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# THE ETHICS OF WILLIAM WOLLASTON

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BOSTON

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## INTRODUCTION

It has happened more than once in the history of thought that a really great and creative thinker has become the victim of a traditional interpretation, which soon became so thoroughly established that no further thought was given to his system. Instead of giving his thought the critical examination which it really deserved, each generation of thinkers and writers would simply pigeonhole it according to the traditional interpretation. I am very sure that this is just what has happened in the case of Wollaston. Even British writers on the history of ethical philosophy have, for the most part, said the traditional things about him, and that without verification as to the truth of the statements made. This may be explained by the fact that his book soon became rather rare. Very few British writers give any evidence of having read Wollaston at all carefully and those who did read his book seem to have stopped with the first two sections. We can be quite sure from internal evidence that many of his critics knew him only through secondary sources. Some attribute illustrations and even quotations to him that cannot be found in his work. Perhaps the most common of these fictitious illustrations is the one regarding a man breaking his wife's head, which is mentioned as authentic by even as great an authority on the Eighteenth Century as Leslie Stephen. "Thirty years' profound meditation had convinced Wollaston that the reason why a man should abstain from breaking his wife's head was, that it was a way of denying that she was his wife."<sup>1</sup> The same can be said of the French as of the British writers in this respect. Instead of criticising him on the basis of actual

<sup>1</sup>L. Stephen, *English Thought in the 18th Century*, p. 130.

quotations and on the basis of Wollaston's own illustrations, they discuss him in a most general way, using illustrations that are not his. On the whole the German historians of philosophy understand him better and treat him more extensively and more fairly. This, though, does not mean that they had read him more carefully, in fact one finds more of this fictitious material in the German works than in the British and French. It means that they had more sympathy with his rationalistic and idealistic philosophy and so they invented materials that more truly represented Wollaston. The Germans gave considerable attention to Wollaston because they regarded him as a precursor of Kant. So regarding him, however, and making interpretations of his philosophy, without careful objective investigation, they naturally miss his meaning in many cases. They try to give Wollaston's ethics an intuitionistic interpretation for which there is no justification. Garve and Drechsler are responsible for this interpretation. The latter wrote a book dealing with Wollaston's philosophy exclusively; but perhaps the former was even more responsible for this interpretation becoming traditional, because he claims that his interpretation of Wollaston is an actual quotation and actually incloses his remarks in quotation marks. Later German writers have based their interpretation on this passage. For example, Von Hartmann quotes the entire passage and says that it is Christian Garve's translation of Wollaston.<sup>2</sup>

Conybeare tells us what a great impression Wollaston's intellectual criterion of morals made upon the contemporaries of Wollaston who were interested in finding a firmer foundation for morals than that offered by hedonism. Conybeare himself speaks of the theory as though it were a discovery in morals, "fit to be placed beside the discoveries of Newton in astronomy."<sup>3</sup> That his system enjoyed considerable popularity when it was first promulgated is proven by the fact that his work, itself, went through seven editions

<sup>2</sup> Drechsler, *Über Will. Wollaston's Moralphilosophie*, Erlangen, 1801. Garve, *Übersicht der vornehmsten Principien der Sittenlehre*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Conybeare, *Defence of Revealed Religion*, p. 239.



in ten years, and also by the number of books and pamphlets which it evoked. His popularity, however, must have been exceedingly ephemeral for his work soon became very rare. Because of the fantastic interpretations given to his system of ethics it was soon relegated to the curiosity section of the philosophical museum.



## CONTENTS

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| Introduction . . . . .  | 3    |
| Wollaston's Dedication . . . . .  | 11   |
| The Relation of Wollaston to the Thought of His Age . .                 | 13   |
| The Predecessors of Wollaston . . . . .                                 | 18   |
| "The Religion of Nature Delineated" . . . . .                           | 32   |
| Exposition of the Section on the Nature of Goodness .                   | 32   |
| Wollaston's Critical Interpretation of Other Systems . .                | 68   |
| Wollaston Deals with Possible Objections to His Principle               | 72   |
| General Interpretation of Section I . . . . .                           | 78   |
| I. Morality Treated as Analogous to Truth . . .                         | 78   |
| II. The Search for and Objective Standard of Moral-<br>ity . . . . .    | 85   |
| Wollaston and His Critics . . . . .                                     | 95   |
| I. That He Confuses Logical and Moral Relations .                       | 95   |
| II. That Immorality as Well as Morality Conforms<br>to Nature . . . . . | 114  |
| III. That Wollaston Obscures the Real Nature of<br>Morality . . . . .   | 125  |
| IV. That the Nature of Virtue is Not Defined but As-<br>sumed . . . . . | 137  |
| V. That Wollaston's System is Over-Intellectualistic                    | 150  |
| Critical Exposition of the Section on Happiness . . .                   | 162  |
| I. Exposition of Section II "Of Happiness" . .                          | 162  |



|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| II. An Examination of the Hedonistic Interpretation of Wollaston . . . . .                           | 171  |
| III. An Examination of the Utilitarian Interpretation of Wollaston . . . . .                         | 176  |
| IV. An Examination of the Dualistic Interpretation of Wollaston . . . . .                            | 184  |
| V. The Ethics of Wollaston Reconciles Rationalism and Hedonism . . . . .                             | 192  |
| Practical Religion and Practical Morality . . . . .  | 198  |
| Section VI. "Truths Respecting Mankind in General" . . . . .   | 198  |
| Section VII. "Truths Respecting Particular Societies of Men and of Governments" . . . . .            | 201  |
| Section VIII. "Truths Concerning Families and Relations" . . . . .                                   | 201  |
| Section IX. "Truths Respecting a Private Man" . . . . .  | 201  |
| The Metaphysical Teachings of Wollaston . . . . .  | 204  |
| The Epistemology of Wollaston . . . . .  | 208  |
| Section III. "Of Reasoning, and the Ways of Discovering Truth" . . . . .                             | 208  |
| The Problem of Freedom . . . . .   | 219  |
| Section IV. "Of the Obligations of Imperfect Beings with Respect to Their Power of Acting" . . . . . | 219  |
| The Problems of Evil and Immortality . . . . .   | 230  |
| Section V. "Truths Relating to the Deity" . . . . .  | 230  |
| Index . . . . .  | 233  |

THE ETHICS OF  
WILLIAM WOLLASTON





# THE ETHICS OF WILLIAM WOLLASTON

## WOLLASTON'S DEDICATION

Wollaston dedicates his book, "The Religion of Nature Delineated," to his friend, one A. F., Esq., because it seems that this gentleman had asked him to state his thoughts upon three questions, namely;

I. Is there any such thing as natural religion properly so called?

II. If there is, what is it?

III. How may a man qualify himself, so as to be able to judge for himself, of the other religions profest in the world; to settle his own opinions in disputable matters; and then to enjoy tranquillity of mind, neither disturbing others, nor being disturbed at what passes among men?

Wollaston's work, "The Religion of Nature Delineated," is an answer to the first two questions. We know that he gave considerable thought to the third, but none of his thoughts on that question were ever published. It would not be difficult to tell how he would answer it from the many suggestions in his answers to the other two questions. Natural Religion, I am sure he would say, contains the great universals and essentials of all religion and all else in the religions of the world is false.

Wollaston says that if he had anticipated that he was to be called upon to write a book that he would have made notes on his readings and would have recorded his thoughts

through the years. Because he failed to do this he cannot, he says, write a learned book; "but can only give some of" his "thoughts upon the articles and duties of natural religion." He makes almost no reference to modern moralists. His illustrations are taken largely from the classics. He claims originality for his ethical ideas.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Religion of Nature Delineated*, London, 1725.

## THE RELATION OF WOLLASTON TO THE THOUGHT OF HIS AGE

In spite of the fact that Wollaston claims to be a philosopher after the order of Melchisedeck: "That which is advanced in the following papers, concerning the nature of moral good and evil, and is the prevailing thought that runs through them all, I never met with anywhere," I think that it can be shown that his philosophy belongs indubitably to the period in which he lived and that it is very definitely related to the stream of world thought. Wollaston died in 1724, the year Kant was born, so his thought belongs to the first quarter of the 18th century. This period is generally known as the early Enlightenment. It has been characterized as an age of reason. The breaking down of religious authority necessitated the rationalization of morality. The practical difficulty which the moralists of the time faced was how to maintain order in society without the sanctions of traditional religion. Since theology refused to rationalize religion, the moralists had to seek other grounds on which to base morality. The old religion had taught that the revealed will of God determined the good, and as long as this religion of authority was generally accepted there was no room for ethical discussions. But with the rise of the rationalistic attitude toward religion, ethical speculation became necessary to the very salvation of morality.<sup>1</sup>

Wollaston calls his book "The Religion of Nature Delineated." He set out, as did the contemporary Deists, to prove the essentials of religion to be true apart from revelation. He would also, like them, limit the essential doctrines of religion to those which can be shown to be rational. The very questions he set out to answer definitely relate him to Deism. Reason for him, as for the deists, is the final

<sup>1</sup> Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, p. XXXI.

test of truth in religion as elsewhere. Wollaston was in holy orders and perhaps belonged more to the Rationalistic School of Theology than to Deism, but there was much in common in the two movements. The rationalistic theology accepted the deistic position that faith must be tested by reason, that reason is the ultimate court of appeal. Essential Christianity, it said, is reasonable and its truths are capable of rational proof. Deism made morality the essence of Natural Religion. The deists taught that he who believes God to exist must, in order to be true to reason, acknowledge the obligations of morality and natural religion. The theologians of the Rationalistic School, like the deists, laid more stress on right living than on subscriptions to theological creeds. Their religion was not only ethical, but like the deists they considered ethics to be the chief part of religion. Wollaston was in entire agreement with this view of religion. The first article of faith in Wollaston's religion is the belief that the human reason is competent to discover and to define religious truth without supernatural aid or divine revelation. All religious truth is discernible by the unaided powers of reason and that which cannot be so explained is to be rejected.<sup>2</sup>

There were two schools of moralists in England in the 18th century,—the Intellectual School and the Sensational School. These schools had a great deal in common. They had the same attitude towards traditional theology, especially towards traditional theological ethics. Both schools were rationalistic in the theological sense and both made great use of the term "natural" as opposed to "inspirational" religion and ethics. The schools were entirely agreed that it is not the mere will of God which constitutes the distinction between right and wrong, and that morality is independent of revelation. Both schools used "conformity to nature" as the formula of morality, but the only thing in common in the use of it as the criterion of morality was the attempt to work out an ethics that would be independent

<sup>2</sup>L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, chs. 2 and 3. Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, pp. XX-XXIV. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat.*, pp. 7, 42 and 203. Hurst, *His. of Rationalism*.

of traditional theological ethics. Both schools taught that virtue is natural.<sup>3</sup> Selby-Bigge says that "according to nature" is an article of faith with both schools. This is true, but it is very evident that the two schools use "natural" and "according to nature" in very different senses. When the intellectualists say that virtue is natural they mean that it conforms to the eternal nature of things, and also that it considers the true nature of man and seeks to realize it. For the other school "natural" means in conformity to man's sentiments and affections. In the one school moral distinctions are matters of reason; in the other, a matter of feeling. Selby-Bigge says that the two schools are "primarily distinguished by their adoption of reason and feeling respectively as the faculty which perceives moral distinctions, a faculty declared in each case to be peculiar and not identifiable with ordinary reason or ordinary feeling."<sup>4</sup>

I do not agree at all that Selby-Bigge's statement that I have just quoted is applicable to Wollaston. Some of the intellectualists did believe that the faculty which perceives moral distinctions is a "peculiar" one "and not at all identifiable with ordinary reason." These I would denominate intuitionists. Wollaston did not believe that man possesses a special moral faculty capable both of apprehending the reason why actions ought to be performed, i. e., the principle from which the rightness follows, and of causing the performance of such actions. I think that I can prove that Wollaston was not an intuitionist in ethics, nor an intuitionist in epistemology, but that his philosophy is a reconciliation of the empirical and rational elements both in knowledge and in morals. We have considered pre-Kantian rationalism identical with intuitionism, and in general this is true, for it is a philosophy which makes knowledge and morals dependent upon a body of immediately given self-evident and necessary first truths. Kant's epistemology reconciled the a priori and the a posteriori factors in knowledge. Thanks to the natural empiricism of the English

<sup>3</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, ch. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, Intro.



mind and to the influence of Locke, Wollaston did not require a Hume to arouse him from dogmatic slumber. Wollaston went much further than Kant, for the latter remained an intuitionist in morals, a position inconsistent with his anti-intuitionistic epistemological position, while the former tried to reconcile the a priori and the a posteriori factors in morals.

The term rationalism is used in three very different senses. When theologians use the term they generally have in mind the religious and ethical systems which base truth on the reason rather than on revelation. Wollaston was a rationalist in this sense of the word. A second use of the term would identify rationalism with intuitionism and intuitionism. The term, when given this connotation, cannot apply to Wollaston, but moralists of the Sensational School quite generally confuse rationalism and intuitionism and consequently criticize Wollaston for believing in innate ideas of morality. The third view thinks of reason as a factor in knowledge but that it is dependent upon experience for its data. Wollaston was a rationalist in this sense, for he believes that knowledge is dependent upon the senses for data and upon the reason for organization. Dewey classifies the uses of the term in these ways and then says: "The three senses are historically connected. The 18th century rationalism in theology and in morals is derived from the insistence of Descartes upon method, and clearness and distinctness as criteria of truth. It is combined, however, with an empiricism which descends from Locke."<sup>5</sup> It is certainly true that Wollaston combined the truth of rationalism with that of empiricism. His higher rationalism, unlike intuitionism, is not opposed to experience, but instead is based on experience. It was a construction of experience itself as a system of reason.<sup>6</sup> I have no particular objection to classing Wollaston with the "Philosophical Intuitionists" as Sidgwick does, because his definition "Philosophical Intuitionism" is a clear statement of the a priori factor in the determination of duty. Sidgwick says: "it is a view that

<sup>5</sup> Dewey, Art., Rationalism in Balwin Dict.

<sup>6</sup> Wollaston, Reli. of Nat. D., pp. 42-6.



seeks a complete synthesis of practical rules, and the practical is held to be able to lay down one universal rule capable of distinguishing good from evil." <sup>7</sup> This "one universal rule," in Wollaston's ethics, is that everything should be treated as that which it is. This is a universal and necessary truth, but Wollaston does not think of it as an innate idea or an intuition, but as a product of reflection.

I think that it can be said with truth that Wollaston gave to the formula "according to nature" a more metaphysical connotation than was generally given to it, and that when he spoke of the "law of nature" he meant something quite different from the ordinary meaning. Locke used "natural" in a somewhat similar way when he said that morality is capable of being demonstrated as "natural." This meaning is that morality is as natural and as necessary as a natural law. In no other sense could the law of nature be the law of morality. The naturalness and necessity of natural law is not what is meant by the naturalness and necessity of morality. In a sense, though, it is the natural law in the moral world and is based on the belief that the world is all of a piece. The utilitarian interest was great in Wollaston, due to the fact that he consciously tried to reconcile the opposing views of "naturalness," by showing that ultimately the two belong to the same all-comprehending world of meaning. He may be fairly accused of confusing the two meanings of "law of nature," but he was seeking to make it clear that morality is based on the real nature and relations of things, and that happiness has the same foundation. The free conformity of life to the nature of things is goodness, and happiness is the natural and necessary consequence of such a life. <sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Sidgwick, *Method of Ethics*, ch. Intuitionism, I, 6, 8 and 13.

<sup>8</sup> Locke, *Essay on the Human Understanding*, p. 28. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. D.*, pp. 37-8 and 41-2.

## THE PREDECESSORS OF WOLLASTON

Professor Sidgwick is right when he says that: "The main stream of English ethics, so far as it flows independently of Revelational Theology, begins with Hobbes and the replies that Hobbes provoked." He says that the starting point of Hobbes' ethical speculation is to be sought mainly in the current view of the law of nature which was defined to mean the rules that men ought to observe, so far as they can be known by the light of nature apart from revelation. <sup>1</sup> Grotius had taken the position that this natural law is a part of divine law which follows necessarily from the essential nature of man, and is as unalterable as the truths of mathematics. This law of nature, Grotius says, is cognizable a priori by an abstract consideration of human nature.<sup>2</sup> Hobbes took the position that Grotius had left unanswered the all-important question: "What is man's ultimate reason for obeying these laws of nature?" He undertook to answer it by saying that each man's appetites and desires are naturally directed either "to the preservation of his life or to the heightening of it in the way of pleasure. Since all the voluntary actions of men tend to their own preservation or pleasure, it cannot be reasonable to aim at anything else; in fact, nature rather than reason fixes the end of human action, to which it is reason's function to show the means. Hence if we ask why it is reasonable for any individual to observe the rules of social behavior that are commonly called moral, the answer is obvious that this is only indirectly reasonable, as a means to his own preservation or pleasure."<sup>3</sup> Naturally there was a very

<sup>1</sup> Sidgwick, *His. of Ethics*, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

strong reaction from this extreme hedonistic position and Wollaston belongs to this reaction movement. This school of thinkers were insistent upon the point that morality must of necessity be based on the real nature of things, and must, consequently, be as natural and as necessary as the natures and relations of things. So Wollaston was influenced negatively by Hobbes. He reacted, not only from the ethical position of Hobbes, but, perhaps, even more from the materialistic determinism of his philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

I think that it can be said that Wollaston was influenced on the positive side by several very different schools of thought. Rogers is right when he says that Wollaston was greatly influenced in his thinking by Locke's epistemology. He, like Locke, denied innate ideas, in general, and innate ideas of morality in particular.<sup>5</sup> Wollaston, like the entire rationalistic school of British moralists, was also greatly influenced by the Newtonian conception of the universe; but, perhaps, even more by the mathematical method of the new science. The rationalistic philosophy of Descartes was also influential in the same way. In fact, what Leslie Stephen says of the intellectualists, in general, is true of Wollaston in particular. He says: "It is very difficult to tell whether the intellectualists in morals were more influenced by the Newtonian conception of the universe, which gave the world loftier ideas of God, and great aid and support to morality and religion; or by Descartes' philosophy, which inspired the rationalistic method of ethics."<sup>6</sup> By the use of the mathematical method, inspired by both Newton and Descartes, the intellectualists claimed that they were able to prove the existence of God and the obligations of Natural Religion. Wollaston certainly cannot be classified as a rationalist in the Cartesian sense of the term, nor would any one think of classifying him as an empiricist. To my mind he is far more of an empiricist than a rationalist, if rationalism is given the intuitional connotation. Rogers is perhaps right when he says that Wollaston's position was

<sup>4</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 62 and 104-5.

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, *His. of Ethics*, p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, p. XXXII.

a combination of the two.<sup>7</sup> It has been customary to call Wollaston an Intuitionist, meaning thereby that he taught that men have innate ideas of virtue and vice. I do not understand him to teach any such doctrine. Rather, I understand him to say that all of our knowledge comes through the senses. Wollaston thinks, also, as I shall try to show later, that we have rational synthetic minds that are capable of organizing experience and of determining what our duty is in any given situation of life. He believed that there are two elements, both in knowledge and in morality, the empirical and the rational. While Wollaston was influenced, on the rationalistic side, by both Descartes and Newton, he was not by any means a disciple of either, and the influence of each upon his thinking was very general. He did get his rationalistic attitude and method partly from them. I say this advisedly, because this rationalistic attitude was characteristic of the age. The rationalistic method, however, was taken bodily from them and used by Wollaston, as offering an analogy of morality, to determine the general formula of morality.<sup>8</sup>

The influence of Cudworth upon Wollaston was more specific. I think that it was his insistence upon the objective reality of moral distinctions, and his insistence that the criterion of morality must be rational in nature, that most impressed Wollaston. Cudworth wrote his *Treatise concerning eternal and immutable morality* in answer to Hobbes. In this work he took the position that just as knowledge contains a permanent intelligible element over and above the flux of sense impression, so there exist eternal and immutable ideas of morality. According to Cudworth the distinctions of good and evil have an objective reality, "cognizable by reason, no less than the relations of space and number; the knowledge of them no doubt comes to the human mind from the divine; but it is from the divine reason, in whose light man imperfectly participates, not merely from the divine will as such." Things are what they are, not by

<sup>7</sup> Rogers, *His. of Ethics*, p. 141. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. D.*, pp. 24, 48-50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec. III.



will but by nature. . . . For though the will and power of God have an absolute, infinite and unlimited command upon the existence of all created things to make them to be, or not to be at pleasure; yet when things exist, they are what they are. . . . Nothing is morally good or evil by mere will without nature, because everything is what it is by nature, and not by will. . . . No positive commands whatsoever do make anything morally good or evil, which nature had not made such before.<sup>9</sup> Wollaston agrees with Cudworth that the real nature of things constitutes the basis of morality. This is what is meant by saying that their ethics is objective. This objective nature is discerned by the reason, and the appropriate moral behavior is determined by the reason also.

But Wollaston was as greatly influenced by the empiricists. Cudworth and Wollaston have very different ideas as to the relation of sense and reason in knowledge, thanks to the influence of Locke upon Wollaston; but both base the criterion of morality on the reason. Cudworth says that the mind has conceptions which, while occasioned by sense, could not be formed but by a faculty superior to sense. He does not, like Locke, believe that all knowledge comes through the senses, but rather holds to the doctrine of innate ideas. This doctrine of innate ideas was attacked by Locke, and Clarke and Wollaston admit the force of Locke's arguments. They were, nevertheless, greatly influenced by Cudworth.<sup>10</sup> They were especially influenced by his statement that moral relations are as evident and as necessary as the laws of thought and the axioms of mathematics. Speaking of eternal truths, Cudworth says, "Neither are there such eternal truths as these only in mathematics and concerning quantity, but also in ethics concerning morality."<sup>11</sup> Cudworth says that ethical ideas do not come from experience, but are necessary ideas in the divine and in the human reason. The individual mind, being derived

<sup>9</sup> Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, bk. I, ch. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Clarke, *Natural Religion*, p. 45. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Cudworth, *Intel. System*, p. 734.

from the eternal mind, inherits these eternal moral truths, is conscious of them, and realizes their obligation.<sup>12</sup> This extreme Intuitionism is, of course, unnecessary, and the universality and necessity of morality is entirely reconcilable with an ethical epistemology which gives due place to the empirical factor in knowledge. Ethical ideas, Cudworth says, cannot come from experience, for experience is always particular, and morality must be universal and necessary. He is right, of course, in saying that experience cannot give universality and necessity; but, as Clarke and Wollaston realized, his inference from this to the doctrine of innate ideas of morality is not necessary. And yet they realized that he was right in insisting that the distinction between right and wrong is a rational distinction and is universal and necessary. Clarke and Wollaston agree that it would be contradictory to say that any power, human or divine, could change their nature.<sup>13</sup> The good could not be bad nor the bad good.<sup>14</sup> This internal perception of moral truth, which Cudworth calls conscience, teaches men that the good of the whole is better than individual good alone. Thus he set for Wollaston a eudæmonistic example.<sup>15</sup>

Cumberland's importance, for our purpose, rests on his attempt to supply the connecting link between moral perception and moral action by identifying the good of all with the good of each, and on his endeavor to make the utilitarian principle of the good of all the ethical end and the standard of moral action. The good of all is the moral standard, and the reason is the moral faculty. He believes in the mathematical certainty of moral truth, and his faith in the ultimate rationality of the world is so great that he believes that this will result in the good of humanity. He did not, like Wollaston, say that one should consider the probable consequences of actions and that these should enter into the motivation. Cumberland took the position that the Baconian method is as applicable to ethics as to natural science. By observing external nature we discover its truths

<sup>12</sup> Cudworth, *Intel. System*, p. 730.

<sup>13</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 45. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Cudworth, *Intel. System.*, p. 895.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 898.



and laws, and by studying the nature of man we discover the relation in which he stands to the natural universe of which he forms a part. The foundation of morality lies in the nature of things, antecedent to all positive law, else no reason could be given for the enactment of any law. He defines the laws of nature as "immutably true propositions regulative of voluntary actions as to choice of good and avoidance of evil, and which carry with them an obligation to outward acts of obedience."<sup>16</sup> The laws of nature are the laws of God, so are the universal laws of right reason. There are, he says, no innate ideas, but by means of reason man perceives the mathematical and moral truths contained in nature, and both are of equal certainty.<sup>17</sup> Practical reason points out the ends to be pursued and the means to those ends, and since reason is common to man, all unprejudiced men agree with regard to the fundamental principles of morality. The mind of man naturally assents to the universal law of nature. He states this law as the universal law of benevolence: "The greatest possible benevolence of every rational agent towards all the rest, constitutes the happiest state of each and all, so far as depends on their own power, and is necessarily required for their happiness, therefore the common good is the supreme law."<sup>18</sup> The happiness of all is at the same time the end of every rational man's actions and the standard of right and wrong.<sup>19</sup> Cumberland's dynamic is prudential hedonism. The law of benevolence is the law both of rationality and of reality, he says; but then he proceeds to say that it derives its obligation from the fact that only by striving to promote the happiness of all can one be happy. Sidgwick says that Cumberland is the first one to lay down the principle that "the common good of all is the supreme end and the standard of morality." So far, says Sidgwick, he may be fairly called the precursor of the later utilitarianism. Sidgwick says that Cumberland meant by "the common good of all" not only "the greatest happiness of all but perfection." He regards

<sup>16</sup> Cumberland, *De legibus naturæ* Cap. V. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Cap. V, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Cumberland, *Proleg.* IX.; Cap. I, 15 and Cap. III, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Cap. I, 4 and 22.

Cumberland as a precursor of Wollaston, since, in his estimation, Wollaston's position was that of late utilitarianism.<sup>20</sup>

The connection of Locke with the moral systems of Clarke and Wollaston is well expressed by Erdmann: "In the first book of his *Essay*, Locke had placed speculative and practical principles on the same plane. In regard to the former, however, he had supplemented the negative result that they are not innate, by the positive statement that they are presented to us by the external world. Exactly the same process must be looked for in the case of the latter: the mind cannot draw the principles of action from within itself; they must come to it from without, and not, as mediæval philosophy had taught, through revelation, but from the external world. This positive addition to Locke's negative assertion was made by some thinkers who are connected with him, not merely by nationality, but also by the fact that they owe to him their first impulse towards philosophy." Erdmann, then, expressly mentions Clarke and Wollaston.<sup>21</sup>

Wundt also connects Locke directly with the objective intellectualists. Locke, he says, even draws a comparison between the application of moral rules to particular cases and the application of mathematical axioms. Such statements clearly bear the closest relation to his opinion that "all judgments on moral values are the results of rational insight and intellectual deliberation."<sup>22</sup> This opinion connects Locke with the Cambridge Intellectualists, says Wundt, but they are, he says, distinguished from Locke by the fact that his morality was subjective whereas their criterion was objective. "Their attempt is rather to show the objective reality of the moral law, from which its obligatory force necessarily follows." Whereas the subjective intellectualists, as Wundt terms them, make the natural law to be a thing of empirical origin in our sensations of pleasure and pain, the objective intellectualists, Clarke and Wollaston, have moral norms that are claimed to possess an ob-

<sup>20</sup> Sidgwick, *His. of Ethics*, p. 174.

<sup>21</sup> Erdmann, *His. of Phil.*, vol. II, p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Wundt, *Ethics*, p. 323.

jective reality equal to that of mathematical or physical laws. A transgression of law in the moral realm is like a change which disobeys the laws of physical nature.

For Locke, as for the objective moralists, Clarke and Wollaston, morality is essentially a matter of conformity to relations. For Locke there are three fundamental certainties; the existence of the self, of God and of the world, and there are three corresponding fundamental ethical conceptions; man, God and nature. The foundation of morality does not lie in the nature of man alone, but in the nature and character of God, the creator of the universe. God cannot act contrary to his own nature, and so the laws of the universe are as unchangeable as God himself; for the laws of nature are the laws of the divine nature, the will and the command of God. Thus the law of nature is eternal and unchangeable, the rule of God to himself and to all his creatures. Into this divine order man is born, a sociable being endowed with reason. By means of reason, which is the only ethical faculty, man perceives and recognizes the law of nature, which is at the same time the law of God. There are moral relations, which are capable of being rationally perceived antecedent to all positive revelation. In the law of nature reason discovers the foundation of duties and rights. The various kinds of duties are founded on various relations;—the duty of piety, on the relation of man to God; the duties of benevolence, equity and love arise from the various relations men stand to one another.<sup>23</sup>

Clarke, of course, stands a great deal closer to Wollaston, both in time and in thought, than did any of his other predecessors. Wollaston was, in fact, an older contemporary of Clarke, but his book was not published until two years before his death, 1722, while Clarke's work on the same subject was published in 1706. Clarke's philosophy represents a reaction both from the materialistic determinism of Hobbes and from the spiritualistic determinism of Calvin. He sought to define right and wrong so clearly and to place the distinction between them on such a solid foundation that moral relations would be as indubitable as are mathematical rela-

<sup>23</sup> Locke, *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, ch. 2.

tions. This he did by making reason and morality conform. He insisted, however, upon making an important distinction, a distinction equally important in Wollaston's system: "The only difference is, that assent to a plain speculative truth is not in a man's power to withhold, but to act according to the plain right and reason of things, this he may, by the natural liberty of his will, forbear."<sup>24</sup> Wollaston's ethics, also, attempts to ground morality on the very nature of things, and to show moral relations to be necessary and indubitable. He, also, says that assent to truth is necessary, but acts conformable to truth are contingent upon free choice. This objectivity of the moral standard, and this insistence upon freedom make both Clarke and Wollaston stand out distinctly.<sup>25</sup> Erdmann says that: "These two had placed the determining factor in the object, but had left it to the choice of the subject whether or not to follow it."<sup>26</sup>

Clarke undertakes to state a complete moral principle in terms of "fitness" of actions to the objective nature of things. He says that things stand one to another in certain relations which are necessary and eternal; and that we can conceive nothing without, at the same time, conceiving its relations to other things. There are such relations between man and God and between man and man, and from such relations there arises a "fitness" or "unfitness" of actions. The whole of these relations constitutes truth. "These eternal different relations of things constitute or at least involve eternal fitness or unfitness in the application of things one to another; with regard to which the will of God always . . . chooses . . ., and which ought likewise to determine the wills of all subordinate rational beings. These eternal and necessary differences of things make it fit and reasonable for these creatures so to act; they cause it to be their duty and lay an obligation on them to act in ac-

<sup>24</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli. in British Moralists*, vol. II, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> "Hatten diesen beiden zwar den determinirenden Grund in die Objecte gesetzt, dagegen es dem Belieben des Subjectes anheimgestellt, ob es ihm folgen wolle."

<sup>26</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 107.



cordance with the eternal fitness of things.”<sup>27</sup> To deny that I should do for another man what he in like case should do for me, “and to deny it, either in word or action is as if a man should contend that, though two and three are equal to five, yet five is not equal to two and three.”<sup>31</sup> “Wickedness,” according to Clarke, “is the same absurdity and insolence in morals, as it would be in natural things to pretend to alter the relations of numbers, or to change the properties of geometrical figures.”<sup>32</sup>

Lowman, one of Clarke’s followers, says, that Clarke conceived of morality as “the practice of reason.”<sup>33</sup> Morality for Clarke, says Falckenberg, is the subjective conformity to the objective “fitness of things.” The good is the fitting. Certain things, relations, and modes of action are suited to one another and others not. “He who is induced by passion to act contrary to the eternal relations or harmony of things, contradicts his own reason in thus undertaking to disturb the order of the universe; he commits the absurdity of willing that things should be that which they are not. Injustice is in practice that which falsity and contradiction are in theoretical affairs.”<sup>34</sup>

The positions of Clarke and Wollaston are so very similar on most questions that it has been common to practically identify them. I do not deny the justification of that procedure. I do wish, however, to call attention to the fact that Wollaston does not acknowledge indebtedness to Clarke. Rather, he insists that his treatment is original: “That, which is advanced in the following papers, concerning the nature of moral good and evil, and is the prevailing thought that runs through them all, I never met with anywhere.”<sup>35</sup> Only once in his entire book does he use the terminology of Clarke, and even in that instance the use may well be accidental. The word used by Wollaston is, however, Clarke’s

<sup>27</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli. in British Moralists*, vol. II, pp. 3-7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 619.

<sup>32</sup> Clarke, *Evidences*, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Lowman, *Unity and Perfection of God*, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> Falckenberg, *His. of Phil.*, pp. 196-7.

<sup>35</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 6.

favorite term, namely, "fit." We can say that there is no verbal dependence, for even in the case just mentioned Clarke never uses "fit" but "fitness" or "fitting." The thoughts of the two men, though, with reference to the criterion of morality are so very similar that it is quite impossible for me to doubt the dependence of the one on the other. On two rather important questions of the time the men differed considerable, namely, the question of the relation of happiness to virtue and the question of the relation of truth and revelation.

Perhaps there is more difference between Clarke and Wollaston on the question of happiness than on any other, and this difference is, I suppose, responsible for the fact that Wollaston has often been classed with the hedonists, while Clarke has never been so classed. Clarke says that happiness is a necessary consequent of acting according to the fitness of things. "God," he says, "will certainly cause truth and right to terminate in happiness."<sup>36</sup> He says that virtue "tends to the good of the world" as certainly as physical effects or mathematical truth follow from its principles.<sup>37</sup> It may be said, in general, that Clarke considers happiness more as the necessary consequent of true living, and that the desire to be happy and make others happy does not enter into the motivation of moral actions to the same extent with him as with Wollaston. It is true that Wollaston does insist that happiness is the natural and necessary consequence of right living; but he also emphasizes the fact that one should deliberately consider the happiness or unhappiness that can be expected to result from a given action, and that without so doing one cannot be said to be acting truly. It is, Wollaston thinks, wrong not to treat happiness as what it is, a true mental state and a desirable human good.<sup>38</sup>

Vorländer says that while Clarke takes the objective ethical principle of the fitness of actions only from the universal metaphysical side, Wollaston tries to define it more

<sup>36</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli. in British Moralists*, 512.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 524.

<sup>38</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 38.



definitely, partly by means of reference to the particular purposes of things, partly "through more definite reference to the principle of happiness."<sup>39</sup> Wollaston does make a significant advance from the position taken by Clarke in that he gave far more consideration to consequences, in so far as they can be anticipated, and human happiness is the most important of all the consequences that must be considered. I would go so far as to say that such a consideration must constitute an all important part of every moral action, and that due place must be given to the consideration of consequences by any system of ethics that makes any pretence of being based on an objective foundation. The principle, otherwise, is that of Intuitionism. Clarke does say that God created the world only that he might communicate to his creatures goodness and happiness, and that he expects and requires that all his creatures should endeavor to promote happiness among men.<sup>40</sup> There is another passage which better represents Clarke's position and shows him to be more eudæmonistic than do these passages. I refer to the passage with which he begins his great work on *Natural Religion*, a passage which states the thesis of his work and gives, in one sentence, his metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of morals: "The same necessary and eternal different relations, that different things bear one to another, and the same consequent fitness or unfitness of the application of different relations one to another, with regard to which the will of God always and necessarily does determine itself, to choose to act only what is agreeable to justice, equity, goodness and truth, in order to the welfare of the whole universe, ought likewise constantly to determine the wills of all subordinate rational beings, to govern all their actions by the same rule, for the good of the public."<sup>41</sup> For Clarke, then, consequences, in so far as they can be anticipated, must necessarily enter into every motivation; and are involved in acting "according to the fitness of

<sup>39</sup> "durch die bestimmtere Beziehung auf das Princip der Glückseligkeit." Vorländer, *Gesch. der Philosophischen Moral*, etc., p. 386.

<sup>40</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.* in *British Moralists*, 524.

<sup>41</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, I, Intro.

things." It is true, however, that Clarke does think of happiness more as the necessary consequence of acting according to moral principles and less as an element in the motivation. He leaves happiness to providence and has the faith to believe that it will result from treating everything according to nature.

The article in Chambers' Encyclopedia says that Wollaston's system is a development of Clarke's system. This is undoubtedly true in the sense that Wollaston went further away from ecclesiastical ethics. As the article well says "his methods were exclusively rational," whereas Clarke depended more on religious authority and religious sanctions.<sup>42</sup> Both Clarke and Wollaston take as their starting point "the clearness, immutability and universality of the law of nature."<sup>43</sup> They agree that morality is founded upon "the eternal and necessary differences of things," and that the essentials of morality rest upon as sure a foundation as the laws of thought in logic or the axioms in mathematics.<sup>44</sup> An interesting question arose as to the relation of revelation to such a view of ethics. It was seen very clearly that an inspired system of ethics is no more necessary than an inspired system of mathematics. Clarke, however, did not regard revelation as superfluous as did Wollaston. He took the position that while revelation is not necessary to reveal a code of morality it is necessary to reveal the sanctions of that code. He thinks with Wollaston that the reason is a sufficient guide to morals, that revelation is not necessary to tell men how they ought to live. He thinks that revelation is necessary, however, to tell men that a true life leads to everlasting happiness and that a wicked life leads to everlasting misery. Clarke thinks that most men will be too weak to live right without a belief in the hereafter. So while Clarke is as sincerely anxious to prove that moral principles are binding, independent of Divine appointment, as is Wollaston, he is no less concerned that morality requires the support of revealed religion. So while he be-

<sup>42</sup> Art. Wollaston, Chambers Ency., vol. 10, p. 709.

<sup>43</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, vol. I, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Clarke, Works, pp. 609-13. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. D.*, p. 24.

lieves that "virtue is worthy to be chosen for its own sake" and also that the virtuous life necessarily leads to happiness, he still thinks revelation to be necessary "for the reformation of mankind." He says that revelation is needed as a bulwark of truth, particularly concerning the hereafter, "for without revelation many men could not forbear doubting a future state of retribution or reward, in spite of the strongest arguments of reasons."<sup>45</sup> Wollaston makes only one reference to revelation and that is in connection with his treatment of the problem of evil. He had said that "there must be a future life where proper amends may be made," where the wrongs of this world may be made right. If this life be all, he argued, "the general and usual state of mankind is scarce consistent with the idea of a reasonable cause."<sup>46</sup> But how can we be sure that God will reward virtue in the next world more liberally than in this? In trying to answer this question, he says, he "begins to be very sensible how much he wants a guide."<sup>47</sup> He does not, however, grant that we have a guide other than reason, for, in his view, the Scriptures constitute only that kind of guide.<sup>48</sup> The only solution of the problem of evil, thinks Wollaston, and revelation can offer no other, is belief in the ultimate rationality of the universe.<sup>49</sup> So we can say with the *Grande Dictionnaire Universel* that "Wollaston made morality to rest upon a foundation entirely independent of revelation."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Clarke, Works, pp. 643, 646, 652 and 667.

<sup>46</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 205.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec. IX, Prop. xii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72 and 113-14.

<sup>50</sup> *Grande Dict. Universel*, Art. Wollaston.

# THE RELIGION OF NATURE DELINEATED

## SECTION I

### “OF MORAL GOOD AND EVIL”

This thesis is an endeavor to give a systematic and critical exposition of the Ethics of William Wollaston, but since he was the author of only one work on that subject, “The Religion of Nature Delineated,” this treatment naturally takes the form of a critical commentary on that book. I have tried to harmonize his order of treatment with a strictly logical and systematic procedure. Since my purpose is to delineate his Ethics, and to treat other aspects of his general discussion from that point of view, I have in several instances departed from his order of treatment.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE RELATION OF MORALITY AND NATURAL RELIGION

“The foundation of religion,” says Wollaston, “lies in that difference between the acts of men, which distinguishes them into good, evil, indifferent. For if there is such a difference, there must be religion; and contra.” Erdmann understands him to mean by this that all religion is based on the difference which men must make between good and bad, and where such difference is made you have religion. He understands that: “Nothing else is here meant by religion but the obligation to do what may not be omitted and to refrain from doing what may not be done (So wird hier unter Religion nicht Andres verstanden, als die Verpflichtung, zu thun was nicht unterlassen). . . . To obey the law which God has given is religion in general, and to obey that law in particular which he reveals unto us when we rightly em-



ploy our natural abilities is the religion of nature or natural religion.”<sup>1</sup> So Wollaston begins his work by seeking to find the ultimate ground of natural religion. He grounds Natural Religion in the distinction that men naturally must make between good and evil. It is the necessity of thinking that constitutes the necessity and the universality of this distinction.

Just as Natural Religion is based on natural morality, so is morality grounded in the nature of things. Moralists, Wollaston says, have long sought for some idea or principle that would decide the morality of acts, but have not come to any agreement. He proposes a principle that he considers self-evident, and implies that this is the principle which has really determined men’s evaluations of conduct. Wollaston proposes the plain and obvious principle of evaluation, used by the plain man, as the moral criterion. He says just let things “speak for themselves,” and they will “proclaim their own rectitude or obliquity.”<sup>2</sup> He means by this that the nature and relations of things determine their moral character. Selby-Bigge says that the British moralists of all schools base morality on the nature of things, and all make their appeal to the ordinary man’s ideas of virtue rather than to those of saints and philosophers.<sup>3</sup>

## I

In this paragraph Wollaston discusses the necessary implications of morality, intelligence and freedom. “That act, which may be denominated morally good or evil, must be the act of a being capable of distinguishing, choosing and acting for himself; or more briefly, of an intelligent and free agent.” Blakey suggests that Wollaston was influenced by William King’s book, “Treatise on the Origin of Evil,” as well as by Clarke, in arriving at his conception of the freedom of the will and of its importance for morality.<sup>4</sup> But Erdmann is right in saying that the starting

<sup>1</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, p. XVII.

<sup>4</sup> Blakey, *His. of Morals*, p. 208.



point in Wollaston's thinking is with the ideas of good and evil as necessary ideas because of the very nature of things. Then he arrives at the notion of freedom as the necessary implication of good and evil. In this division Wollaston lays down the preconditions of morality,—intelligence and freedom.<sup>5</sup> Properly speaking, he says, "no act at all can be ascribed to that being which is not indued with these capacities," and certainly no moral character can be applied to acts other than those of a "being capable of distinguishing, choosing and acting for himself."<sup>6</sup> All other kinds of acts are but the acts of an instrument, acts "under a necessity incumbent *ab extra*" and consequently not moral acts at all.<sup>7</sup>

Wollaston's only proof of freedom, in this section of his work, is that it is the necessary precondition of morality. If he had been asked, but why must there be morality? I suppose that he would have answered very much as did Kant, later "I know that I ought." But while Kant attributed the feeling of ought to an intuition, to an indubitable and immediate impingement of the moral conscience speaking within; Wollaston could say, only, that intelligence demands that we treat things according to their natures, that we act conformably with reason. The one constitutes a moral imperative as much as does the other. So while Kant's ought is subjective, resting as it does on intuition, and Wollaston's ought is objective, being based on experience and ratiocination; still "If we ought we can" holds as much for Wollaston as for Kant. Wollaston does not say that we have an immediate consciousness of freedom nor an immediate consciousness of ought, but both are for him the product of thinking about the natures of things and of our relations there-to. As intelligent beings we cannot do otherwise than perceive the natures of things and our relations to the rest of reality. In view of these natures and relations we see that there are duties we ought to perform or else be false to ourselves and to the universe. So if we ought we can,

<sup>5</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

and since we know that we ought we know that we can, for freedom is the necessary precondition of there being an ought.

## II

This paragraph is concerned with defining the nature of truth. "Those propositions are true, which express things as they are; or, truth is the conformity of those words or signs, by which things are exprest, to the things themselves."<sup>8</sup> Here Wollaston is asserting what he understands by truth. It is, he says, the conformity of thought and language to reality.

## III

The topic of this paragraph is the nature of goodness. "A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds, as well as by express words or another proposition."<sup>9</sup> It has frequently been thought that in this proposition Wollaston is just simply saying that there is another way of asserting or denying truth. He seems to have anticipated the danger of being misunderstood here and tried to safeguard against it. It is true that he says that "things may be denied to be what they are by deeds," but that he is doing something other than merely describing a form of existential judgment is quite evident from his own statement. After saying that "there is meaning in many acts and gestures" and that "everybody understands weeping, laughing, shrugs, frowns, these are a sort of universal language"; he then goes on to say: "But these instances do not come up to my meaning." Why do not these instances of actions which either affirm or deny things to be what they are come up to his meaning? I think it is because he is not referring to the different methods that may be employed to convey meaning, to affirm or to deny the conformity of thoughts with things. He is not dealing

<sup>8</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

with theoretical matters at all, but with moral considerations. "There are many acts," he says, "of other kinds," that is, acts different from acts of the pantomime variety. "There are," he says, "many acts of other kinds, such as constitute the character of a man's conduct in life, which have in nature, and would be taken by any indifferent judge to have a signification, and to imply some proposition, as plainly to be understood as if it were declared in words; and therefore if what such acts declare to be, is not, they must contradict truth, as much as any false proposition, or assertion can."<sup>10</sup> Wollaston tried to define truth in Proposition II, while in Proposition III he sought to explicate goodness by comparing it to truth. It is here that he has been so much misunderstood. This is particularly unfortunate, because it constitutes the very crux of his argument. For, as Ueberweg well says, the entire book is an analogous treatment of morality. "The characteristic of this treatise is that it makes virtue to consist in acting according to truth."<sup>11</sup>

The position I wish to maintain is that Wollaston does not identify truth and goodness. In his system morality is thought of as really affirming a true relationship, but that is not by any means saying that morality is mere assent to a true proposition. It is as true as such assent, and immorality is as false as the denial of a self-evidently true proposition. The two processes are very different, the one is merely intellectual while the other is moral. There is a great difference between intellectual assent, which is determined by the nature of things, and a moral act, which is contingent on free choice. The value judgment embodied in a moral act is expressive of the self and of character, while the intellectual assent to a true relation involved in an existential judgment has no such connection with the will, the character, or the self. It has been said that Wollaston just reduces morality to existential judgments, when he says, "If what such acts declare to be, is not, they must contradict truth, as much as any false proposition or asser-

<sup>10</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ueberweg, *His. of Phil.*, vol. II, p. 382.

tion can." This cannot be said with justice for Wollaston is very insistent upon the fact that here he is talking about "such acts as constitute the character of a man's conduct in life."<sup>12</sup>

Just what is Wollaston saying when he says, "if what such acts declare to be is not, they must contradict truth as much as any false proposition or assertion can"? He certainly is not saying that this is but another way of denying or contradicting truth, but rather is he not saying that immorality is as contradictory as a false proposition? The difference is this,—a man cannot deny a true proposition. As intelligent beings, we can but assent to what convinces us is true. But, thanks to our freedom, we can act contradictory. The immoral act is not a lie, as many of Wollaston's critics accuse him of teaching, it is not a contradictory existential judgment; but, what he says is, that it is just as absurd as to fail to assent to truth when we recognize a true relation. Wollaston does not say that moral deeds are propositions. What he does say is that a moral deed is an affirmation of true relations, and that an immoral act is a denial of these relations. This interpretation is found in the unsigned article on Wollaston in the *Britannica*: "He claims originality for his theory that moral evil is the practical denial of a true proposition and moral good the affirmation of it."<sup>13</sup> This I consider to be one of the best statements of his position that I have found. The word "practical" is generally left out, with the result that an absolutely different meaning is given. "Practical" is really the key word in the statement of his moral theory, and when it is accentuated immorality is not defined as the denial of a true proposition. The theory, rather, is that immorality implies the truth of the proposition and then acts as if it were not true, or "practically" denies, the admittedly true, proposition.

There are two kinds of acts, says Wollaston. He, then, tries to show the very great difference between them. The one kind of acts, he says, in effect, merely expresses intel-

<sup>12</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Anon., *Art. on Wollaston in Britan.*, vol. 28, p. 776.

*Originality of the theory of Wollaston  
is not in the theory itself but in the way it is  
expressed.*



lectual meaning: "It is certain there is a meaning in many acts and gestures." The other kind of acts are moral acts, "such as constitute the character of a man's conduct in life." The very same action may, under different circumstances, have these two very different meanings. A bow of the head, for example, may be merely a gesture expressing, in sign language, the proposition to-day is Tuesday. At another time and under other circumstances the action might have a moral quality, in that the one who performed such an act might thereby deny essential human relations, might thereby will the destruction of human society. In so acting, says Wollaston, one "would contribute his share towards the introduction of universal disorder and misery," and would for his part deny human life to be what it is, would deny human society to be what it is.<sup>14</sup>

Illustrative of this point I wish to give some material which I found in a work on criminal psychology. Gross says: "Purely physiological conditions operate in many directions, such as blushing, trembling, laughing, weeping; and very few men want to show their minds openly to their friends, so that they see no reason for co-ordinating their symbolic bodily expressions. Nevertheless, they do so, and not since yesterday, but for thousands of years. Hence definite expressions have been transmitted for generations. Characteristically, the desire to fool others has its predetermined limitations, so that it often happens that simple and significant gestures contradict words when the latter are false." Gross takes as a case a man who "assured us," in words, of course, "that he lived very peaceably with his neighbors and at the same time clinched his fist. The latter meant ill will toward the neighbor while the words did not." Gross is saying that gesture language, involuntarily, speaks the truth, oftentimes, even when our words are trying to deceive.<sup>15</sup>

Clarke is, perhaps, a little clearer than Wollaston on this point of the relation of the intellectual and the moral. "The only difference," he says, "is that assent to a plain specu-

<sup>14</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 8 and 143.

<sup>15</sup> Gross, *Kriminal Psychologie*, Part I, Topic 3.



lative truth, is not in a man's power to withhold; but to act according to the plain right and reason of things, this he may, by the natural liberty of his will, forbear. But the one he ought to do; and 'tis as much his plain and indispensable duty; as the other he cannot but do, and 'tis the necessity of his nature to do it."<sup>16</sup> His thought is that assent to plain intellectual truth is necessary to sanity, so to act in conformity, while not necessitated, is necessary to the fulfillment of life relations and so to moral self-realization.

Garve undertook to offer an interpretation of this paragraph of Wollaston's treatise and for some reason inclosed his discussion in quotation marks. These statements of Garve are for the most part fair to the teachings of Wollaston, except on this one point of the relation of the intellectual and the moral. Garve begins with the words "Wollaston sagt," implying that what follows is quoted from the work of Wollaston, so it is not to be wondered at that Von Hartmann and other German writers should think that they were quoting from Wollaston, in form of Garve's supposed translation, when they are only quoting from Garve's interpretative remarks. "Every action is good which expresses a true proposition. Truth is the highest. To recognize truth and to represent it in one's words and deeds, alive and effective, is the ultimate end of man. The ability to recognize truth makes a man a rational being, and through the endowments of his nature to express truth also in action he becomes a moral being (durch die Anlagen seiner Natur, Wahrheit auch in Handlungen auszudrücken, wird er ein sittliches Wesen)."<sup>17</sup> So far I have no fault to find with the interpretation, but as he proceeds we see that he interprets the Wollastonian Ethics as based on an essential identification of the intellectual and the moral. He says: "As man expresses his ideas and words by means of language he can indicate them also and communicate them to others by means of actions. This is clear to everybody in the form of gestures, but only the most attentive observer can discover that every

<sup>16</sup> Clarke, *Evidences*, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup> Garve, *Uebersicht der vornehmsten Principien Sittenl.*, p. 172. Von Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins*, p. 345.

action without exception expresses a certain proposition (dass jede Handlung, ohne Ausnahme, einen gewissen Satz ausdrückt)." Garve, it is clear, does not make any distinction between gestures and other forms of action and so misses Wollaston's meaning entirely. This is even more evident in what he next says: "In der Wahrheit oder Unwahrheit dieses Satzes liegt die Sittlichkeit oder Unsittlichkeit der Handlung."<sup>18</sup> This is not Wollaston's meaning at all. The morality does not lie in the truth or falsity of the proposition but in the truth or falsity of the action. The proposition is just as true when the action is false as when it is true, otherwise there would be no inconsistency and consequently no wrong.

Garve gets the big idea in the Ethics of Wollaston, namely, that the criterion is objective, that the natures of things determine how they should be treated. Wollaston does insist that inanimate objects, animals and human beings by their very different natures indicate that they should be treated very differently. Since animals have feelings this must be taken into consideration in our treatment of them, and since man has both feelings and reason he should be treated as possessing both. Wollaston says that if mankind be differentiated from the rest of the animal kingdom by reason, then the rational nature of man must be a large factor in the determination of the treatment properly to be accorded a man.<sup>19</sup> Garve, however, fails to understand Wollaston because he seems to try to translate an immoral action into some kind of false proposition. "If I torment an animal," he has Wollaston say, "I express thereby the proposition, I take this animal to be a being without feeling and therefore I treat it like my table or a stone." In torturing an animal I do not thereby express the proposition "Ich halte diess Thier für ein empfindungsloses Wesen." On the contrary, I know, and must as an intelligent being declare, it to be a creature with feelings. It is true, that I "behandle es daher so, wie meinen Tisch, oder einen Stein." The same can be said of the next statement he puts into Wollaston's mouth:

<sup>18</sup> Garve, Uebersicht der vornehmsten Prin. der Sittenl., p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> Wollaston, Reli. of Nat. Delin., pp. 27 and 128.

"If I make a slave of a person I express thereby the proposition; this man is an irrational being, which I can use for my purpose like horses and oxen without his consent."<sup>20</sup> But by treating a man like horses and oxen I only act as if he were an irrational being. I do not by my inhuman treatment of him make the declaration "dieser Mensch ist ein vernunftloses Wesen." In fact, implicit in my mistreatment of the man is the indubitable truth that the man is a rational being, otherwise there would be no inconsistency in my behavior. This same confusion of intellectual contradiction with moral inconsistency appears in the generalization which he has Wollaston make: "Wenn ich ungerecht handle, so erkläre ich dadurch, dass ich mich für kein Glied der Menschlichen Gesellschaft halte."<sup>21</sup> Wollaston does not take the position that when a man acts immorally he, thereby, declares that he does not consider himself a member of human society. He has, it is true, acted as if there were no human society and as if he were no member thereof; but the immorality does not consist in the denial of the evidently true, as Garve thinks. The immorality consist, rather, in the inconsistency of the actions with the truth.

John Clarke, Wollaston's contemporary, says that he is not at all sure "that all immoral actions deny more truth than they affirm," so it cannot, he thinks, be argued that they are for that reason immoral.<sup>22</sup> As many truths, he says, could be affirmed in regard to "any species of vicious action . . . as for the denial of it." In the first place, I would answer, it is not the position of Wollaston that immorality is just a denial of true propositions. In the second place, considering truth in the broad sense as true to the relations and meanings of life, as Wollaston does, John Clarke certainly cannot deny that vicious actions are essentially false. They are, to be sure, in conformity to some particular truth, but they contradict the larger truths and deny the indissoluble unity of life and the world. Wollaston anticipates this objection, when he says that there are many true propo-

<sup>20</sup> Garve, Uebersicht der vornehmsten Prin. der Sittenl., p. 173.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>22</sup> J. Clarke, Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin.," p. 19.

sitions which imply no moral relations, since persons are not involved.<sup>23</sup>

In regard to the contention of Wollaston "that men may by their actions deny truth," John Clarke says, that the only meaning this can have is that "actions . . . are expressive . . . of propositions," that they are ways "of conveying . . . sense . . . to the minds of others."<sup>24</sup> This is the same confusion we found in Garve. The confusion is due to the failure to understand that Wollaston speaks of actions which express merely intellectual meaning, such as gestures and pantomimes, and also of actions expressive of character, moral action. This confusion is made evident by what follows. Clarke says that all that Wollaston can mean is that an action may convey a false impression "even where a person has no intention by his action of conveying any such sense to the minds of others."<sup>25</sup> Clarke goes on to say that "the difficulty of making a determination will grow with the number of significations the same action may have . . . to different people." The civility of a sharper, for example, makes a very different impression upon a green-horn to that made upon a man of the world. His actions, however, are precisely the same in the two instances.<sup>26</sup> "But," says Clarke, "supposing actions rightly denominated immoral did really imply a denial of the truth . . . a denial of things to be what they are; yet how will it follow from such a denial, that those actions therefore are truly and properly immoral, that is contrary to the will and good pleasure of God, declared by the voice of reason, or the light of nature?"<sup>27</sup>

Having defined truth and goodness and determined the nature of each Wollaston, next, proceeds to illustrate each. His first case is an example of an act which affirms a false proposition to be true or denies a true proposition to be false. It is that of a body of soldiers firing upon another body thinking them to be enemies when they are friends.

<sup>23</sup> J. Clarke, etc., from p. 19. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin.,"* p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.



This case of the soldiers illustrates actions that express or deny true relations, but not acts expressive of character, since they are based on error. True, as Wollaston says, the truth or falsity "does not depend upon the affirmer's knowledge or ignorance"; because words have a fixed meaning and do, as a matter of fact, conform, "agree or disagree to that, concerning which the affirmation is made." But is he not confusing the intellectual and the moral when he goes on to say: "The thing is the same still, if into the place of words be substituted actions?" No, for actions of this kind could have no moral character and so would be actions of the pantomime order expressing meaning, not character. "The salute here was in nature the salute of an enemy, but should have been the salute of a friend; therefore it implied a falsity," but no moral character attaches to it. This, I take it, like acts of the gesture and pantomime variety, "do not come up" to Wollaston's "meaning."<sup>28</sup>

Wollaston, then, gives instances of the "acts of the other kind, such as constitute the character of a man's conduct in life." "When Popilius Laenas solicited to have Cicero proscribed, and that he might find him out and be his executioner, would not his carriage have sufficiently signified to any one, who was ignorant of the case, that Tully either was some very bad man, and deserved capital punishment; or had some way grievously injured this man; or at least had not saved his life, nor had as much reason to expect his service and good offices upon occasion, as he ever had to expect Tully's? And all these things being false, were not his behavior and actions expressive of that which was false, or contradictions to truth? It is certain he acted as if those things had been true, which were not true, and as if those had not been true which were true (in this consisted the fault of his ingratitude); and if he in words had said they were true or not true, he had done no more than talk as if they were so; why then should not to act as if they were true or not true, when they were otherwise, contradict truth as much as to say they were so, when they were not so."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



John Clarke thinks that this criterion of Wollaston which undertakes to explicate morality in terms of truth is a failure. He thinks that the matter of agreement to truth is ethically speaking irrelevant and undertakes to prove this by a consideration of Wollaston's own cases. Clarke says "It would be easy to multiply instances of actions, very serious in their significations, some of which would be agreeable to truth, others not." Take Wollaston's case of Popilius Laenas' solicitation to have Cicero proscribed. The absolute irrelevance of conformity or non-conformity of actions to truth is quite apparent, he thinks. Clarke says that by Wollaston's own confession Laenas' action had various significations "to any one, who was ignorant of the case," namely, "that Tully either was some very bad man," or "had not saved his life," or "had in some way grievously injured this man." Clarke asks "what would that carriage of his have signified to any one that was not ignorant of the case, but knew Tully to be 'a person of eminent parts, learning, eloquence and virtue, that had merited highly from his country, and particularly from Laenas, whose life he had saved? Why 'tis as clear as the sun can be at noonday, that to such a person it would have had no one of those various significations, but only this, that Laenas was what the world calls an ungrateful profligate villain.'" <sup>30</sup> I am very sure that Clarke has not refuted Wollaston. He has not proved the irrelevance of the principle of agreeableness to truth. To be sure the actions of Laenas would have had a much more definite signification to one familiar to the case; but Wollaston says, that to even one entirely ignorant of the case, his "carriage" clearly "signified" that he was acting inconsistently with relations of a friendly kind obtaining between Cicero and himself. Wollaston is only concerned to say that Laenas' actions were unfitting to the circumstances, that his action would naturally lead one ignorant of the circumstances to infer that they were quite otherwise. In a word his "carriage" was indicative of evil, not good. But says Clarke "since the same actions have various significances . . . our author's new scheme of morality appears

<sup>30</sup> J. Clarke, Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin.," p. 24.

clogged with insuperable difficulties," because we cannot tell "what significations we are to have regard to, in forming a judgment of the morality or immorality of human actions."<sup>31</sup> No, Wollaston says the relations concerning persons are the ones to have particular "regard to" although everything should be treated as what it is. However various the significations of the actions of Laenas to the different casual observers they made one general impression.<sup>32</sup>

In regard to these two instances we could wish more clearness on one point, namely, that of making clear that in the first example the objectively inappropriate act, act not in conformity to the nature of things, was done ignorantly and innocently. Whereas in the second instance the objectively inappropriate and incongruous act was done intelligently and wilfully, and was, consequently, not only objectively bad but also morally wrong. Wollaston makes the distinction but not as clearly as he might have done. He should have emphasized the fact that in the first instance there was conformity of acts to the nature of things as they were thought to be, while in the second instance the non-conformity was in the face of known facts. He undoubtedly intended for these two instances to show that immorality is as self-contradictory as intellectual contradiction. "If he in words had said that they were true or not true, he had done no more than talk as if they were so; why then should not to act as if they were true or not true, when they were otherwise, contradict truth as much as to say they were so, when they were not so."<sup>33</sup> I think that Wollaston labors unnecessarily hard to try to show that a truth can be denied by actions as well as by words, unless he means thereby more than the mere fact that there are significant acts.

I think that these two illustrations answer the objection that the intention of the actor has nothing to do with the morality of the act. I think, however, that his lack of clarity in distinguishing between the two types of actions was responsible for the false interpretation. John Clarke, in

<sup>31</sup> J. Clarke, Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin.," p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Wollaston, Reli. of Nat. Delin., p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

Wollaston's lifetime, offered this criticism of his system. John Clarke says that "actions whether words are deeds cannot be properly said to deny or affirm anything," since "affirming and denying are actions" the terms are only "applicable to agents."<sup>34</sup> Clarke says that the objection may be made that this is a "nice distinction." He answers that "it is not more nice than necessary" because one cannot affirm or deny without an intention to do so. "A man is then, and then only, said to affirm or deny a thing when he conveys a proposition in his own mind to the minds of others; as expressing his own sense of apprehension or persuasion of the agreement or disagreement of things."<sup>35</sup> Clarke says that it matters not what meaning his words or actions may "excite in the minds of those that hear the one, or see the other" a man can only be said to affirm or deny when he intends to do so. He takes the case of "orders given in a nation under the apprehension of an invasion from an enemy."<sup>36</sup> The order was "that beacons should be fired, or lights set up . . . to give warning of the enemy's approach." The lighting of the beacons "would be equivalent to the proposition, the enemy is come; and might be said thereby to affirm a truth, if the enemy was come, and a lie if he was not, because this was really meant and intended." But suppose some one ignorant of the orders should fire a beacon, "he could not be said thereby to 'affirm that the enemy has come,' notwithstanding their actions would necessarily convey that proposition to the minds of such as, being acquainted with the orders, should see the lights; and that for this reason only, because he had not the least intention to affirm anything." This is a case like the first one mentioned by Wollaston. It is illustrative of actions of the non-moral type, illustrative of actions of the gesture or pantomime variety which express only meaning. Wollaston is as equally insistent as John Clarke that no moral quality attaches to actions of this kind. Such evil as results from mistakes of this kind does not constitute moral but only natural evil.

<sup>34</sup> J. Clarke, Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin.," p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

So of course an innocent action cannot "deny" in the ethical sense of the term.

Wollaston anticipates this objection when he says: "I lay this down then as a fundamental maxim, that whoever acts as if things were so, or not so, doth by his acts declare, that they are so or not so; as plainly as he could by words, and with more reality. And if things are otherwise, his acts contradict those propositions, which assert them to be as they are."<sup>37</sup> Now John Clark argues that if one is mistaken he does not really act. He violates truth, he says, but he does not act in any moral sense. He thinks that Wollaston fails to make this all-important distinction. I am very sure that he does make the distinction, for he says that "No act of any being, to whom moral good and evil is imputable, that interferes with any true proposition, or denies anything to be as it is, can be right."<sup>38</sup> And "to whom" are "moral good and evil . . . imputable?" This he answers precisely as Clarke does; "That act, which may be denominated morally good or evil, must be the act of a being capable of distinguishing, choosing, and acting for himself; . . . an intelligent and free agent. Because in proper speaking no act at all can be ascribed to that which is not indued with these capacities."<sup>39</sup>

John Clarke thinks that the rightness or wrongness of actions is determined by the intention of the actor and he understands Wollaston to teach that "the immorality of the action is exclusive of the intention," that he who has no intention to deny the truth is equally guilty with the one who knows and intends to deny it.<sup>40</sup> "If therefore nobody can be said to affirm or deny anything, without an intention so to do, I doubt the greatest villains, will, according to Mr. Wollaston's doctrine, stand discharged from the guilt of the greatest of crimes; since they are so far from intending the denial of any truth, any true proposition whatsoever, by the rapine and murder they are guilty of, that

<sup>37</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Prop. IV, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec. I, Intro., p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin."* p. 12.



they never so much as once imagine, their actions have any such tendency, meaning or significance at all.”<sup>41</sup> Clarke must, I think, admit that the criminal is conscious of denying many significant life relations. A villain who demands a man’s money does not, he says, “intend thereby the denial of any truth.” He says “the truth that the money belongs to the traveller” is not, as Wollaston claims, “denied by such an action.” The action has rather the contrary signification.<sup>42</sup> To be sure the very essence of wrong consists in denying by actions, or “practically denying” that which must be assented to intellectually. The trouble is Clarke thinks that there is only one way to deny truth and strictly speaking there is only one way, but treating things as they are not denies by action that which must be assented to as fact.

John Clarke next offers a dilemmatical argument against Wollaston’s doctrine: “Take it which way you will, whether an intention to deny the truth be made necessary or not necessary to the immorality of an action, Mr. Wollaston’s doctrine cannot stand. Upon the former supposition, the greatest rogues will be excusable in the vilest of actions for want of this intention to deny the truth, as it is very certain that they have it not. . . . And upon the supposition that an intent to deny truth is not necessary to the immorality of an action, but that it is sufficient to render an action immoral, that it has a meaning inconsistent with some truth, though the agent has not the least intention of denying any truth; I say upon this supposition it will be a crime, and as great a crime to deny the truth through ignorance, as to do it wittingly and knowingly, with a perverse and malicious intention.”<sup>43</sup> I would like to ask Clarke what the intention of the rogue is if it is not to take something for his own that belongs to some one else? The rogue, by his action, does practically deny truth, for he denies things and relations to be as they are, and he intends to deny these essential relations. Wollaston, as much as Clarke, believes that the

<sup>41</sup> J. Clarke, Exam. of the “Reli. of Nat. Delin.,” p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 13.



morality of an action is dependent upon the intention of the agent, in the sense that no act could be said to be good without this good intention. His position is that all facts must be considered and that an act is not really good, in the highest sense, unless the intention as well as the results are good. Intentions as well as expected consequences must enter into the motivation.<sup>44</sup> This is not, however, inconsistent with an objective conception of morality, for by the objectivity of Ethics we only mean that the real natures of things determine what our intentions ought to be. The good man is one who strives to conform to the nature of things.

That my interpretation of Wollaston is the correct one is made even more evident by his third instance. In this case a man promises that he will never do a thing and then does it. The act, Wollaston says, interferes with his promise and is contrary to it, and is as contradictory as saying that A made the promise and then straightway say that he did not make it. True, the proposition is as much denied by A's behavior, as it would be by an actual verbal denial; but that is very different from saying that, morally or otherwise, they are the same kind of denials. If he thought that they were the same, why should he, over and over again, mention both kinds? He, clearly, it seems to me, means that moral inconsistency is a form of inconsistency; but he does not mean to identify it with the intellectual inconsistency of self-contradictory propositions. "If then the behavior of A be inconsistent with the agreement mentioned in the former proposition, that proposition is as much denied by A's behavior, as it can be by the latter, or any other proposition. Or thus, if one proposition imports or contains that which is contrary to what is contained in another, it is said to contradict this other, and denies the existence of what is contained in it. Just so if one act imports that which is contrary to the import of another, it contradicts this other and denies its existence. In a word A by his actions denies the engagements to which he hath subjected himself."<sup>45</sup> Acts that do this, though, are not acts of the

<sup>44</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

gesture or pantomime variety which are but forms of language; but are "such acts as constitute the character of a man's conduct in life" and have a moral "signification." Wollaston says "In common speech we say some actions are insignificant, which would not be sense, if there were not some acts that are significant, that have a tendency and a meaning." Acts, he is saying, have a significance for life and character, a moral signification, as well as intellectual significance. True, he again uses an analogy to make clear his meaning, and, as before, he succeeds in clouding up his meaning instead of clearing it up. Actions, he says, are significant or insignificant; "And this is as much as can be said of articulate sounds, that they are either significant or insignificant." Just as some articulate sounds have significance and some have not, so of actions. He is, of course, using significance in two very different senses,—moral and intellectual.<sup>46</sup>

The failure of Wollaston to clearly differentiate between moral and intellectual signification constitutes the ground of the criticism by John Clarke. He says that in regard to this case of A making a promise to B not to do a thing, and then doing it, there are ten equally possible significations. Suppose one of the significations to be true, the rest would of necessity all be false. Now, according to Wollaston's rule, thinks Clarke, the actions, however innocent, must be condemned as immoral; because "no act that interferes with any true proposition can be right" and this one "has so many various meanings, all inconsistent with the truth."<sup>47</sup> But none of the nine possible significations, are, as a matter of fact, true, so no action can be in violation of them.

I wish to mention one more of the illustrations of Wollaston, because it is the original source of the most common criticism against him, namely, that he reduces all immorality to lying. Isaac told Abimelek that Rebekah was his sister, but after this the king saw Isaac sporting and taking conjugal liberties with her. These acts, says Wollaston, denied that she was his sister and affirmed her to be either his wife

<sup>46</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin."* pp. 27-30.

or concubine. A man may so live that his "whole conduct breathes untruth. May we not say" of such a man "that he lives a lie?" Wollaston does not say, as his critics accuse him of saying, that bad acts are just different ways of lying;—that would reduce all actions to the gesture and pantomime type of actions. To act a lie means simply to be false to significant life relations and meanings, and certainly this is what he means by saying "his whole conduct breathes untruth" and "he lives a lie." The immoral act in this case was literal lying. Isaac, knowingly and deliberately, confused ontological predicates in his statement to Abimelek of the relations that obtained between Rebekah and himself.<sup>48</sup>

Wollaston recapitulates the argument of this division, and this recapitulation might well serve as an epitome of his analogous treatment of truth and goodness: "I lay this down as a fundamental maxim, that whoever acts as if things were so, or not so, doth by his acts declare that they are so or not so; as plainly as he could by words, and with more reality."<sup>49</sup> Is not his meaning very clear? "As plainly": the contradiction is as evident, but not the same kind of thing, for the one is logical and the other ethical in character. He says "with more reality," because intellectually speaking, true propositions cannot be denied. Immoral acts do not deny true propositions to be intellectually true, but they do "practically" deny them to be true. In the practical denial of that to which one intellectually assents consists the inconsistency of immorality. The critics, from the time of Garve and Clarke to the present, have interpreted this passage as meaning that immoral acts are false judgments in regard to the nature of things.<sup>50</sup>

#### IV

In this paragraph Wollaston defines morality negatively by saying that contradictory acts cannot be right. "No

<sup>48</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

act of any being, to whom moral good or evil is imputable, that interferes with any true proposition, or denies anything to be as it is, can be right.”<sup>51</sup>

1. Wollaston's first proof of this proposition is as follows: “If that proposition, which is false, be wrong, that act which implies such a proposition, or is founded in it, cannot be right; because it is the very proposition itself in practice.” Mere propositions cannot be right or wrong, if right and wrong are given an ethical connotation. Were this sentence alone considered we might think that Wollaston is using “wrong” with an ethical connotation, for he does use “right” with an undoubted ethical connotation in the same sentence. In the very next paragraph, however, he makes it very clear that his use of the word “wrong” is not moral but natural and intellectual. This constitutes his second. John Clarke very properly takes Wollaston to task for the two meanings given to “wrong.” He says “The terms of right and wrong are not applicable to propositions at all, in any moral sense. . . . Right and wrong are denominations given to things, upon account of their agreement or disagreement with some rule, to which they are referred, and by which they are judged of. Now, the only rule to which propositions, considered as true or false, are referred, and by which they are judged of, is the nature and existence of things. Such propositions as are conformable thereto may be, and are properly called ‘right,’ those that are not, ‘wrong.’”<sup>52</sup> Clarke says that this means that Wollaston's proof will reduce to the “trifling” statement “that the proposition which is false is false.” Wollaston had set out to prove, “not that actions which imply denial of the truth, cannot be declarative of the truth they deny, . . . but that such actions are immoral.”<sup>53</sup>

2. “Those propositions, which are true, and express things as they are, express the relation between the subject and the attribute as it is; that is, this is either affirmed or denied of that according to the nature of the relation.

<sup>51</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the “Reli. of Nat. Delin.”* p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.



And, further, this relation is determined and fixed by the natures of the things themselves." In other words one cannot deny such relations, as actually existent, and be considered sane. Then follows the moral part of the argument: "Therefore nothing can interfere with any proposition that is true, but it must likewise interfere with nature, and consequently be unnatural or wrong in nature."<sup>54</sup> In criticising this second proof that nothing can interfere with truth "but it must likewise interfere with nature" and so be wrong, John Clarke says, that "interfering with nature . . . can here signify" only "false," not moral "wrong." So that Wollaston's way of proving actions . . . that deny truth to be immoral, . . . is but affirming over and over again . . . that actions that deny truth deny truth.<sup>55</sup> I do not see the special force of this objection, because saying that truth is conformity to nature is saying something more than that truth is truth. It is saying that truth is objective, and by saying that morality is in conformity to nature or to truth we are saying that morality is also objective.

3. For a third argument for his thesis that contradictory acts cannot be right, he says, "if there is a Supreme Being, upon whom the existence of the world depends," then there can be nothing in it but "what he causes"; then "to own things to be as they are is to own what he causes; . . . and this is to take things as he planned them in his constitution of the world." The duty of man consists in submitting to his will "revealed in the book of nature." The "owning of things, in all our conduct, to be as they are, is obedience . . . to the author of nature." Wollaston's conception of the place of the will in morality is made quite evident here: "The relation that lies between this and that is of such a nature that one may be affirmed of the other, this is true; but yet to me it shall not be so; I will not act as if it were so."<sup>56</sup> Wollaston says that one can say for himself; I will not follow the laws of nature, "even existence shall be non-existence, when my pleasure requires. Such an impious

<sup>54</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin."*, p. 39.

<sup>56</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 14.

declaration as this attends every voluntary infraction of truth."<sup>57</sup> What Wollaston is, here, saying, in effect, is this "conformity to nature" is the standard of both truth and goodness; but "to own things to be as they are" in our thinking is necessitated, while the "owning of things, in all our conduct, to be as they are" is a matter of freedom. This constitutes the essential difference between intellectual and moral relations. John Clarke's criticism of this point fails to take this into consideration. He thinks that everything in the world is as God would have it be, failing to consider the ill effects wrought by men through the mis-use of their freedom. John Clarke says that for the rich to relieve the poor is not "taking things as God has given them," but "altering things that God has caused or permitted to be." The neglect of the poor more truly "leaves things in the condition he has caused or permitted to be, and which his constitution of things suffered to remain unaltered."<sup>58</sup>

4. The fourth argument for the thesis, that contradictory acts cannot be right, is that things cannot be denied to be what they are without contradicting axiomatic and eternal truth, such as "everything is what it is." Now there are immutable truths, which have "always subsisted in the divine mind," the denial of these is a denial of God. The nature of things cannot be denied existentially, but only morally. Intellectually we cannot deny the existence of things to be as they are, and morally things should be treated as they are.

5. This fact is further emphasized: "Designedly to treat things as being what they are not is the greatest possible absurdity." To get Wollaston's meaning we must get the full force of the word "designedly." The kind of contradiction which immorality makes, is that of "designedly" treating "things as what they are not." This is contradictory, because one must, at the same time, assent to the truth, that is, admit things to be what they are. To act immorally is to act inconsistently, or as Wollaston expresses it, "to put bitter for sweet, darkness for light, crooked for straight.

<sup>57</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 14.

<sup>58</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin."*, p. 41.

It is to subvert all science, to renounce all sense of truth, and flatly to deny the existence of anything. For nothing can be true, nothing does exist, if things are not what they are"; and he who acts immorally, thinks Wollaston, practically wills these contradictions an existence.<sup>59</sup>

John Clarke comments on the statement of Wollaston, "that to treat things as not being what they are is to put bitter for sweet, darkness for light, crooked for straight" by saying that this is just stating "that the denial of truth is the denial of truth."<sup>60</sup> Clarke fails to consider that Wollaston is saying that these matters of fact cannot be denied, "but that to treat things as not being what they are" is as equally contradictory. He pretends to believe Wollaston to teach that immoral men have actually denied these matters of fact. Wollaston means to say that to act immorally is as contradictory as "to put bitter for sweet, etc. It is to subvert all science, renounce all sense of truth, flatly to deny the existence of anything," but this Clarke takes literally. So he asks: "How has poor science done to subsist in the world, under such terrible and furious assaults, from the vices and follies of men?"<sup>61</sup> This criticism is based entirely upon a confused interpretation. Leslie Stephen, laboring under the same mis-interpretation says that Wollaston is arguing the impossibility of immorality.<sup>62</sup> Both men fail to get the significance of the difference between denying truth and "practically" denying it. The truth of the matter is that a man can, in practice, deny truth; but even while so acting one gives his assent to the truth of the proposition practically denied. The intellect is determined in its reactions, the will is not, consequently immorality is not impossible. So, in acts, one can deny what cannot be denied as truth. The contradiction consists in affirming and denying at the same time; and this is what all immorality does, for morality attaches only to intelligent and free acts.<sup>63</sup>

Wollaston ends this paragraph by an illustration of

<sup>59</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin."*, p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>62</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> S. Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 188. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 14.

“designedly treating things as being what they are not.” In this example he makes very clear the differentia of immorality. Immorality is as absurd, he says, as saying that things that are are not, as absurd as saying that A is at the same time both A and not-A. But Wollaston does not say that all such practical denials of evident truth are immoral, and not all practical affirmations of evident truth are moral. The first sentence in the work of Wollaston states that there are good, bad and indifferent acts of men. These indifferent acts either conform to truth or conflict with truth. Mere conformity to some truth, then, does not make an act good. The mere violation of truth is not immoral. The nature and importance of the truths conformed to or violated is an important factor in determining whether an act has moral character or whether it is morally indifferent. It is true that Wollaston does say that he would have everything treated as what it is and that the thought of any truth suffering violation is shocking to him, still he grants that there are acts that are practically indifferent, morally considered.<sup>64</sup> “To talk to a post, or otherwise treat it as if it was a man, would surely be reckoned an absurdity. Why? because this is to treat it as being what it is not.” It is, though, not immoral but only absurd to treat a post as a man. The converse, that is to treating a man as a post, constitutes immorality. He says “to treat a man as a post should . . . be reckoned as bad,” because it practically denies him to be a man and treats him “as if he had no sense and felt no injuries, which he doth feel.” Treating a man as a post is bad and not only absurd, because it is acting towards him “as if to him pain and sorrow were not pain, happiness not happiness. This is what the cruel and unjust often do.”<sup>65</sup> It is quite certain that Wollaston does not here confuse the intellectual and the moral relations, whatever he may do elsewhere. It is not immoral, but only absurd, to treat a post with the same consideration with which one would treat a man; but to treat a man as a post is a very different kind of thing, for such treatment violates the

<sup>64</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. Nat. Delin.*, pp. 20 and 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



nature of humanity. The one is merely acting incongruously or absurdly. The other action is equally incongruous and absurd, but since personality is the truth here violated the act is also morally bad. This instance also meets the criticism that Wollaston gives no consideration to feelings, for the immorality of treating a man as a post he makes to consist, largely, in the disregard of the man's feelings.<sup>66</sup>

6. His last argument for the truth of his proposition is as follows: "To deny things to be as they are is a transgression of the great law of our nature, the law of reason." When we choose something contrary to truth, that is, make a moral choice which contradicts the true nature of things we thereby violate reason: "For truth cannot be opposed, but reason must be violated." Wollaston here, gives us his idea of conscience: "If I may judge by what I feel within myself, the least truth cannot be contradicted without much reluctance; even to see others disregard it "does something more than displease; it is shocking." It violates the law of our being, our rational nature.<sup>67</sup>

## V

In this paragraph Wollaston says that truth is as much violated by sins of omission as by sins of commission. He says that by omissions, or failing to act when one ought to act, a true proposition is as much denied as by acts inconsistent with truth. In regard to these, however, he grants that "much more latitude must be allowed, and much must be allowed, and much must be left to every one's own judgment and ingenuity." There are many omissions "which are manifestly inconsistent with some true proposition, these must be wrong." The violation of solemn promises, for example, is a contradiction of truth. Then there is the sin of having low ideals of life. This is wrong, because it is "failing to have the life ends required by the nature of things." The failure to cultivate my mind is to "deny my mind to be what it is and knowledge to be what it is." This

<sup>66</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

principle does not mean, Wollaston says, that if I do not always give to the poor I am acting wrongly. There are times, he says, "when I might contradict truth by giving to a poor man."<sup>68</sup> Many things are to be considered before we can pass a moral judgment in such cases. The existential judgment, this man is poor is true in every case; but the moral judgment asserts, in addition, my relation to the case and to the problem of poverty in general. If my circumstances are such that I can give something for charity and I fail to do so, then do I "deny the condition of the poor to be what it is and my own to be what it is."<sup>69</sup> In a word, according to Wollaston, an uncharitable being is immoral in that he violates the real nature of things by not living up to his real self in all his relations to other real things. His general principle is that human beings are to always be treated as human beings, and when they are otherwise treated wrong is done them. Wollaston here comes rather close to Utilitarianism, but his criterion is more inclusive than that of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

John Clarke says that in this case Wollaston "blundered upon the manner of proof, commonly called *petitio principii*," not by saying that "the rich man's neglect of the poor" is "immoral, because it implies a denial of this truth, that the rich are obliged to relieve the poor"; but on the ground that he denied his condition and that of the poor to be what they are. "The denial of property in the owner did so visibly imply the supposition of a law of nature, as the denial of obligation did." Clarke says that the principle of Wollaston would imply that the relief of the poor by the rich was a denial that the circumstances "are what they are," namely, that he is rich and they poor.<sup>70</sup> Clarke says that, according to Wollaston, the rich ought not to relieve the poor for that is denying the poor to be what they are. The poor should be left in the circumstances in which God has seen fit to place them.

<sup>68</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin."*, p. 34.

## VI

In this paragraph Wollaston emphasizes the necessity of considering all relations. The position is taken that a thing must be considered in all its relations before we can know what it is. The man who rides a stolen horse is acting in conformity with the nature of the horse in riding him, but in that the horse is stolen he violates the nature of the horse as some one's else property. Because each thing is several things, in that it has many relations, and the same of each and every person there are many conflicts of duties. "Here the importance of the truth on the one and the other side should be diligently compared. . . . In short, when things are truly estimated, persons concerned, times, places, ends intended, and effects that naturally follow, must be added to them."<sup>71</sup> So it is all a matter of judgment, existential and value. In many life situations one does not know enough to act intelligently, and how is one to act morally without acting intelligently? One may say that, in such cases, conscience bids one be true to himself, but when this is given content it can only mean being true to one's relations. The significant thing to me is that Wollaston gives due place to both and rightly relates the a priori and the a posteriori elements in knowledge and in morality. Prior to all experience we can say that a man ought to conform his life to the nature of things, and it is only experience that can tell him what these are. There is an absoluteness and a relativeness about it. The form of morality is a priori and absolute; it is that there should be conformity of life, through freely willed acts, to reality. The content of morality is relative and a posteriori involving judgment both of the facts and of duty in respect to the facts: "Nothing can be true any further than it is compatible with other things that are true."<sup>72</sup>

Erdmann in commenting on this passage says that it is Wollaston's idea that every object must be judged, not in

<sup>71</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 18 and 20.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

isolation, for this would give only a one-sided judgment; but "a person must consider, at the same time, all its relations and must consider it in its totality. Otherwise we are not taking it as it is but only as it is partly and partly as it is not."<sup>73</sup> He says that this is of the very greatest importance in evaluating an action and refers to Wollaston's own case of riding a horse which belongs to some one else. One's action is in conformity to the nature of things when the horse is considered only as a horse, but when the horse is considered as being a piece of property belonging to some one else then the action is seen to be in contradiction to the nature of things. Erdmann says that a proposition is true only when it considers a thing in its totality, "hence only that is really true which is in accord with the nature of the object and to act in accord with its nature is acting according to truth, that is, good (*nur das ist wirklich wahr, was der Natur des Gegenstandes gemäss ist, und seiner Natur gemäss ihn zu behandeln, ist der Wahrheit gemäss, d.h. gut*)."<sup>74</sup>

## VII

In this paragraph Wollaston merely says that it is right not to do wrong: "When any act would be wrong, the forbearing that act must be right; likewise when the omission of anything would be wrong, the doing of it must be right. Because *contrariorum contraria est ratio*."<sup>75</sup>

## VIII

This proposition affirms the coincidence of good and right and of evil and wrong: "Moral good and evil are coincident with right and wrong. For that cannot be good, which is wrong; nor that evil, which is right."<sup>76</sup> The truth of this is not so apparent as would seem to be the case nor is it a

<sup>73</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 116.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>75</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.



mere tautological statement. Right and wrong refer to the conformity of acts to the moral law, while good and evil refer to the conformity of acts to the nature of things.

## IX

In this paragraph Wollaston takes the position that there are degrees of good and evil and undertakes to reconcile this with the position that morality consists in acts that are conformable to truth. "Every act" of an intelligent free being and "all those omissions which interfere with truth . . . are evil in some degree or other." When he speaks of acts inconsistent with truth, he says, "I mean any truth, any true proposition, whether containing matter of speculation or plain fact. I would have everything taken to be what in fact and truth it is." Here Wollaston does identify truth and goodness, and gives ground for the criticism that he reduces all immorality to lying. But this passage must not be taken alone, and it must also be borne in mind that he is here discussing degrees of immorality. He can well say that every violation of truth is to some extent evil. He would say, I am sure, that even his relatively innocent case of a man speaking to a post is, to an extent, a violation of the nature of personality, in that the man who does that kind of thing is acting absurdly and is consequently not treating himself as a rational creature, and so the act is evil. He goes on to say, however, that "neither all evil nor all good actions are equal."<sup>77</sup> It might be argued that to make any difference in degrees of morality he must resort to another standard than that of conformity to truth. He says that the importance of the truth respected or violated determines the degree of virtue or vice. "For neither all evil nor all good actions are equal. Those truths which they respect, though they are equally true, may comprise matters of very different importance; or more truths may be violated one way than another, and acts committed by the violation of them may be equally said to be crimes but not equal crimes." In his example,

<sup>77</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 22.

however, he apparently resorts to the hedonistic criterion. He says that it is far worse to deprive a man of an estate than it is to steal a book from him, because the one is worth far more than the other, which means that the one "is capable of conferring more happiness than the other."<sup>78</sup>

One year after the death of Wollaston, Thomas Bott wrote a pamphlet criticizing his ethical philosophy. Bott confines his criticism almost entirely to this paragraph, which is perhaps the weakest, or, at least the one most open to misinterpretation, of any in the entire argument. Bott says: "What I design is to confine myself to the peculiar and principal notion of our author; and enquire whether it is right, or not. His notion of morality we have in his IX. Proposition where he makes the formal ratio of moral good and evil to consist in an agreement or disagreement with truth: and by truth, he immediately tells us, he means any truth whatever; any true proposition whatsoever, whether containing matter of speculation, or plain fact."<sup>79</sup> I do not think it at all fair to say that this passage really gives the clearest statement of the ethical principle of Wollaston, for he is here concerned more with the question of the degrees of good and evil than with that of determining the criterion of morality. The criterion is, of course, used in determining the degrees of good and evil; but since he is more concerned with the determination of the degrees than with stating the differentia of good and evil, he is not as careful in that regard as he is elsewhere. The thing in this passage, that makes Wollaston more open to criticism here than in any place else, is that he does apparently identify intellectual and moral relations. But, it must be remembered, that he has labored to make clear that there is not only truth of propositions but also truth of actions. His position is that all truth should be respected and that it is, to some extent, wrong to violate any truth. "I would have everything taken to be what in fact and truth it is."<sup>80</sup> We are told by Wollaston's biographer that he had such a

<sup>78</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 23.

<sup>79</sup> Bott, "*Reli. of Nature Delin.*" *Considered and Refuted*, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 20.

passion for accuracy that he destroyed many manuscripts of his because he was not satisfied with them. A man can have a scientist's passion for truth, and at the same time grant that there is a great difference in the importance of purely academic speculative truth and that which more directly concerns human happiness and human welfare. The thing that Wollaston is here insisting upon is that all truth should be respected and that it is wrong to violate any truth, however theoretical it may be in interest and in importance. It is of course far more important that he be true to human life and to truth directly concerned therewith. So instead of Wollaston giving up absolutely the distinction between truth and goodness, as Bott accuses him of doing, he really draws up a hierarchy of vices and virtues. By the principle of concomitant variation it may be shown that his moral criterion is that of truth to human happiness and welfare, for while all truth should be respected and while it is wrong to violate any truth there are degrees of good and evil. And the degree of good or evil is to be determined, not by its degree of conformability to abstract truth but by the importance of the truth conformed to or violated; and that which determines the importance of the truth is its relations to human life and to human happiness.<sup>81</sup>

Bott is insistent upon the point that in this passage is to be found Wollaston's "principal and peculiar notion of morality. And it is," he says, "visible on every page, how much he endeavors to carry this notion through the whole book, and make it agree to, or comprehend all virtues and vices whatsoever." He says that "as far as page 138 we find him proving T guilty of immorality, by taking from P something that was P's; because by such an act, T declared that to be his own, and so acted a lie; in which, as he adds, consists the idea and formal ratio of moral evil. Indeed this is the peculiar notion of the book."<sup>82</sup> It is very difficult to see how Bott can think that Wollaston con-

<sup>81</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 20 and 38-40.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138. Bott, "Reli. of Nature Delin." Considered and Refuted, p. 5.

fuses ethical and logical relations in the case mentioned. He states that, according to Wollaston's principle, "I was guilty of immorality" because he treated P's property as if it were his own "and so acted a lie." To say that immorality consists in acting a lie is no confusion of intellectual and moral relations. It is very clearly implied that the one belongs to the world of knowledge and the other to the realm of action. But Bott thinks that the two are hopelessly confused for he says: "I think his notion of moral good and evil make all truth not only moral, but equally so; or, in other words, all truths are in themselves of equal importance, according to his definition; and the agreement or disagreement of our actions with them, equally moral or immoral."<sup>83</sup> Bott certainly must have read the passage very carelessly for it states very clearly that "neither all evil nor all good actions are equal. Those truths which they respect, though they are equally true, may comprise matters of very different importance."<sup>84</sup> He makes it very clear also that he has in mind not formal truth but true life relations. As I have just said, Wollaston grants that all truths are moral, in some degree, in that truths of every kind should be respected; but it cannot be said that truths are considered by him to be of equal importance.<sup>85</sup>

In spite of the fact that Wollaston makes it very clear that morality is concerned only with actions, Bott insists that he makes morality to depend upon the truth or falsity of some proposition. He goes further and says "if the moral goodness or evil of actions consists in their agreement or disagreement with truth," then "where there is this agreement or disagreement, there is moral good or evil, let the truth respected be what it will."<sup>86</sup> This, as we have seen, Wollaston grants. Mathematical truths of an absolutely abstract nature should be respected, not alone because of "the respect they bear to human beings" for mathe-

<sup>83</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nature Delin." Considered and Refuted, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 20.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>86</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nature Delin." Considered and Refuted, pp. 8-9.



matical truths often come to have very close relations to human welfare, but also because "the least truth cannot be contradicted without much reluctance."<sup>87</sup> Wollaston, however, is very far from saying that it follows from this that, morally speaking, "whatever actions have an equal agreement or disagreement" with truth are "equally good or evil."<sup>88</sup> In fact he denies this absolutely. He says, "that though to act against truth in any case is wrong, yet, the degrees of guilt vary with the importance of the things." In some cases the sin is great and in others it amounts to "almost nothing." Inanimate things, for example, Wollaston thinks, cannot be "considered as capable of wrong treatment, if the respect they bear to living beings is separated from them."<sup>89</sup>

Bott grants that "the author often speaks of truths of importance, or weight, etc., and so may be supposed to guard against any such objection as this." Bott thinks, however, that he fails to guard against the objection because he did not put any such word in "his definition of moral good and evil, and seems only incidentally to talk of the different importance of truths, when he is as it were forced to it by the cases that are put; and to which no tolerable answer could be given, without allowing such difference."<sup>90</sup> In reply, I will say, that in the very passage that Bott is considering Wollaston does say that: "Every act . . . which interferes with truth . . . is morally evil, in some degree or other." He also says that "neither all good, nor all evil actions are equal," because the "truths which they respect, though they are equally true, may comprise matters of very different importance."<sup>91</sup> I grant that Wollaston does not, in this particular passage, state that it is the relation to human happiness and welfare that constitutes the standard by which the importance of a truth is determined, until he takes up particular cases. He does state in the proposition itself that there are truths of very different impor-

<sup>87</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 16 and 31.

<sup>88</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nature Delin." *Considered and Refuted*, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 31.

<sup>90</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nature Delin." *Considered and Refuted*, p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 20.

tance, and, of course, this could only be a difference of importance for human lives, otherwise importance could have no moral connotation. Incidentally, it may be said, that Bott's criticism here is quite inconsistent with his other criticism of Wollaston, which is considered at length in the section on happiness, namely, that Wollaston makes the importance of truths to depend upon their relation to the production of human happiness.<sup>92</sup>

## X

In this paragraph Wollaston takes up at length the thesis stated in his introductory sentence. He there said: "The foundation of religion lies in that difference between the acts of men, which distinguish them into good, evil and indifferent." He thinks that he has proved that there is moral good and evil, consequently he affirms that there is Natural Religion. His position is somewhat different from that of Kant; both rest religion on morality, but Kant bases morality on a categorical imperative, an immediate and indubitable inner command, while Wollaston bases morality on the nature of things. I think that this objection might be made to the position of Wollaston on this point: Religion and morality are both rational and are demanded by the nature of things, so religion cannot be said to rest on morality. It is true that morality implicates religion, but religion just as truly implicates morality. They are in fact but the finite and the infinite aspects of one *Weltauschauung*, and this is really but Wollaston's way of relating them. By religion he means nothing else, he says, "but an obligation to do what ought not to be omitted, and to forbear what ought not to be done," which obligations are determined by the real natures of things due to their cosmic relations. Religion "follows from the distinction between moral good and evil," which distinction is "founded in the respect which men's acts bear to truth." Truth can only be conformity to the real and ultimate natures of things, and since there are ultimate life relations based on the real nature of things

<sup>92</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nature Delin." Considered and Refuted, p. 6.

there is religion. This is natural religion based not on revelation but on the uninspired reason. Religion rests on the necessary distinction between good and evil, and this distinction "is founded in the respect, which men's acts bear to truth." Truth, in turn, depends upon the real nature of things "since no proposition can be true, which expresses things otherwise, than as they are in nature." Both morality and religion are objective, their nature being determined by the real nature of things, by reality.<sup>93</sup>

## XI

This paragraph epitomizes the argument of the entire section by stating the rationale of Natural Religion. The one great law of Natural Religion is: "That every intelligent, active, and free being should so behave himself, as by no act to contradict truth; or that he should treat everything as being what it is."<sup>94</sup> But this is also the law of morality. Natural Religion, then, teaches that man should be treated as being what he is and God as what he is.

<sup>93</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 24.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

## WOLLASTON'S CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF OTHER SYSTEMS

After stating his own view of Ethics Wollaston undertakes to offer a critical evaluation of the typical ethical theories. He says that "our main subject of study is the distinction between moral good and evil." The existence of any such distinction, he says, "some have been so wild as to deny." He thinks from what he has said already it is quite evident "that there is as certainly moral good and evil as there is true and false, and that there is as natural and immutable a difference "between the one as between the other." He then proceeds to pass judgment on the various ways of finding the differentia of moral good and evil.<sup>1</sup>

"They who place all in following nature, if they mean by that phrase acting according to the natures of things, or according to truth, say what is right. But this does not seem to be their meaning. And if it is only that a man must follow his own nature, since his nature is not purely rational, but there is a great part of him, which he has in common with the brutes, they appoint him a guide which I fear will mislead him, this being commonly more likely to prevail than the rational part. At best this is loose talk."<sup>2</sup> In the section on happiness this question of what is meant by a life conformable to nature is treated more completely. It is very clear, however, that he is not in agreement with those who interpret the formula "according to nature" hedonistically. If one means by a life "according to nature" a life lived conformably to the real and ultimate nature of things, or according to reason's dictates, then does Wollaston find himself in agreement, otherwise not.

"They who make right reason to be the law, by which

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.



our acts are to be judged, and according to their conformity to this or deflection from it call them lawful or unlawful, good or bad, say something more particular and precise," than do the hedonists. Wollaston says that they are right when they say that "whatever will bear to be tried by the test of right reason, is right; and that which is condemned by it wrong." He says that he agrees with them if by "right reason they mean that which is found by the right use of our rational faculties," but he says that he is not at all sure that this is what they mean.<sup>3</sup> He is rather sure that this is not their meaning, but that they think that there is a special kind of reason which passes upon moral matters. He would not agree to the intuitional conception of the term "right reason," for when so conceived "each man has a different right reason, and each thinks that his alone is right." Wollaston says that there is only one kind of reason and by "right reason" one must, to be true to the facts, mean the "right use of our rational faculties." He does not think that man possesses a moral faculty but that moral matters are decided by the ordinary reason. He is very insistent upon the point that he will accept no intuitive notion of "right reason." He makes it very clear that there are two factors involved in the criterion of morality, the empirical and the rational, and also that "rational" is not given an intuitional but a ratiocinative connotation. He says: "And besides, what I have said, extends further; for we are not only to respect those truths, which we discover by reasoning, but even such matters of fact, as are fairly discovered to us by our senses. We ought to regard things as being what they are, which way soever we come to the knowledge of them."<sup>4</sup> As morality is "made to consist in the conformity of men's acts to the truth of the case" we have a criterion which is "undeniable, intelligible and practicable."

Wollaston takes the same attitude towards those who would make the criterion of morality a special sense or innate idea. You cannot, he says, "deduce the difference

<sup>3</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

between good and evil from the common sense of mankind, and certain principles born with us. . . . For it is much to be suspected there are no such innate maxims as they pretend, but that the impressions of education are mistaken for them; and besides that, the sentiments of mankind are not so uniform and constant, as that we may safely thrust such an important distinction upon them.”<sup>5</sup> So Wollaston very distinctly denies that he is an intuitionist or an intuitionist. He believes neither in a special moral faculty nor in innate moral ideas nor in a moral sense, yet, as we shall see, critic after critic has identified his position with that of Intuitionism.

It has been very common to identify the intellectualists and the intuitionists in morals, and historically they have been associated together, because they have both been opposed to the sensationalists. The two positions are really very different, and Wollaston is careful to deny the identity of his position and that of Intuitionism. He says that one cannot know immediately and indubitably what he should do in any life situation, but that this can be known only after one has thought of the relations and meanings of things. It is true that the intellectualists presuppose a common rational nature, but the advantage of this over the idea of a moral faculty is that all human conduct can be evaluated by a common standard, that of inherent rationality. “The eternal rule of morality is that of right reason. This is the Law of Nature which is of universal extent, and everlasting duration.” It is founded in the nature and reason of things, and is of the same original with the eternal reason of things. Its obligations “were from eternity, and the force of it reaches throughout the universe.” To this “Law of Nature” the reason of all men everywhere naturally and necessarily assents.<sup>6</sup> As contrasted to the standard of rationalism the criterion of the intuitionist or intuitionist is private, personal and peculiar, and be it ever so indubitable it is nevertheless unintelligible. The criterion of the intellectualists is that of truth, the

<sup>5</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 24. Clarke, *Nat. Reli.* IV. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

principal of constancy in the meanings of all minds and the practical conformity in all living to these universal meanings. Perhaps the difference between the two views can be even more clearly drawn by simply characterizing the one as subjective and the other as objective.

Wollaston ends this section of his treatment by criticizing the systems of Plato and Aristotle. The latter on the ground that the Golden Mean is often "difficult to discern," and also on the ground that "there are several obligations that can by no means be derived from it." With Plato he agrees that virtue "consists in such a likeness to God as we are capable of," but he criticizes Plato on the ground that he does not tell us "by what means we may attain this likeness." He says that Plato's view must really be the same as his own for we must understand by living in "likeness to God" nothing other than "the practice of truth, God being truth, and doing nothing contrary to it."<sup>7</sup>

Wollaston says that there are many other foundations upon which morality has been built, but says that he questions whether any of them will hold any better than the ones he mentions. He is skeptical of all subjective principles and insists that the standard of morality must be an objective one. He says: "But if the formal ratio of moral good and evil be made to consist in a conformity of men's acts to the truth of the case or the contrary, as I have here explained it, the distinction seems to be settled in a manner undeniable, intelligible, practicable. For as what is meant by a true proposition and matter of fact is perfectly understood by everybody; so will it be easy for any one, so far as he knows any true propositions and facts, to compare not only words but also actions with them."<sup>8</sup> He says that things themselves must be our standard, that we must constantly conform our thoughts and lives to the real natures of things. Any system of morals is true to the extent that it is based on nature, understanding by nature the true nature and relations of things.

<sup>7</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

## WOLLASTON DEALS WITH POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS TO HIS PRINCIPLE

Wollaston, before ending the section on "Moral Good and Evil," takes up certain objections that may be offered to his principle of determining moral relations.

1. "If everything must be treated as being what it is" it naturally follows that "to treat my enemy as such is to kill him, or revenge myself soundly upon him." Not so, Wollaston answers, because my enemy is something more than my enemy, and I must consider him, not only as an enemy, but also as a human being who is due the treatment properly due a person. If all truth is to be observed my enemy must be treated not only as my enemy but also as a man and a citizen. I must, consequently, prosecute him in such a way as to be true to all these relations. It is quite evident that the taking of the law into my own hands would not do this."<sup>1</sup>

2. "To use a creditor, who is a spendthrift, or one that knows not the use of money, or has no occasion for it, as such, is not to pay him." Wollaston answers this objection by saying that to act in such a way is to make oneself "the judge of his creditor, which is what he is not." To act in such a way would be to "arrogate to himself more than can be true," for he cannot know all the present and future circumstances of his creditor. Wollaston says that to pay a man what is due him does not deny "that he who pays may think him extravagant." The only significance the act of paying a debt to a spendthrift has, says Wollaston, is "that he who pays thinks it due to the other."<sup>2</sup> John Clarke accused Wollaston of the fallacy of Begging the Question in his manner of dealing with this supposed objection. He says that Wollaston presupposes the idea of property, when

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 25 and 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25 and 28.



he says that the debtor's act "directly denies the money which is the creditor's to be the creditor's." He says that Wollaston has no right to take for granted that which he designs to prove. "Since property is founded in the law of nature, . . . to suppose property, is to suppose that there is a law of nature, the very thing in question, and which is the business and design of this section to prove."<sup>3</sup> Clarke grants that this is not an obvious *petitio principii*. It is not the same as saying the obvious thing that immorality is a denial of the law of nature—or the religion of nature.<sup>4</sup>

Bott undertakes to criticize Wollaston's answer by asking "is it to be considered above all, or is it the principal circumstances in the debtor's guilt, that, by refusing to pay his debts, he denies that to be his creditor's, which really is his?" Bott denies that this is the case. He is insistent that immorality does not consist in such denials. The thing "to be considered above all, . . . when one man bastinadoes another to death," is not that by such an act "he denies him to be a man, or to have a sense of feelings; or, in other words, asserts him to be a post."<sup>5</sup> I am very sure that Wollaston would agree entirely with the position taken by Bott, in another passage, that the immoral act implies the truth of the facts in the case and so cannot consist in a denial of the truth.<sup>6</sup> Bott simply falls into the common mistake of failing to distinguish between the truth of acts and that of the propositions. One can act contrary to truth.<sup>7</sup>

3. In Wollaston's third instance, he asks, "If I want money do I not act according to truth, if I take it from somebody else to supply my wants?" Is that not treating my want as what it is and money as what it is? If I act in any other way "do I not act contrary to truth?" He answers saying: "Acting according to truth, as the phrase is used in the objection, is not the thing required by my

<sup>3</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the "Reli. of Nat. Delin.,"* p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nat. Delin." *Considered and Refuted*, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

rule; but, so to act that no truth may be denied by any act.”<sup>8</sup> Bott intends to answer this objection but it is quite evident that he has it confused with one of Wollaston’s illustrations. This case is concerned with the taking of money to satisfy my wants, whereas the other dealt with the case of giving to the poor. Bott evidently has the latter in mind when he asks: “Who would have expected that such a man, as our author appears to be, should be capable of telling a poor wretch, just upon the point of starving, that if he cannot get relief in any honest way, he must take it as his fate. This, forsooth, because truth is truth; That is though, such a poor creature sees at his feet a penny loaf of his neighbor’s, which his neighbor does not want, he must by no means touch it, because it is his neighbor’s and not his own.”<sup>9</sup>

Bott thinks that Wollaston takes an extreme position in regard to the reverence he says men should have for the truth. I do not think that this is the case. Wollaston thinks that formal truth should be respected, but that there are occasions for such violations when it is necessary to the realization of a higher truth. Wollaston takes the position that there are almost always ways of supplying one’s needs without the violation of truth. He says that “the man may by honest labor and industry seek to supply his wants; or he may apply as a supplicant not as an enemy or robber, to such as can afford to relieve him.” He does say that “if there is no way in the world, by which he may help himself without the violation of truth he must take it as his fate. Truth will be truth, and must retain its character and force, let the case be what it will.”<sup>10</sup> I understand him to say that one should not do a criminal thing even in a critical situation. He does not say that no truth whatever should be violated even to further a higher truth as Bott accuses.<sup>11</sup> Granting that Wollaston goes too far, in this case, I do not see that that constitutes an objection

<sup>8</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 25 and 27.

<sup>9</sup> Bott, “*Reli. of Nat. Delin.*” Considered and Refuted, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 19 and 28.

<sup>11</sup> Bott, “*Reli. of Nat. Delin.*” Considered and Refuted, p. 8.

to his criterion of morality. There are occasions when truth should be violated for the sake of humanity, but this does not imply a principle other than that of truth. It only insists that there is higher and lower truth and that the lower should be sacrificed for the higher when they come into conflict. In fact it is the idea of truth to humanity that makes Bott reject Wollaston's statement in this case. He is using the criterion of truth when he in effect insists that the all-important truth is that men must always be treated as men. Wollaston says that there are degrees of good and evil. He admits that truth concerning humanity is the all-important truth.<sup>12</sup>

4. "If one, who plainly appears to have a design of killing a man or doing him mischief, if he can find him, should ask me where he is, and I know where he is; may not I, to save a life, say I do not know, though that be false?" Wollaston says that this is a very unusual situation. He says that "It is certain . . . that nothing may willingly be done, which in any manner promotes murder" for to be "accessory" to murder "offends against many truths of great weight." It may be possible, however, to give an evasive answer or to give an answer verbally false.<sup>13</sup> Bott criticizes Wollaston on the ground that he does not justify a lie in even such an extreme case as this. I do not understand Wollaston to take such an extreme position. True, he insists, that "truth is sacred," but he also says that a denial "by words" is not as bad as to deny truth "by facts." He also says "all sins against truth are not equal, and certainly a little trespassing upon it in the present case, for the good of all parties," is to be justified.<sup>14</sup> Bott thinks that Wollaston teaches that one should not tell a lie even to save a life because "truth is sacred." He asks "Would not one think that the man's life was much more sacred than such a truth as this? And who would not think that such a fellow, as should either by saying Yes, or by being silent, expose his neighbor to the knife

<sup>12</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nat. Delin." *Considered and Refuted*, p. 19. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 27.

of a villain, greatly deserved, notwithstanding all his scruples, an equal punishment with the ruffian himself." Bott thinks that Wollaston "contradicts himself, by his notable distinction between denying truth by words, and by facts, and making the latter much more criminal."<sup>15</sup> I do not think that this is true for Wollaston simply means to say that all truth should be respected, and when one is forced by the exigencies of the situation to violate some truth, the violation of a merely verbal truth is less contradictory than the violation of truth by actions. Anyway, Bott's criticism on this point is very inconsistent, for he had criticized Wollaston on the score that he did not distinguish between formal truth and truth that involves human lives. He is, now, criticizing him on the ground that he does make that distinction, for that is really the essential difference, morally speaking, between denying truth by words and denying truth by facts.<sup>16</sup> Wollaston says that all circumstances should be considered and he says also that there are degrees of good and evil.<sup>17</sup> Bott is not able to properly appreciate Wollaston, due to the fact that he thinks that his system is based on an identification of the intellectual and the moral. This is made evident by this quotation: "For wherein is the guilt of a wicked deed? has it not been defined to lie in denying a truth? and is there not as much of this in a verbal falsehood? When therefore the same truth is equally affected both ways, sure the guilt is the same, or equal."<sup>18</sup>

5. Wollaston's last case is this: If a man in a frolic breaks a glass he uses it as that which it is not, and so his act is immoral. Does this not pay too much respect to an inanimate object? the supposed objector asks. Wollaston says that of course a drinking glass could not be considered as such, or to be what it is, if there were no men to drink out of them. To wantonly break a glass is wrong, because of the use to which a glass can be put and its consequent

<sup>15</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nat. Delin." Considered and Refuted, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 15. Bott, "Reli. of Nat. Delin." Considered and Refuted, p. 21.



value to men. So it is the relation to persons that constitutes the moral relation. Wollaston says that "all sins against truth are not equal," but must they not be according to the criterion of truth? He answers that "the degrees of truth vary with the importance of things."<sup>19</sup> Again, he says, "inanimate beings cannot be considered capable of wrong treatment, if the respect they bear to living things is separated from them." Perhaps here as strongly as anywhere Wollaston states just what kind of relations constitute moral relations. He says, in effect, that those situations are moral situations where human beings are involved. "When we compute what things are, we must take them as being what they are in reference to things that have life" and most of all to men.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

## GENERAL INTERPRETATION OF SECTION I

### *I. Morality Treated as Analogous to Truth*

In this section Wollaston undertakes to delineate the nature of goodness by comparing it with truth. I wish to prove that he did not identify goodness and truth, but that he merely compared the one with the other in order to explicate the nature of goodness. The very use of the term "delineated" in the title of Wollaston's book is indicative of the analogous method which he employs. Reasoning by analogy was a favorite method in the Eighteenth Century. Religion and morality were both treated in that way by many writers. Wollaston took the position that the difference between good and bad is as immutable as that between true and false. He goes further and says that the difference is at bottom the same, but this does not mean that he identifies them. What he means is that both are in true conformity to things as they are, not that a moral act, or a value judgment, is an existential judgment, A is A, but that every one ought to treat A as A. He does not confuse the matter at all, for he makes good "to consist in a conformity of men's acts to the truth of the case, . . . evil the contrary."<sup>1</sup> Wollaston thinks that the nature of truth is better understood than the nature of goodness, so tries to delineate goodness in terms of truth.

Wollaston takes the position that acting according to the nature of things as the moral principle is as self-evident as the law of identity. This, Sidgwick says, leads Wollaston to state his four chief rules of righteousness, all of which are as self-evident as the general principle on which they depend. These four moral rules are: "Piety towards God, Equity and Benevolence towards our fellows, and Sobriety towards

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

our own self." This does not mean that the relations must be always the same, but it does mean that when they are so and so a very definite moral obligation necessarily follows, and so morality is immutable. Sidgwick grants that Wollaston merely works out an analogy between goodness and truth, but still he says that the analogy is pressed so far that "the essential distinction between what is and what ought to be is lost."<sup>2</sup> It is very difficult to see how an analogy could be pressed so far as to confuse goodness and truth. The two could be confused only by failing to consider that the method used was that of analogy.

Saying that moral relations are as true as logical relations is very far from the identification of the two, because while we cannot withhold our assent to speculative truth, "we can refuse to act up to a plain moral truth."<sup>3</sup> Selby-Bigge very properly suggests that Wollaston's meaning is that "practical truth is a metaphorical phrase and that the practical absurdity of refusing to perform the appropriate act cannot be a formal fallacy."<sup>4</sup> Clarke had used this same method: "The reason which obliges every man in practice so to deal with another as he would expect that others should deal with him, is the very same as that forces him in speculation to affirm that if one line or number be equal to another, that other is reciprocally equal to it."<sup>5</sup> This can only mean that the same reason that pronounces material absurdity to be such, also pronounces moral absurdity to be such. It cannot mean that material absurdity can be a test of morality, but only an analogy of it. Hobbes had used this analogous argument for the obligation of justice. Injustice, he says, is as if a man should deny in the end what he had declared in the beginning.<sup>6</sup> Williams very properly speaks of the relation of ethics to mathematics and logic as "an analogy and nothing more," and yet he goes on to say that the writers of this school allowed themselves to be mis-

<sup>2</sup> Sidgwick, *His. of Ethics*, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, 4:4.

<sup>4</sup> Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, p. XXXI.

<sup>5</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.* in *British Moralists*, 500.

<sup>6</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. XIV.

led by the analogy and so failed to make the distinction between what is and what ought to be.<sup>7</sup>

Another proof that Wollaston did not confuse or identify goodness and truth, but only sought to explain goodness by taking the position that morality and immorality are analogous to truth and falsity in intellectual relations, is the fact that Clarke's method has been described as the method of analogy. There is no difference in the two moralists, in this respect, except that Clarke used the mathematical analogy while Wollaston used the analogy of logic and physics. In the unsigned article in the *Britannica* on Clarke the statement is made that "His theory of fitness is formulated on the analogy of mathematics. He held that in relation to the will things possess an objective fitness similar to the mutual consistency of things in the physical universe. This fitness God has given to actions, as He has given laws to nature; and the fitness is as immutable as the laws."<sup>8</sup> The article states that Clarke's theory has been criticized on the ground that he "made virtue consist in conformity to the relations of things universally." In reply to these criticisms, it is said, that "the whole tenor of his argument shows him to have had in view conformity to such relations only as belong to the sphere of moral agency." The view is expressed that Clarke might have escaped this criticism if he had emphasized more the relation of moral fitness to the will. I think that both Clarke and Wollaston did emphasize sufficiently the relation of the will to morality, in fact they made the difference between intellectual propositions and moral acts to depend upon this. Moral relations are like intellectual relations in the respect that both require conformity to the objective nature of things, but moral actions are unlike intellectual judgments in that the former belong to the world of freedom while the latter belong to the world of description where relations are determined by the nature of things. The article, however, does say that it is a mistake to say that "Clarke simply confused mathematics and

<sup>7</sup> Williams, Art. Ethics in *Britannica*.

<sup>8</sup> Anon., Art. Samuel Clarke in *Britannica*.



morals by justifying the moral criterion on a mathematical basis. . . . He compared the two subjects on the basis of analogy.”<sup>9</sup>

Williams, in his article on ethics in connection with the exposition of the philosophy of Price, takes occasion to remark that Clarke and Wollaston confused the ethical question more than they explicated it by this use of the method of analogy. Price, he says, regards moral ideas as derived from the “intuition of truth or immediate discernment of the nature of things by the understanding.” He regards “right” and “wrong” as “single ideas incapable of definition or analysis.” Williams says that Price conceives the notions of “right,” “fit,” “ought” as coincident and by so doing “avoids.” Williams thinks, “the confusion into which Clarke and Wollaston had been led by pressing the ‘analogy between ethical and physical truth!’”<sup>10</sup> As I have already said I do not see how any confusion can result from pressing an analogy, a confusion can only result from forgetting that the relation between the good and the true is one of analogy. As we shall see, presently, many of Wollaston’s critics fell into confusion in their interpretations of his system on this very point.

This analogous method of treating morals has been very greatly misunderstood, and this misunderstanding has been largely due to the fact that Wollaston’s critics have failed absolutely to consider that his method was that of analogy. Long ago Warlaw undertook to defend the principle of Wollaston, or rather he was determined to see that he was given a fair deal. Warlaw, as a matter of fact, dissents considerably from this principle on the ground that it is entirely too general, and also because he believes that Christian ethics is the only adequate system. Sir James Mackintosh, in criticizing the notion that a wicked act is as contradictory as a logical or mathematical contradiction, said that as it is impossible for 3 and 3 to be other than 6, it ought on this ethical principle, “to be impossible to do a wicked act.” To

<sup>9</sup> Anon., Art. Samuel Clarke in *Britannica*.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, Art. Ethics in *Britannica*, vol. IX, p. 833.

act without the proper regard to the nature of things, "as if a man were to use fire for cooling, or ice for heating" is absurd, but not immoral. Sir James goes on to say that the murderer who poisons conforms to the nature of things as much as does the physician who administers the emetic. All men, whether they mean to do good or ill, must conform to the nature of things.<sup>11</sup> Warlaw answers, that when it is said that an immoral act is as absurd as to deny obvious logical or mathematical relations, the meaning, of course, is "that the two are equally absurd in their respective departments, that the one is as preposterously contrary to the fitness of things, which constitutes the principles of morals, as the other is to those mathematical relations which constitute the principles of Geometry." He continues, "does not the very fact of his drawing a comparison, or borrowing an analogy, from the one to the other, show, that he considered the two descriptions of relations as essentially different, and moral relations, though capable of such analogical illustrations from logical or geometrical relations, as quite distinct from, and not in any way affected by them?" Precisely the same is true of the physical relations like those referred to by Sir James. Warlaw says: "The fact that the murderer and the physician act alike in conformity to such relations for their respective ends, is so far from bringing their respective actions in identity, or even alliance with each other, that illustration of the position could have been made as easily from physical as from mathematical or logical relations. One could say that the act of murder is as absurd a thing in the department of morals, as, in the department of physics, would be the 'choosing of fire for cooling or ice for heating'."<sup>12</sup> Warlaw says that, of course, "morality is not founded on relations universally and of every sort, but only on those capable of such application, relations involving persons." No one, he says, could imagine morality to attach to purely abstract things. Mackintosh had said that "it seems evident, that no relations are to be

<sup>11</sup> Mackintosh, Preliminary Dissertation.

<sup>12</sup> Warlaw, *Christian Ethics*, p. 303. Mackintosh, *Preliminary Dissertation*. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nature Deli.*, p. 15.

considered, except those in which a living, intelligent and voluntary agent is one of the beings related." This Warlaw says is precisely the teachings of Wollaston, "it never occurred to me, before reading Mackintosh, that this moral principle had any reference to mathematical or logical abstractions." The system teaches that there ought to be a conformity of actions to the nature of things, Warlaw says, but not that morality consists in "relations which are entirely extraneous to the department of moral agency, but all the relations in which such agency is possible. On these universally the general system of morals rests, and in conformity to these universally, virtue consists." Wollaston anticipated just such objections as those offered by Sir James Mackintosh, and his answers were very similar to those offered by Warlaw.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the moralists who interpret Wollaston's system idealistically see in his analogical method a profound metaphysical significance. It is said that such an analogy between the good and the true can be found only because of the ultimate coincidence of the two.<sup>14</sup> I think that this is true but we do not want to interpret this in such a way as to make Wollaston confuse logical and moral relations. Windelband says that "Wollaston determined the content of the moral law solely by metaphysical relations, and, accordingly, in the last instance, by logical criteria." He sought to find "an objective principle of morals in the general suitability of an action to its determining relations," and "claimed for this knowledge a self-evidence analogous to that of logical relations." He though also, says Windelband, that the feeling of obligation which determines the will to appropriate action "comes from the insight as to natures and relations."<sup>15</sup> This same metaphysical interpretation of the method of analogy is implied in what Blakey has to say of it. He says that a great part of the reasoning on the eternal nature of virtue is grounded upon "a principle of analogy, which Clarke and Wollaston said existed between

<sup>13</sup> Warlaw, *Christian Ethics*, pp. 303-5.

<sup>14</sup> Von Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins*, p. 347.

<sup>15</sup> Windelband, *His. of Phil.*, p. 504.

our perceptions of good and evil and our mental perceptions of figure and quality. Iniquity is the very same in action, as contradiction is in theory."<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this metaphysical interpretation is even more pronounced in Grote than in any of the moralists who so interpret Wollaston. In his chapter "on the analogy between the intellectual and the moral ideals," he says, that "man is social to the bottom of his mind." It is for this reason, according to Grote, that when a man thinks, he thinks generally. When we think, we think not for our own intelligence alone, but for general intelligence, and we verify our thoughts accordingly. Grote, then, discusses the applicability of truth to action, showing the close connection of our active and intellectual natures. The two historic ideals of morality, that of rightness and that of good, are he says, analogous and also historically closely related to the ideals of truth, empiricism and rationalism. The one view of knowledge is that things just impress themselves on us as they are. The other view is that we think of things as we should. The term analogy is not quite strong enough, thinks Grote, to express the relation between the intellectual and the moral. "True," he says, "the intellectual suggests the moral," but "the rightness which governs actions is an extension or wider application of the truth which governs thought." Moral action is as rational, he says, as is intellectual truth, "because as conformable to the nature of things." This is practically a quotation from Wollaston, consequently it is very clear that Grote is discussing him although he mentions neither Clarke nor Wollaston by name. He has them in mind, of course, when he says that "many philosophers, whom we may call the intellectual moralists, have followed out this view extensively." The relation of the good to the intellectual ideal of real being was, he says, worked out by Plato in a very beautiful way. The relation of rightness to truth was, he says, worked out in very much the same way by the intellectual moralists.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Blakey, *His. of Moral Sc.*, p. 212.

<sup>17</sup> Grote, *A Treatise on Moral Ideals*, pp. 60-7.



*II. The Search for an Objective Standard of Morality*

The agreement between the world order and man's reason is the ground of moral obligation. It is essential to reason to respect order, as soon as the idea of it is conceived. This is what is meant by the objectivity of morality. It is entirely consistent, then, to say that the reason is the moral faculty, and at the same time say that the nature of morality is determined by the objective nature of things. It must be understood, however, that by reason we do not mean intuition or innate idea, but rather the interpretative power of the mind. At first sight, it would appear as if there were two very different criteria of morals in Wollaston's system, namely, the rationalistic principle which should guide one in all his acts, and the objective principle, conformity to the nature of things, which must characterize every action that is denominated moral. The two are, however, for him, entirely reconcilable, in that rational actions are precisely those actions which are in conformity to the nature of things, and, apart from such objective reference, one cannot say that anything is either rational or irrational. Apart from relations one cannot say that anything is true or false, good or bad. Both our theory of knowledge and our theory of morals must rest on an objective basis.

The law of identity constitutes the one ethical law for Wollaston. True, a judgment expressing identity, A is A, is an existential judgment, merely, and it expresses an ought and becomes a moral judgment, only when it is appropriated by a person. Its identity may then be affirmed or denied by deeds. Man belongs to two worlds, is and ought, but, after all, ought is just acting in accordance with the rationality of things. When, duly considered, the value judgment is just an existential judgment of a higher and more ultimate nature. As to the validity of this principle, who can question the position that a man ought always to act in such a way as to fulfill his rational nature, which can be done only by living conformably to the real nature of things? It is reason which differentiates man from the rest

of the animal kingdom. The true life of man must, then, be a rational life. A rational life is, on the one hand, a life guided by self-knowledge, self-reverence and self-control; but, on the other hand, it is a life, all acts of which must be characterized by self-consistency and coherency,—in a word, a life conformable to the objective nature of things. This means that the good life is a life lived in accordance with the logical laws of identity and contradiction. This means that no action should deny essential relations and natures, or stated positively, that everything should be treated in accordance with its nature and relations. Wrong denies the indissoluble unity of life and the world, and is therefore self-contradictory. Good affirms this indissoluble unity of life and the world, and is therefore self-consistent and coherent. The finite fragmentary self realizes itself only by coming to think of itself as a significant member of this unity of life and the world, and the moral choices of such a life are determined by this realization of the indissoluble unity of the individual life with the entire cosmic order. Everything in the world gets its value and significance from its relations to other things. It is an infinitely related system, and morality consists in the affirmations of these in thought and deed, whenever and wherever human lives are involved. Man being free he can either affirm or deny these essential life relations by his actions, and it is this freedom which constitutes him a moral being.

This type of philosophizing came as a natural reaction to the relativity of empiricism and hedonism. Morality, it was felt, should possess universality and necessity in order to have validity and authority. Professor Seth says that a subjective basis failed to satisfy these conditions, so the intellectualists made the appeal not to any moral sense or moral faculty which is subjective and relative, but to the moral reason which is universal.<sup>18</sup> Wollaston realized that both the subjective moral principles of interest, and of intuition are insufficient, and that an objective and logical principle is necessary. In order to make morality objective he tried to place it upon an intellectual basis. After criti-

<sup>18</sup> Seth, *Ethical Principles*, p. 173.

cizing the extreme intellectualism of the system, Vorländer grants that there is "a certain justification for this because it represents a reaction from systems of ethics which based morality upon subjective feelings and inclinations" and which paid little attention to the relation of the subject to things and to persons.<sup>19</sup> Von Hartmann says that Wollaston's attempt to carry out a pure rationalism in the realms of morality is most noteworthy. "For he has seized with philosophical daring and carried out with admirable acumen the standpoint to which abstract rationalism of conscious reflection must come." He says that "consistent rationalism is bound to acknowledge the consistency of this position."<sup>20</sup>

Garve says that Clarke and Wollaston and the German Kant must be considered as the inventors of a new moral principle based completely on the reason. Garve is right when he says that while Kant distinguished sharply between the practical and the theoretical reason, Clarke and Wollaston made no such distinction. Morality is based on a purely rational principle and this is not conceived as a peculiar kind of reason. Garve says that Clarke and Wollaston think of morality "as a practice of reason," but rightly says that this is very different from Kant's "practical reason" or moral intuition.<sup>21</sup> Garve understands this system of morals to be based on the pure reason and so on the nature of things learned by experience. Erdmann's interpretation is the same. He understands Wollaston to teach the objectivity of morals. "What determines how they must be treated are not a priori laws in one's reason," and since "there are no such common principles given (da es keine solche allgemeine Vernunftprincipien geben) a priori to the human mind men must think out on the basis of experience and reason how they shall act." So, he says, that Wollaston teaches "dass grosse Gesetz der Religion, oder der Natur ist, dass die Dinge als das behandelt werden, was sie sind." It follows from this "that not an inner imperative but the nature of things determine the action and its worth."<sup>22</sup> Win-

<sup>19</sup> Vorländer, *Geschichte der Philosophischen Moral*, etc., p. 386.

<sup>20</sup> Von Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des Sittlichen*, etc., p. 345.

<sup>21</sup> Garve, *Uebersicht der vornehmsten Prin. der Sittenl.*, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Philosophie*, vol. II, p. 116.

delband says that Wollaston sought to find "an objective principle of morals in the general suitability of an action to its determining relations."<sup>23</sup> Vorländer interprets him as finding the criterion in the objective; "Diejenige Handlung ist gut, welche der Natur des Gegenstandes angemessen ist."<sup>24</sup>

In a system of ethics that is both rational and objective, morality consists in the suitability of the action to the nature and relations of the object, and that, in the last analysis, it is coincident with truth. This dual principle is clearly shown in Vorländer's exposition of Wollaston's principle; "The great commandment of Natural Religion or the great moral principle is that every intelligent, acting and free being shall thus act, that it does not contradict truth through any action or that it treats everything according to what it is." Vorländer thinks that this is not really a dual principle because to act rationally, "dass es durch keine Thätigkeit einer Wahrheit widerspricht" means precisely "dass es jedes Ding als das was es ist behandelt."<sup>25</sup> Falckenberg understood Wollaston in the same way as Vorländer: "That action is good whose execution includes the affirmation of a truth or whose omission the negation of a truth." According to the law of nature, a rational being ought so to conduct himself that he shall never contradict a truth by his actions, i. e., to treat each thing for what it is."<sup>26</sup> The highest destination of man is, on the one hand, to know the truth, and, on the other, to express it in actions. This does not mean that there is any naked truth, for all truth is concerned with things and relations. Hall says that Wollaston "has an interesting discussion of moral good as essentially a correspondence with the facts of the universe. . . . Truth is the good because it corresponds to God's nature, and all human acts are statements affirming or denying in various degrees God's eternal truth." He quotes a passage from Wollaston which he thinks states his position: "Every intelli-

<sup>23</sup> Windelband, *His. of Phil.*, p. 504.

<sup>24</sup> Vorländer, *Gesch. der Philosophischen Moral, &c.*, p. 385.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Falckenberg, *His. of Modern Phi.*, p. 196.



gent, active and free being should so behave himself as by no act to contradict truth, or that he should so treat everything as being what it is." <sup>27</sup>

Windelband says that the philosophical element in the system of Wollaston "is the striving after an objective basis of morality." He says that Wollaston "based" morality "on the nature of things themselves," and to this he also "gave a logical turn. He viewed the matter from the standpoint that there is involved in every moral action a theoretical proposition and therewith a judgment as to the things treated or of the prevailing circumstances."<sup>28</sup> He thinks that Wollaston fails to distinguish clearly between the intellectual and the moral, and yet he says that "of course he also pointed out that a person must differentiate from this judgment not only the action but the decisions as to the same." Windelband says one finds in this philosophy a careful investigation of "the difference between will and an affirmative judgment." But even after he has said this he goes right on and makes a statement that makes it quite evident that he does not really get the significance of the will in Wollaston's system: "Now, although Wollaston thought of the action as different from the judgment, he nevertheless meant that the worth of the action stands or falls with the worth of the judgment, and consequently he found the moral criterion in that this judgment was either true or false." I think that Windelband is wrong in saying that with Wollaston "das der Werth der Handlung mit dem Werthe dieses Urtheils stehe und falle." It is not true that a moral action is one that truly recognizes "the object or relation to which the action refers," for a wrong action as truly as a right action recognizes the truth of the case, but rather is the moral action one that is conformable to the recognized truth. According to Wollaston an evil action also recognizes the truth of the nature and relations of things and the act could not be morally wrong otherwise.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Hall, *His. of Christian Ethics*, p. 453.

<sup>28</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Windelband, *Gesch. der Neurn Philosophie*, vol. II, pp. 266-7. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 7-8.

Wundt says that according to Wollaston's principle, moral norms possess an objective reality equal to that of mathematical or physical laws, "so that a transgression of law in the moral realm is like a change in the proportion of bodies which breaks the laws of nature in the physical world. As truth consists in the agreement of our ideas with the nature of things, so good consists in the agreement of our acts with things. . . . To act according to nature is, in Wollaston's opinion, to act morally and in obedience to God." He was perhaps influenced by the natural philosophy of Newton, Wundt thinks, in thus regarding morality "in the light of a violation of the laws of nature." While Wundt thinks this to be a defect, still, he says, "this attempt to prove the objectivity of morals, as against the subjectivity of current views of morals, was historically important."<sup>30</sup>

Stewart says that Wollaston tried to reconcile Locke's theory of the origin of ideas with the immutability of moral distinctions by taking the position that virtue consists in conduct conformable to truth. He said that right and wrong cannot be just simple ideas, as the intuitionists taught, "but that morality must be conformity with relations perceived by the reason."<sup>31</sup> In discussing the historical origin of Wollaston's objective principle of morality, Erdmann has this to say: "Locke placed both speculative and practical principles in the same class, taking the position that neither are innate. He went further, however, and made the positive statement that the speculative principles are presented to the mind by the external world." Now, says Erdmann, Wollaston took the same positive position in regard to practical principles: "The mind cannot draw the principles of action from within itself, they must come to it from without." He says that "the moral law," for Wollaston, "is summed up in the formula: We should follow nature, or treat everything as that which it is. . . . In our actions we should act as things prescribe."<sup>32</sup>

"For a man to act virtuously," according to Blakey's un-

<sup>30</sup> Wundt, *Ethics*, p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> Stewart, *Works*, vol. VI, p. 290.

<sup>32</sup> Erdmann, *His. of Phil.*, vol. II, pp. 116-20.

derstanding of Wollaston, "he must square his conduct according to the truth of things; or to treat everything according to its real character, or as it really is." He believed in the stability of the laws of nature, says Bailey, and that everything in the world is regulated by infinite wisdom. His system of ethics is "grounded on a simple metaphysical principle that truth in everything is to be in conformity with the constituted order of nature."<sup>33</sup> Bain says: "With him, a bad action contains the denial of a true proposition. . . . Truth can be denied by actions as well as by words. Thus the violation of a contract is the denial by action that the contract has been concluded. . . . Robbing a traveler is the denial that what you take from him is his. . . . An action that denies one or more true propositions cannot be good, and is necessarily bad. A good action is one whose omission would be bad or whose contrary is bad, in the above sense."<sup>34</sup>

There is in the system of Wollaston an a priori element, namely, that one can know as a universal and necessary first principle of morality that an intelligent being should always act rationally. This is, however, entirely reconcilable with the demand that morality be objective, because acting rationally means acting in conformity to the nature of things. Wollaston insists that, apart from such objective reference, we cannot say that any action is either rational or irrational. It follows, of course, that, apart from such objective reference, no action can be pronounced either good or bad. He would not admit that an action can be called good, simply because the will or the intention is good, but the objectivity of his principle demands that there be some anticipatory consideration of consequences. As Von Hartmann says, though, there is a tendency for one who has accepted the principle that morality must be based on reason to "make the immediate basis of morality that theoretical rationality with which he is best acquainted" and to "proclaim truth as the principle of morality."<sup>35</sup> There is no truth that has

<sup>33</sup> Blakey, *His. of Moral Sc.*, p. 152. Briley, *His. of Phil.*, vol. III, pp. 7 and 8.

<sup>34</sup> Bain, *Moral Sc.*, p. 152.

<sup>35</sup> Von Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des Sittl. Bewusstseins*, p. 343.

not an objective reference for there can be no reality to knowledge that is not a knowledge of reality; consequently, when morality is based on truth it is based on the nature of things, not on intuition,—truths independent of objective reference, for there are no such truths. Erdmann very truly says that only those propositions are true, “which define things as they actually are (welche die Dinge so setzen, wie sie wirklich sind), or truth is the conformity of symbols or names with the things themselves.” Erdmann says that Wollaston first gives his principle as if it were a purely formal one, but later explains it “more definitely to the effect that that action is good which is in accord with the nature of the object (die Handlung gut ist, welche der Natur des Gegenstandes gemäss ist).”<sup>36</sup>

Wollaston’s assertion that truth constitutes the moral principle, together with his view that ethics must have an objective basis asserts, or at least implies, an idealistic view of the world, because these two things could both be true, consistent and coherent, only if they both belonged to a world of meaning, a coherent world order.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps Clarke brings out these broader relations somewhat more clearly, in some respects, than does Wollaston. It is in the nature of things, that is, in the nature of reality and man, says Clarke, that moral distinctions are founded. The individual soul stands to the rest of nature in the relation of subject and object, the perceiving mind and the things perceived. The universe is reasonable and the same reason which pervades the whole, exists also in each individual. He does not mean that this exists as a divine implantation, for he goes on to say that the reason in man perceives reason elsewhere. “If a natural or a fitting thing exists it will be perceived by the individual mind.” Rationality demands conformity not only in thought, but also in life to “the absolute reason of things.”<sup>38</sup>

Schmidt says that Wollaston’s norm of conduct lies not within, but in things, “to whose true nature our deeds and

<sup>36</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Philosophie*, vol. II, pp. 113-4.

<sup>37</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 7-8 and 19.

<sup>38</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 42. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat.*, etc., p. 23.



words must simply conform." This does not mean, says Schmidt, that Wollaston thought morality consisted in acting conformably to things viewed singly, but each thing is to be thought of "in connection with the others, in its relations to all others." This is one of the best interpretations of Wollaston. It implies that this objective order has a metaphysical meaning, and I am very sure that Wollaston understands it that way. Wollaston speaks of an immoral action as opposing the will of the Author of nature and as contradicting nature and truth. These untrue and unnatural things are wrong, he says, because they "break through the constitution of things."<sup>39</sup> Gass gives Wollaston's principle of conformity to nature a similar metaphysical interpretation. In a rational system of morality, like that of Wollaston, Gass says "that every will must be determined by a universal purpose as well as by the nature of the individual case (dass jeder Wille durch eine allgemine Zweckmässigkeit sowie anderseits durch die Beschaffenheit des eigenen Falles bestimmt werde)." Gass says that the "appropriateness of acting conformably to the nature of things strongly "recommends itself through itself. It makes the impression of the fitting by which disorder and extravagance are excluded and through its rule it guarantees also happiness."<sup>40</sup> Gass understands Wollaston to mean that it is inherently rational to act conformably to the nature of things. He also understands him to say that the experiences of life justify the belief in the rationality of the criterion.

Wollaston is considered by Morell to belong to the movement characterized by him as English Polemical Idealism. He says that in England Idealism has always appeared as an opposition movement. The English mind is of a practical bent and not naturally inclined to speculation, consequently in England "the rationalistic method of philosophizing has seldom been carried to any great extent, except it has been occasioned and almost necessitated by the ex-

<sup>39</sup> Schmidt, *Das Gewissen*, p. 296. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Gass, *Gesch. der Christlichen Ethik*, p. 19. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 8, 11, 15, 38 and 52.

cesses of the opposite school." Wollaston, he says, must be regarded as the opponent of extreme empiricism. "The ground he takes in his ethical system, namely, that virtue consists in acting according to the truth of things, is a sufficient proof that he regarded some conception as absolutely necessary, and originating in the very constitution of man's rational nature." Since Morell says that this absolutely necessary conception of morality is, that "virtue consists in acting according to the truth of things," he cannot mean by "originating in the very constitution of man's rational nature," that morality is based on innate ideas. He says explicitly that experience is involved in moral knowledge. Idealism is involved, Morell thinks, in Wollaston's thought that there are certain fixed relations in the universe, cognizable by the human reason, and that virtue consists in acting conformably thereto.<sup>41</sup>

The idealistic interpretation of Wollaston's ethical system is perhaps shown more clearly by Victor Catherein than by any other commentator. We are, according to Catherein to treat everything according to its own nature, but also "nach seinem Verhältniss zu uns und zum Weltganzen." He thinks that a thing cannot be treated according to its nature, or treated as what it is, without a due consideration of "its relations to us and to the entire universe." This is true because a thing is really nothing apart from its connections with other things. Without such relations it certainly could have no ethical significance, "denn alle Dinge seien so eingerichtet, das sie zusammen ein harmonisches Weltganze bildeten."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Morell, *His. of Modern Phil.*, p. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Catherein, *Moralphilosophie*, p. 215.

## WOLLASTON AND HIS CRITICS

I wish to consider in this division of my treatise the general criticisms that have been made of Wollaston's intellectual system of Ethics. Specific criticisms of specific portions of his work are treated in the appropriate place. I think that an extensive consideration of Wollaston's critics is justified on the ground that the very *raison d'être* of writing the thesis is to show that Wollaston has been a very much abused man, and especially to show that he was not guilty of holding the nonsensical views he has been supposed to hold. I will now take up in a systematic way the criticisms that have been made to his system.

### I. CRITICISM

#### THAT HE CONFUSES LOGICAL AND MORAL RELATIONS

The criticism that has been most frequently offered to Wollaston is that he confuses logical and moral relations. This has been so from the beginning. John Clarke, a contemporary of Wollaston, makes this criticism of his criterion of morality. In regard to the contention of Wollaston "that men may by their actions or omissions deny truth," John Clarke says, that the only meaning this can have is that "actions . . . are expressive . . . of propositions," that they are ways "of conveying sense . . . to the minds of others."<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, just the common confusion due to the failure to understand that Wollaston speaks of actions which express merely intellectual meaning, actions of the pantomime and gesture variety; and also of actions expressive of character, moral actions. This confusion is made evident by what follows. Clarke says that all that Wollaston can mean is that an action may convey a false

<sup>1</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of Wollaston's Notion of Moral Good*, p. 20.

impression "even where a person has no intention by his action of conveying any such sense to the mind of others." Wollaston says that in such cases 'moral good and evil is not imputable.'<sup>2</sup>

I have already considered several of the specific criticisms made of particular portions of the work of Wollaston by his contemporary, Bott. While his criticism is confined almost exclusively to Proposition IX, it has a general application also, because he thinks that in this proposition Wollaston states his "principal notion" of morality. Bott thinks that Wollaston fails to give a real differentia of morality. He says even after the idea of importance is added to that of truth, it is still inadequate as a moral criterion, for "those acts in which there is an equal agreement or disagreement, will be, in an equality, morally good or evil."<sup>3</sup> He thinks that this will not hold, for if it did then two morally contradictory acts would be equally moral, which is impossible. He states a case like this. Two men A and C both meet a poor wretch, B, at the point of starvation. A "takes notice of his case, says everything that is right about it, and goes his way. C comes immediately after, sees what B's case is, gives him relief and departs. Here A's words and C's actions are supposed perfectly to agree with B's circumstances; that is, in the language of our author, they each of them say, B's case is really what it is: and therefore, according to him, because the agreement is equal, the moral goodness of their acts must be equal too. But is this true? Nay, is it true, even though we should suppose, that A really had it not in his power to do more? It won't immediately follow, that his act was morally as good as C's. Again, D meets the wretch B, and denies his case to be what it is, and calls him a cheat, though he knows to the contrary. E meets with him, and beats him to any degree. It will be impossible not to find both these persons equally moral, according to our author; yet certainly they are not so."<sup>4</sup> This confusion has been dealt with, at length, else-

<sup>2</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Bott, "*Reli. of Nat. Delin.*" Considered and Refuted, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.



where, but I will say that it rests upon a failure to distinguish between the two ways in which truth can be affirmed or denied. Wollaston says, "A true proposition may be denied or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds, as well as by express words. It is certain there is a meaning in many acts and gestures. . . . But these do not come up to my meaning. There are many acts of other kinds, such as constitute the character of a man's conduct in life."<sup>5</sup>

Bott, then, proceeds to state another case where there is precisely the same confusion between intellectual truth and morality. "If P says T's horse is his, when really he is not, he is as guilty as if he actually stole him. For the disagreement in both these instances of P's actions with the truth of the case, is equal. In short, for anything there is in our author's definition, there is no difference betwixt a man's talking to a post, as if he were a man, and beating him as though he were a post."<sup>6</sup> Wollaston practically anticipates this criticism in his case of a man stealing a horse and riding away upon him. He may, Wollaston grants, conform to some truth by so acting, for he is treating the horse as a horse. He is, however, acting in violation of other truths.<sup>7</sup> The mere assertion by P that T's horse is his, Wollaston says, violates very little truth compared to actually stealing a horse.<sup>8</sup> Wollaston says that talking to a post is not so wrong as it is absurd, because the nature of personality is not greatly violated and that is the all-important truth.<sup>9</sup>

Bott says that "the author has put into his definition a qualifying word or two, in order to escape the objection of his making all morally evil acts . . . and all good ones, equal. He brings in, Bott says, the phrase "in some degree or other," because there can, of course, be no "equality of all evil or all good actions."<sup>10</sup> Wollaston goes further, says Bott, and makes the qualifying statement that "those

<sup>5</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nat. Delin." *Considered and Refuted*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 20-1.

truths which they respect, though they are equally true, may comprise matters of very different importance; or more truths may be violated one way than another."<sup>11</sup> Bott thinks that in bringing in these qualifying terms Wollaston really gives up the criterion of conformity to truth. With this criterion, Bott says, that "the difference of actions cannot depend upon the different importance of the truths respected by them," because any "good action asserts a thing to be what it is, . . . so it is impossible that any other good action . . . should do more with reference to the truth respected by it."<sup>12</sup> Bott does not make good his criticism because he has no reason for his insistence that either morally or scientifically considered truths are of equal importance. Truths are equally true but they are not equally important. He implies that there is some flaw in the argument that a thing must be considered in all respects but he offers no refutation of it.<sup>13</sup> An action may conform to a truth and at the same time violate a thousand truths far more significant. Every immoral act conforms to some truths, but it is, nevertheless, essentially untrue and cannot be made to fit into a coherent world order. Such a statement does not involve the denial of the criterion of truth, as Bott supposes.<sup>14</sup> The same kind of objection could be made against any criterion of morality.

Vorländer understands Wollaston to say that "every bad action is a lie (*jede schlechte Handlung ist eine Lüge*); to violate an agreement means actually to deny it. A wrong is so much greater the more true propositions it denies; the good act must then be in accord with all relations of the object."<sup>15</sup> If we had only the last statement we would think that Vorländer understood Wollaston, but a wrong deed does not deny true propositions. He only teaches that a wrong deed is as false to world and life relations as is the denial of a true proposition. It is wrong precisely because it is based on assent to theoretical truth and is inconsistent

<sup>11</sup> Bott, "Reli. of Nat. Delin." Considered and Refuted, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Vorländer, *Gesch. der Philosophischen Moral*, etc., p. 385.

therewith. Wundt has a somewhat better understanding of Wollaston, but he thinks that Wollaston confuses intellectual and moral relations. He takes the position that Wollaston considered moral wrong and intellectual error as equally contradictory "rückt das sittliche Vergehen auf gleiche Linie mit intellectuellem Irrthum."<sup>16</sup> Moral wrong and intellectual error are equally contradictory, because they are equally inconsistent with the true nature of things. Wollaston insists that this is so, but he does not confuse the two very different kinds of things,—immoral acts and intellectually erroneous judgments.<sup>17</sup> Hume says that error is not sin as he understands Wollaston to believe. There is no immorality, Hume says, in merely making an erroneous judgment, but "if moral distinctions be derived from the truth or falsehood of these judgments, they must take place whenever we form the judgment."<sup>18</sup> This is, of course, true if immorality be but an erroneous judgment. Wollaston does not say that immorality is just an erroneous judgment, but something very different, namely, that immorality is as false as a false judgment.<sup>19</sup>

Price denies that all immorality can be reduced to that of denying truth, or affirming a lie. Nor is he agreed that this can serve as a formal statement of morality; because he says "there may be no intention to deny anything true, or to assent to anything false." A falsehood is not general but is "a distinct species of evil." Yet, Price goes right on and grants that in immorality we act as if the person we sin against did not exist, "which upon any other supposition, is inexcusable; and therefore, figuratively speaking, may be said to contradict truth." He even grants that Wollaston probably "meant in reality little more than this."<sup>20</sup> Price says that cruelty can certainly be considered as acting in a way that is contradictory, but denies that the evil of cruelty can be regarded as the same as that of telling a lie. It seems to me that he and Wollaston agree entirely as

<sup>16</sup> Wundt, *Ethik*, p. 323.

<sup>17</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 460.

<sup>19</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Price, *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, p. 208.

to the relation of truth and morality, but Price thinks that Wollaston identifies the intellectual and the moral.<sup>21</sup>

Balguy takes very much the same attitude as Price. He says to treat men as brutes is as "dissonant to the nature of things, as would be the attempt to form an angle with two parallel lines; because, as a matter of fact, there is a great difference between the nature of rational creatures and that of brutes." But he says that he would not characterize such conduct as acting a lie, because "that would be confounding objective and subjective truth." "Neither would I," he says, "call it a contradiction of some true proposition." He says that he would call immorality "a counteraction to the truth or real nature of things. If by truth is meant the truth of things, it may be truly said that goodness consists of actions in conformity thereto."<sup>22</sup> Balguy evidently agrees with Wollaston and is simply trying to make clear the fact that goodness consists of actions conformable to the real natures of things, just as truth consists of ideas that conform to the real nature of things. I can see no reason why Balguy should object to calling immorality "acting a lie,"<sup>23</sup> for there is certainly a great difference between saying that immorality is "acting a lie" and saying that all immorality reduces itself to lying. He seems to think that they are the same, so he accuses Wollaston of saying that all immorality is simply lying.

One of the most interesting critics of Wollaston is the French philosopher Jouffroy who states the essential characteristics of the ethical system of Wollaston in this way: "According to this philosophy, good is truth, and the fundamental law of conduct, the duty from which all others are derived, is to act conformable to the truth, or, in other words, not to deceive by actions." He, then, asks what method Wollaston uses to establish his doctrine, and he answers, in the traditional fashion of Wollaston's critics, that he "begins with the assertion that actions, like words, are signs, and that the truth may be affirmed or denied by

<sup>21</sup> Price, *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, p. 693.

<sup>22</sup> Balguy, *The Foundations of Moral Goodness*, *Brit. Moral.*, p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 11.



actions as well as by words.”<sup>24</sup> Jouffroy fails to consider the distinction Wollaston makes between actions of the gesture variety that express or disguise, actions used as signs and constituting a kind of language, and actions “such as constitute the character of a man’s conduct in life.”<sup>25</sup> He uses “expressed or disguised” and “affirmed or denied” with precisely the same meaning, whereas they mean something very different for Wollaston. When he says an action affirms a truth he is not saying that this is but another way of expressing the same truth as expressed in words, but this seems to be Jouffroy’s interpretation of his meaning. To be sure the one kind of thing is as much conformable to true relations as the other but there the resemblance stops. In a similar way he misconceives Wollaston’s meaning when he understands him to argue “that an action which denies a true proposition, is equivalent to a false proposition. A false proposition is bad; therefore, the action which is equivalent to it cannot be good.”<sup>26</sup> Now, Wollaston does not say that an action which denies a true proposition is equivalent to a false proposition, but what he says is that bad actions deny the real natures of things as truly as do false propositions. Wrong acts are as false and as contradictory as false propositions, because they are as inconsistent with the nature of things in a coherent world, but this is very far from an identification of truth and goodness. Then Wollaston does not say that a false proposition is morally bad but only intellectually bad or false.<sup>27</sup>

In many places Jouffroy seems to have a very clear comprehension of Wollaston’s thought: “An action which denies a true proposition denies that which actually is. It is a revolt against reason. Such an action is contrary to the nature of man, for man is a rational creature and the peculiarity of rational creatures is to see and love things as they are.”<sup>28</sup> Jouffroy proceeds, in the very next paragraph, to misinterpret Wollaston entirely: “Wollaston goes one

<sup>24</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, pp. 334-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>27</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, p. 336.

step further and proves that a true proposition may be denied by omissions as well as by commissions; or, what amounts to the same thing, that the omission is quite as much a sign as the action, and that we may affirm what is false, as well by the former of these signs as by the latter." He is still laboring under the delusion that it is Wollaston's position that actions are but another kind of language or medium of expressing thought. He thinks that this identity of truth and morality is brought out in Wollaston's treatment of the development of morality. "If science is progressive morality must be so too; for, as morality is nothing more than truth expressed in conduct, it presupposes a knowledge of truth."<sup>29</sup> Of course morality advances as science advances, but this only means that as our knowledge increases we can act more and more in conformity with the nature of things. It is true that morality is truth expressed in conduct, but this is saying something quite other than that morality is just a form of truth. A distinction must be made between the coherence of truth and goodness and their identity. A coherent world demands the unity of the two realms, but morality demands also the distinction of the world of appreciation from the world of description. Wollaston did not swamp morality on the one hand, nor did he fail to realize its metaphysical implications on the other.

Janet's understanding of the ethical philosophy of Wollaston is much the same as that of Jouffroy. In his chapter on the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, he says, that Wollaston is "the philosopher who most emphatically maintained the identity of the true and the good." He understands Wollaston to maintain that virtue consists simply in the affirmation of the truth. And so he does, but it must be remembered that the kind of affirmation of truth Wollaston had in mind, when he so characterized virtue, is that of a free moral act in conformity to the nature of things. Janet, apparently, understands this in the examples he gives, e. g., to steal is to affirm that what does not belong to us does belong to us, that is, our action is contradictory to facts

<sup>29</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, p. 337. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 16.

and to our knowledge of them.<sup>30</sup> He evidently does not understand him, though, for he proceeds to make the traditional criticism that Wollaston reduces all vice to lying. Wollaston had only said that all vice is false action, lying actions, you might term them, or actions that contradict truth, and not that all vice is lying. Vice is as absurd as any contradictory proposition, but it is not absurd simply in the logical sense of the word. The absurdity of immorality consists in acting contrary to admitted logical truth. "Virtue is nothing else than reason," Janet understands Wollaston to mean, but this interpretation can be accepted only when due consideration is given to the fact that he insists that the will is involved in all moral behavior. A better interpretation, then, is that virtue is acting rationally or acting conformably to the true nature of things. He seems to interpret him in this way when he says that Wollaston is "one of those philosophers who regard moral verities simply as eternal and necessary relations, conformable to the nature of things," but he straightway proceeds to criticize him on the ground that he confuses the good and the true. "It is," he says, "quite certain that moral verities are truths, but it does not follow that the good must be the true."<sup>31</sup> But Wollaston never says that the good is the true, but only that it is conformable with the true, a very different thing.<sup>32</sup>

Janet says that there is subjective truth, the conformity of thoughts to objects, and objective truth, the necessary and essential relations of things; but neither in the subjective nor in the objective sense is truth identical with good. Certainly not, but the good is the conformity of life to truth and to reality. This is really Janet's own position as is very evident from his discussion of the subjective and objective good. He says: "The good, like the true, may also be understood in two senses . . . one objective, the other subjective. Objectively, the good is the character,

<sup>30</sup> Janet, *Theory of Morals*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

based upon the essence of things, which imposes an obligatory law upon the moral agent. Subjectively, good is the conformity of the will to this obligatory law." That this is his view is made even more evident in his discussion of the distinctions. "Now, the objective good is not the same as the objective true; . . . and the subjective good is not the same as the subjective true. Subjectively, the true is the conformity of thought with its object: now, good, considered subjectively, is the conformity of the will with its object. The true concerns only the understanding; the good concerns only the will. The conception of truth, as such, when it appears, is inevitable: moral action, . . . that is, the conformity of action to the law . . . is not inevitable. I cannot wish that what is true should be false, nor that what is false should be true; I cannot wish that two and two would make five, when my reason shows me their sum is four; but I can wish that my actions should be conformed or not conformed to what my reason tells me is true."<sup>33</sup> Janet here gives his own view, incidental to his criticism of Wollaston, but I do not know of a better exposition of Wollaston's principle than this. His criticism of Wollaston is based on an entire misunderstanding of him. I think it quite probable that he did not know Wollaston at first hand at all, for he does not quote him or give any of his examples, illustrative of his position. How beside the point is this: "Criminal actions are always accompanied by more or less falsehood; but, as regards their nature, they are not lies." "The robber who takes a watch, does not by this act affirm that the watch belongs to him; what he affirms is that he wishes to get the good of it, this is all that he asks. The intrinsic truth of the proposition matters little to him." But that is just the point. The robber is, on every hand, ruthlessly disregarding truth, acting as if it were not truth while as an intelligent being he can but admit truth to be truth. His other example is even more absurd. If a man robs a warehouse his denial that it is a warehouse "is only an incidental accompaniment of the act, it is not its basis."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Janet, *Theory of Morals*, p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.



Janet thinks that we must have a criterion other than that of rationality, otherwise we would not know which kind of truth to obey, since both good and bad actions represent truth. Unless one believes that there is a fundamental distinction between good and bad how am I to know always just what my duty is? But what more universality and necessity could be desired than that of the principle that the good consists in the conformity of life to the nature of things?<sup>35</sup>

La Rossignol says that the ethical philosophy of Wollaston is an exaggeration of the worst aspects of the system of Clarke. "To say that a thing is true, implies intellectual assent; to say it is right, implies moral approval." La Rossignol says that Clarke confused these but did not quite identify them as Wollaston afterwards did. He says that Wollaston failed to notice that "nature and agreement or conformity of action with nature are very different kinds of ideas, and therefore to be applied to different things. There is the same distinction between them as between is and ought, true and right, real and ideal."<sup>36</sup> He states that Wollaston's position is that "all sin is in effect the denial of a true proposition, and moral good the affirmation of it." He gives as his reference the *Britannica* article on Wollaston. He says that this represents "a curious one-sided development of Clark's theory of ethics. Clarke, he grants, asserts something very similar "when he speaks of those who refuse to live according to the laws of justice and truth," as "endeavoring to make things to be what they are not and cannot be, which is the greatest absurdity imaginable, . . . in a word; all willful wickedness and perversion of right, is the very absurdity in moral matters as it would be in natural things, for a man to pretend to alter the certain proportions of numbers, to take away demonstrable relations of mathematics, to make light darkness, or to call sweet bitter and bitter sweet."<sup>37</sup> "This strange language approaches very nearly to the assertion that 'whatever is is right'." La Ros-

<sup>35</sup> Janet, *Theory of Morals*, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> La Rossignol, *The Ethical Phil. of Clarke*, p. 50 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 41.

signol says that such a conclusion can be logically drawn from Clarke's statements that those who fail to conform their lives to "the eternal fitness of things are setting up their own unreasonable self-will in opposition to the nature and reason of things."<sup>38</sup>

La Rossignol says that Wollaston took as his text the statement from Clarke, which I have just given, that morality consists in the conformity of life to the reason and nature of things. La Rossignol says that Clarke did not follow this statement to its logical conclusion, but Wollaston did. He thinks, also, that this statement of Clarke's suggested to Wollaston the "analogy between virtue and truth." If it is but an analogy where is the point to his criticism? As we have seen, he says he bases his interpretation on the *Britannica* article which reads: "Moral evil is the practical denial of a true proposition, and moral good the affirmation of it."<sup>39</sup> But La Rossignol fails to give any significance to the idea of its being a "practical," not an actual denial or affirmation, and he forgets that he has himself said that Wollaston's method is that of analogy. So interpreted the meaning is that bad actions are as false as false propositions and good actions as true as true propositions; but La Rossignol's interpretation is quite different, namely, "That every right action is the affirmation of a truth, and every wrong action is the denial of a truth."<sup>40</sup> He takes as a case that of stealing, and says that it is wrong because it denies that the stolen property belongs to someone else. The fact is that Wollaston insists that the rogue admits the property to belong not to himself but to someone else, and herein consists his inconsistency and consequent immorality in that he "practically" denies that to which he must give assent.<sup>41</sup>

La Rossignol makes a distinction between the teachings of the two moralists, Clarke and Wollaston, for which there is no ground. He says that while Clarke does say that every wrong action is absurd he does not mean that it is such be-

<sup>38</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Anon., *Art. Wollaston, Britan.*

<sup>40</sup> La Rossignol, *The Ethical Phil. of Clarke*, p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 7-8.

cause it is like denying A is A, as did Wollaston; but in his thinking "this absurdity had rather reference to the clearness of moral perception than the actual denial of a fact." Clarke's meaning, he says, is that "it is unreasonable to act wrongly," not, apparently, because immoral acts are as absurd as the denial of something evidently true, but "because reason is the moral faculty, and it is unreasonable to deny a fact because reason asserts it."<sup>42</sup> I am very sure that this is not Clarke's meaning, but that his conception of the relation of the intellectual and the moral is the same as that of Wollaston. He was as intellectualistic as Wollaston for he also made the distinguishing of good and evil a kind of knowledge. He, even, says that "reason is the faculty whereby we are able to distinguish good and evil."<sup>43</sup> La Rossignol fails absolutely in his interpretation in that he does not see the significance of "willful" and "practical," as used by Clarke and Wollaston along with "affirmation" and "denial," and that this together with such statements as that "the very absurdity in moral matters as it would be in natural things" does make the distinction between natural and moral, between the is and the ought.

Many of the critics of Wollaston have taken the position that since morality, in his system, consists in affirming the truth of a true proposition, it is therefore dependent upon correct knowledge. Garve says that it is a very ingenious system and that Wollaston has worked it out very skillfully, but says "unspeakable compulsion" is used to make "it at all probable that every action expresses a proposition and that the moral worth of that action is to be judged according to the truth or untruth of the proposition (dass jede Handlung einen Satz ausdrücke, und dass, nach der Wahrheit oder Unwahrheit dieses Satzes, die sittliche Güte jener Handlung zu beurtheilen sei)."<sup>44</sup> Wollaston certainly does not mean that every action actually expresses a proposition, but he means only that a good action is conformable to reality and so in practice affirms truth. The morality of an action

<sup>42</sup> La Rossignol, *The Ethical Phil. of Clarke*, pp. 51 and 85-7.

<sup>43</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> Garve, *Uebersicht der vornehmsten Prin. der Sitten.*, p. 175.

does not consist in the truth of the proposition but in the true conformity of life to real relations.

Erdmann says that Wollaston founds morality on truth and so "makes acting dependent on correct knowledge of things (*das gute Handeln von der richtigen Erkenntniss der Dinge abhängig macht*)."<sup>45</sup> Windelband takes the same position. He thinks that Wollaston reduces immorality to ignorance and morality to knowledge. "Wollaston says that since every action involves a theoretical judgment as to its underlying relations, the decision as to whether the act is right or wrong in the ethical sense depends upon the rightness (correctness) or wrongness of this judgment."<sup>46</sup> In his criticism Windelband says that immorality consists not in having an incorrect idea of cosmic relations, but in acting contrary to our thinking about those relations. This I understand to be Wollaston's position. The theoretical judgment as to relations is as correct in the case of wrong as in the case of right action. Both equally involve the assent to intellectual truth. The immorality of the unsuitable act consists precisely in the practical denial of admittedly true relations.<sup>47</sup>

Leslie Stephen says that the intellectual criterion made quite an impression upon the contemporaries of Wollaston, some of whom, e. g., Conybeare, speak of the theory as though it were a discovery in morals, fit to be placed beside the discoveries of Newton in astronomy.<sup>48</sup> But Leslie Stephen thinks that there is nothing very wonderful about it, since instead of explicating morals it merely confuses ethical and logical relations. "He who acts upon the hypothesis that things are so and so, proclaims by his acts that they are so and so; and no act that interferes with a true proposition can be right." Stephen says that "no act can interfere with a true proposition. Hence I ought not to kill a man because by so doing, I deny him to be a man. To which it was obvious to reply that my action proclaims the very

<sup>45</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 107.

<sup>46</sup> Windelband, *His. of Phil.*, p. 504.

<sup>47</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Conybeare, *Defence of Revealed Reli.*, p. 239.



reverse.”<sup>49</sup> In reply I will say that Wollaston does not take the position that a wrong act rests upon a false proposition. He misses Wollaston’s meaning entirely. Of course “it is a verbal juggle to call an action a lie,” but this Wollaston does not do. His position is simply this: one must assent to truth when clearly apprehended, but it lies within a man’s power to practically deny a true proposition, namely, by acting as if the truth were not the truth. The essence of immorality in this is inconsistency, and it is the conflict between the truth of the situation and the false action that constitutes the inconsistency.

Leslie Stephen thinks that this view of ethics is related to the “common theory of metaphysicians which identifies crime with error, and which had latterly been presented in more imposing forms by many more famous metaphysicians.” According to this view “all immorality involves an element of intellectual error. To one who had adequate conceptions of the universe, and to whose intellect, therefore, all the consequences of his actions were immediately present, the wisdom of virtue would be so evident that crime would be impossible.”<sup>50</sup> I can see the reason for associating Wollaston’s metaphysical ethics with immediately preceding metaphysical systems for he was undoubtedly influenced by them in formulating his own *Weltanschauung*, but I can see no reason for saying that he held any such view as to the relation of virtue as Leslie Stephen attributes to him. I think that this misinterpretation is due to the failure to understand that Wollaston is merely describing virtue in terms of truth. Virtue is as true as is the truth for it is as conformable to the nature of things, but it does not follow from this that men live up to all the knowledge that they have. “Things can be denied to be what they are by deeds,” says Wollaston, which can only mean that he thinks that one can fail to live conformably to the knowledge that one has.<sup>51</sup>

There are other critics of Wollaston who take the position that the language of truth is inapplicable to the moral

<sup>49</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, vol. II, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

realm. Martineau says that intellectual relations do not give us what we want in ethical enquiries. He says that the understanding belongs exclusively to the unmoral world, the world of science. "Fitness and congruity are ideas which in themselves are by no means equivalent to moral conceptions. They have a broad usage." To be sure "they have a broad usage," and, of course, they mean something just a little different in each connection. But Martineau goes so far as to say that these ideas, when applied to moral situations, have nothing to do with constituting it moral. He says that Wollaston's standard of morality, namely, "conformable to nature" does not constitute the ethical quality of a moral act.<sup>52</sup> His own system is so exclusively subjective, being that of Intuitionism, that he can see no good in an objective principle. Antonio Aliotta says that it is simply impossible to discuss morality with an intellectual vocabulary. He says that Wollaston was one of those who tried to interpret the moral life in terms of logic. He says that Wollaston took the position that "the supreme law of duty can be expressed in terms of logical relations." Aliotta denies that this can be done on the ground that logical relations have to do with the truth alone and so are inapplicable to the moral realm.<sup>53</sup> Leslie Stephen agrees that this criticism is applicable. He says that the difficulty that underlies the reasoning of Wollaston is an obvious one. The logical principle is not applicable to the moral realm but only to the natural. He criticizes Wollaston on the score of having introduced the unphilosophical idea of freedom, and then straightway very inconsistently criticizes him on the ground that he neglects to consider the significant difference that the will makes between factual and moral relations. We might say A is A and then say that a denial of it would involve contradiction, "but the proposition thou shall not kill is a command addressed to the will, not a statement of truth addressed to the intellect." The attempt of Wollaston "to bring the two kinds of propositions under the same

<sup>52</sup> Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 471.

<sup>53</sup> Aliotta, *La Reazione Idealistica Contro La Scienza—Subject Wollaston*.

category involves confusion fatal to the whole theory." Wollaston does not bring them under the same category, thanks to his use of what Leslie Stephens characterizes as the "unphilosophical idea of freedom."<sup>54</sup>

Another case of the confusion of intellectual and moral truth is to be found in the article on Wollaston in Franck's dictionary of science and philosophy. Many of the sentences are balanced sentences and the two conceptions of truth are frequently found in the same sentence. It is stated that Wollaston sought to define the idea of the good and to prove that it may be resolved into the idea of the true, but whether he thinks of this as purely abstract truth or truth in the sense of true to all of life is not clear. "To act conformably with truth is to act well; every bad action is a lie."<sup>55</sup> The first part of the statement can be accepted, if by truth be meant significant life relations and this is apparently the meaning. It does not follow from this that "every bad action is a lie," unless he means that acting immorally is "acting a lie," which does not seem to be his meaning. Wollaston does not reduce all immorality to lying, except in the sense that immoral acts are equivalent to "acting a lie." He says, in justification of the phrase, that a man may so live that "his whole conduct breathes untruth," so, he asks, "may we not say that he lives a lie?"<sup>56</sup> The article continues: "Wollaston says that a person alters truth by actions as by words." This is certainly a mistaken interpretation, for Wollaston insists that truth cannot be altered but that assent to truth is determined. He does say, however, that immorality is really as absurd as would be the attempt to deny evident truth. The same thing can be said of the statements in regard to the violation of contracts: "To violate a contract is to deny it in action." Intellectually a contract cannot be denied but it can be denied in action, by which Wollaston means that a man can "practically" deny a contract, act as if he had made no contract. Thanks to the fact that one's will is free one can

<sup>54</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, vol. II, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Anon., *Art. Wollaston*, Francke *Dict. Des Sciences Phil.*

<sup>56</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 11.

act as if that which is were not, and as if that which is not, were.<sup>57</sup> The article goes on to say that, "Not to keep one's word is also to deny the promise made, to do the contrary of that which one has promised." Wollaston does not say that one denies a promise by breaking a contract, for the fact that one has made a promise is, according to Wollaston, absolutely irrefragable. But one can "do the contrary," which would be just as contradictory as "to deny the promise made." The one, however, is possible while the other is impossible. The same misunderstanding of the relation of the intellectual and the moral is evident throughout the article. For example, it is said that, "To disfigure truth through one's acts means necessarily to do evil."<sup>58</sup> Yes, but this does not mean what he says it does, namely, that the disfiguration of truth by an act of immorality is "the same thing as to uphold a false proposition." It is, however, says Wollaston, "as contrary to the nature of things" as would be the impossible attempt "to uphold a false proposition."<sup>59</sup>

Irons says that Wollaston "obliterated all distinctions between the moral and the rational." In proof of this, Irons says that he teaches that a rational being observes that things bear certain relations to other things, and that because of these evident natures and relations, thus observed, he can discern certain moral relations. Reason, therefore, not only enables men to ascertain what is true, but also to recognize how they ought to act. Wollaston makes the difference between moral good and evil to be at bottom the same as the difference between true and false, and since truth consists in recognizing things to be what they are, virtue consists in "treating things as being what they are." He teaches, says Irons, that virtue is the practice of truth, and vice, therefore, the practice of lying. But this is not even a confusion of the two, and certainly not an obliteration of "all distinctions between the moral and the ra-

<sup>57</sup> Francke, *Dic. Des Sciences Phil.*—Art. Wollaston, p. 1728. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 10. Clarke, *Evidences*, p. 188.

<sup>58</sup> Francke, *Dic. Des Sciences Phil.*—Art. Wollaston, p. 1728.

<sup>59</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.



tional." His quotation from Wollaston certainly does not confuse the two: "A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds as well as by express words."<sup>60</sup> Irons says that "from Wollaston's standpoint the murder of a fellow being is merely an action which denies an evident truth, namely, that the victim is a fellow being." He criticizes Wollaston on the ground that he ought to express the heinousness of the crime in stronger terms, but it must be remembered that he is speaking of immorality universally.<sup>61</sup> Wollaston insists that there are truths of very different values, and consequently degrees of morality and of immorality.<sup>62</sup> Irons continues: "From this point of view, the standard of right and the criterion of truth are the same." "Since reason determines what ought to be done, it must use its own criterion, namely, self-consistency. . . . The distinction between right and wrong is therefore the same as the distinction between true and false. A vicious action is one which involves a contradiction."<sup>63</sup> This, Irons thinks, means that right action and correct thinking are essentially identical. The truth is that Wollaston considers them alike only in the respect that consistency and inconsistency can be considered the norm in each. Wrong actions are as inconsistent with reality, as contradictory therefore, as false statements in regard to indubitable facts. The necessary consequence of this position, Irons says, is that the dynamic force which impels us to act rightly is the same as that which makes us think correctly. The nature of things does "impel" man to act morally or conformably to his relations, but since he is free he can act inconsistently. Man's intellect, on the other hand, is determined;—the mind must assent to necessary truth. This distinction Wollaston certainly does make.<sup>64</sup>

The criterion of morality, according to Irons, is not logical consistency but harmony with the possibilities of the

<sup>60</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Modern Ethics*, *Phil. Rev.*, vol. 12, pp. 138-9.

<sup>62</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Modern Ethics*, *Phil. Rev.*, vol. 12, pp. 139 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 7-8 and 62 ff. Irons, *Rationalism in Mod. Eth.*, *Phil. Rv.*, vol. 12, p. 140.

nature of the agent. Wollaston would answer that the nature of the agent and his possibilities constitute important factors, perhaps the most important, in the moral situation, but logical consistency would still be the best formula of morality. Morality is as consistent with the nature of things as is the logical conformity of truth to the nature of things. Irons says that Kant uses the criterion of truth but that he "does not assert with the earlier rationalists that a vicious action involves a contradiction. For to have said that would have been to grant that the self-contradictory can exist, which would be the same as admitting that a square circle is a possible fact." He says that Kant gets around the absurdity, that Wollaston fell into, by saying that wrong actions would be contradictory and absurd if universalized.<sup>65</sup> In reply to this I would say that Kant certainly does not mean that the particular immoral act is not absurd and contradictory. He only says that we perceive its contradictoriness by trying to think what would be the inevitable consequences of its becoming a universal law. The maxim which is implied in the breaking of a promise, for example, "could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself." The very point of the rationalistic argument is that a particular wrong act is as contradictory as would be the maxim on which it is based becoming a universal law of nature.<sup>66</sup>

## II. CRITICISM

### THAT IMMORALITY, AS WELL AS MORALITY CONFORMS TO NATURE

The criticism that immorality affirms things to be as they are as truly as does morality, and that, consequently, truth, or conformity to the nature of things, cannot constitute a true criterion of morality is a criticism frequently offered against the Ethics of Wollaston. This criticism is very much like the one discussed in the preceding chapter.

<sup>65</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Mod. Eth.*, *Phil. Rv.*, vol. 12, pp. 138-55.

<sup>66</sup> Kant, *Meta. of Morals*, Sec. II. Simmel, *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, vol. 2, ch. 5. Caird, *Critical Phil. of Kant*, bk. 2, ch. 2.

That criticism is that Wollaston's system is based on a confusion of ethical and logical relations. Truth and falsity, it is said, cannot be the differentia of moral and immoral because that would simply identify the very different categories of truth and goodness. The criticism with which I, now, wish to deal is that truth is as much affirmed by immorality as by morality, that we are conforming our actions to the natures of things just as truly when we do wrong as when we do right, consequently a moral criterion other than that of conformity to the nature of things must be sought. Both criticisms are based on the same confused interpretation of Wollaston, namely, that of failing to comprehend what he means when he says that truth can be denied by deeds as truly as by words.<sup>67</sup>

Selby-Bigge states well this objection to Wollaston's criterion of morality. He says that it is quite true that a moral act "must not violate the physical laws of the universe, and in this sense must be suitable to the nature of things," but "such violation would constitute folly rather than vice." And, furthermore, Selby-Bibbe says, that "an action which was calculated with the most exact reference to physical conditions might yet be a very bad one."<sup>68</sup> Why should suitable to the nature of things be restricted to the physical laws of the universe? Is it not true that moral laws also violate or conform to the nature of things? Wollaston makes it very clear that this is his meaning. He realizes that both good and bad acts conform to physical laws, but bad acts violate the real nature of things in that they violate the nature of persons, which must be considered of as much importance as physical things and for moral purposes of supreme importance. His teachings on this point are brought out most clearly, perhaps, in his cases of bowing to a post and breaking a drinking glass.<sup>69</sup> To be sure it is just folly to violate the laws of mere things, but it is both folly and vice to violate the nature of personality. That this is true is evident from the fact that Wollaston

<sup>67</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, p. XXXIV.

<sup>69</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 15 and 31.

never makes moral judgments except where persons are involved. For him personality always constitutes one term of the proposition or else it is not a moral judgment, and no morality attaches to conduct unless it involves persons.

Martineau offers this same criticism in very much the same form as Selby-Bigge. He says that good and bad acts both conform to the nature of things. "These conceptions are as applicable to the act of stabbing a man with a dagger as in the blow that turns the dagger aside and saves a life. Then, too, the act of the one is as conformable to the character of the man as is the other."<sup>70</sup> Janet takes the same position: "Actions regarded as criminal do, in reality, represent truth, just as truly as do honorable and generous actions." That a man can dispose of the lives of his fellow creatures because of his strength and his passions, is a perfectly true proposition. It is true that I can appropriate the property of others. These propositions are just as true as are the converse ones.<sup>71</sup> The answer to these criticisms of Martineau and Janet is very simple and evident. True propositions are, of course, affirmed by criminal acts, but essential truths are violated by acts not conformable to the nature of things. Wollaston says that truths are of very different degrees of importance, and he says also that that which determines the importance is human happiness and welfare.<sup>72</sup> Von Hartmann thinks that the principle is far too broad because many things that are true cannot be convertible into action, and even those special truths which are convertible may still be morally speaking entirely indifferent. He grants, however, that it is a true negative principle of morality, because immorality is always in contradiction to truth. Wollaston never tries to prove that all truth is of moral significance in the sense that every intellectual proposition can be converted into moral actions.<sup>73</sup>

John Clarke says that we may grant that "every immoral action denies some truth, . . . but then he must be forced

<sup>70</sup> Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 472.

<sup>71</sup> Janet, *Theory of Morals*, p. 108.

<sup>72</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, Sec. I, Prop. IX.

<sup>73</sup> Von Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins*, p. 344.



to allow that every such action . . . does as well affirm truth as deny it." He thinks that from this fact the conclusion can be drawn that "let the action deny what truth you will, yet since it affirms other truth, this is as sufficient to bring it under the denomination of virtuous."<sup>74</sup> This is of course true provided morality consists in mere affirmation of any kind of truth, but this is not Wollaston's view. John Clarke says that he is not at all sure "that all immoral actions deny more truth than they affirm," so it cannot, he thinks, be argued that they are for that reason immoral.<sup>75</sup> As many truths, he thinks, could be affirmed in regard to "any species of vicious actions" as "could for the denial of it." In the first place, I would answer, it is not the position of Wollaston that immorality is just a denial of a true proposition. In the second place, considering truth in the broad sense as true to life relations and meanings, as Wollaston does, John Clarke certainly cannot deny that vicious actions are false. They are in conformity to some particular truths, to be sure, but they deny the larger truths of the indissoluble unity of life and the world.<sup>76</sup>

The rationalistic system of Wollaston was criticized by Hutcheson who said that moral distinctions must be referred not to the reason, but to an internal sense. He says that one can make as many true propositions about a bad action as about a good one, consequently moral laws must be a good deal more than such truths. The criterion of truth and the standard of right are different, otherwise true propositions could not be made about wrong actions. Hutcheson says that both virtuous and vicious actions conform to truth, and so truth cannot be the standard of virtue.<sup>77</sup> I am very sure that this is no refutation of Wollaston, for it is his contention that only true propositions can be made about matters of fact. We can, however, act in a manner inconsistent with truth and thus virtually deny, in practice, what we must assent to theoret-

<sup>74</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of Wollaston's Notion of Good, etc.*, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 48-9 and 71.

<sup>77</sup> Hutcheson, *Essay on the Passions, Treatise II, sec. 1.*

ically. Of course propositions that are true can be used in describing or discussing evil actions, but this constitutes no disproof of the thesis that evil is a denial of truth and that goodness is an affirmation of truth.<sup>78</sup> We constantly speak of men acting inconsistently, meaning thereby, just what Wollaston means, that their actions are untrue, that they are not living conformably to the true nature of things. This does not mean that the truth element is by any means all that there is to vice and virtue, nor does Wollaston claim that it is. In fact he makes a great deal of the volitional element, going so far as to insist that without it there can be no morality. It is not moral truth until we will the truth to be actualized in our lives.<sup>79</sup>

Sir James Mackintosh made an objection to Wollaston's rationalistic method similar to that made by Hutcheson. Sir James insists that the terms relation and conformity to nature apply as much to vice as to virtue and that both good and bad actions must conform to the natures and relations of things.<sup>80</sup> Warlaw answers this objection by saying that of course every act must in adapting means to ends conform to the nature of particular things and relations. The vicious act of necessity conforms to the nature of many particular things and relations, but it also violates the nature of things in many essential respects. The virtuous act conforms universally. It is congruous with its relations.<sup>81</sup>

Brown questions Wollaston's criterion of morality on the ground that both virtuous and vicious actions are conformable to the nature of things. He takes Wollaston's case of talking to a post. "Now, you see that on his scheme of absolute irrelative truth, the absurdity of talking to a post is precisely of the same nature with that of injuring a man: For in both cases, we treat the post and the man, as being what they are not. Consequently, on this philosophy, if it be morally evil to injure a man it is likewise

<sup>78</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Mackintosh, *Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Phil.*

<sup>81</sup> Warlaw, *Christian Ethics*, p. 306.

morally evil to talk to a post." Wollaston, he says, would not claim this, of course, but since, according to his system, truth is equally violated in either case and as there is something highly immoral in the one and nothing immoral in the other this cannot be the criterion of morality.<sup>82</sup> Saying that all immorality is absurd and contradictory is very different from saying that all absurdity and contradiction constitutes immorality. It is the simple fallacy of conversion. In the process of conversion an A proposition loses its universality, and becomes only the particular proposition I. All immorality consists in absurdly denying a thing to be what it is or in affirming it to be what it is not. It does not follow that every case of absurdity is immoral, for many cases would be nothing more than stupid mistakes or jokes. This Brown admits and argues from this that Wollaston's principle cannot constitute the criterion of morality. A distinction must be made between error and immorality. Error is only a false existential judgment, and it is only when we act falsely that we are immoral.

No morality attaches to acts that do not violate the nature of personality. Treating a post as a man, then, is essentially different from treating a man as a post. There is absurdity in both cases but not the same kind of absurdity. Then, is not Brown right in saying that this is resorting to another criterion of morality? No, because in every moral situation personality must be involved, and if it is a case of immorality it must be the nature of the person rather than that of the thing that is violated. Wollaston says that things have moral relations only when attached to persons in some way.<sup>83</sup> In spite of the denial of John Clarke and Brown, it is also true that the intention of the actor is a factor in the determination of the quality of the act, in Wollaston's system. In fact he makes it a pre-condition of morality that the agent act intelligently and freely.<sup>84</sup> This certainly means that the intentions of

<sup>82</sup> Brown, *Essays*, p. 263. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 15.

<sup>83</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 15 and 27.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. J. Clarke, *Exam. of Wollaston's Notion of Moral Good*, etc., pp. 5-11.

the agent are essential factors in making moral evaluations.

Brown, then, proceeds to criticize Wollaston's statements in regard to the case of the man in distress. Wollaston's position is that to refuse to help a man in distress is to deny the man's distress to be what it is and personality to be what it is.<sup>85</sup> "These strange denials we certainly do not make," Brown insists. I would answer that of course we do not, nor does Wollaston claim that we do. He, in fact, insists upon the point that as intelligent beings we cannot deny the truth to be the truth. What we can do, however, says Wollaston, is to act as if the truth were not the truth or to "practically deny" what we theoretically admit to be true.<sup>86</sup> Brown continues, "All which we tacitly declare is, on the contrary, a truth, and a truth of the most unquestionable kind." To be sure we declare all of these things to be true, Wollaston would say, otherwise there would be no morality attached to the situation. Brown says that "We affirm ourselves to be what we are, indifferent to the miseries of others; and if to affirm a truth by our actions be all which constitutes virtue," we have acted as virtuously as we would have had we gone immediately to the aid of the suffering man.<sup>87</sup> This statement of Brown's is absurd because real truth is denied by such action, and certainly one who acts in such a way acts contrary to the real nature of man.

In criticizing Wollaston, Jouffroy says, that, "In the appreciation of actions we must come to judgments which do not coincide materially with moral judgments. There is no bad action which does not express, equally with a good one, many true propositions." The man who poisons another conforms to many true propositions. To be sure he does but he also contradicts true propositions and those contradicted are the one's essential to morality.<sup>88</sup> There are, says Wollaston, many true propositions which imply

<sup>85</sup> Brown, *Essay II*, Sec. 3. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 11.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. Brown, *Essays*, p. 265.

<sup>88</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, vol. II, p. 336.



no moral relations, since persons are not involved.<sup>89</sup> It is not, he says, immoral to speak to a post. True, this is treating the post as a person, but it does not violate the nature of personality.<sup>90</sup> Jouffroy's case of administering arsenic Wollaston would treat in this way. The nature of arsenic is not violated, but, in fact, many true propositions are conformed to in the action, e. g., arsenic is poison, poison will kill. The nature of the person, however, is violated and many true propositions are thereby denied, the principal one of which is that a person is a person and should always be treated as such. So I cannot agree with Jouffroy, when he says that Wollaston's fundamental maxim is too comprehensive and confounds evil with good.

"There are," says Jouffroy, "many truths which it is morally indifferent whether we affirm or deny by actions." As a case he takes two cold men, one of whom draws near a fire while the other gets near a piece of ice. The act of the one affirms a true proposition, which the act of the other denies. But says Jouffroy, there is no morality in the action of the first man, nor immorality in the action of the second man; but only reasonable action in the one case and foolish action in the other. He says: "Absurdity and immorality are not coincident."<sup>91</sup> To this Wollaston agrees, but he insists that immorality is absurd, not that every case of absurdity is a case of immorality but that immorality is always absurd.<sup>92</sup>

Because absurdity and immorality are not coincident it by no means follows that it is not the fundamental principle of ethics, that moral actions are those which affirm true propositions and do not contradict the nature of things. Jouffroy says that "when we meet a traveler in a wood, it is equally a crime to maintain that his purse does not belong to him, as to take it, for in either case we equally deny the same true proposition."<sup>93</sup> Of course we deny true propositions in both cases, but the second case represents

<sup>89</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 31.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, vol. II, p. 338.

<sup>92</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, p. 339.

an action based on the denial of a true proposition and, more important still, it represents a case of an action which is in contradiction to the most important of all truths, those concerning persons.<sup>94</sup> Jouffroy further argues that this moral principle would equalize virtues, "for if morality consists in not denying a true proposition, then all good actions are equally good, and no difference can be discovered between them." It is the essence of reason, he grants, to respect essential relations and to act conformably thereto, but it does not follow, he thinks, that because these relations constitute truth that they also constitute goodness. Conduct may be reasonable without being virtuous and it may be unreasonable without being wrong. "We are in error, and act without conformity to the nature of things, when we attempt to warm ourselves with ice; but such conduct is not immoral; the two spheres of absurdity and immorality do not coincide."<sup>95</sup>

Wollaston does not, as I have just said, argue for the coincidence of truth and goodness, but it by no means follows from this that the good cannot be best defined in terms of conformity to objective relations, to the nature of things. The case just mentioned by Jouffroy as being morally indifferent might very easily become a moral situation the moment the conformity or non-conformity to the nature of things involved, not merely the nature of fire and the nature of ice, but that of sentient beings, and especially that of persons, the conduct would take on a moral tone. Wollaston never claims that all relations are morally significant, and he certainly never contends that immorality can be predicated of conduct that does not violate the nature of sentient beings. He considers the inhumane treatment of a lower animal and says it is wrong both because it contradicts the sentient nature of the animal and also because the man who does such a thing violates his own nature. The last factor is the significant one because no moral character can attach to conduct that does not involve persons either as subject or object. He would have

<sup>94</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, Sec. I, Prop. IX.

<sup>95</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, pp. 337-9.

everything treated as what it is, although things are of very different importance. One is, he thinks, mistreating his mind when truth is disregarded.<sup>96</sup>

It is characteristic of rational beings, Irons says, to act with due regard to the nature of things which is the same as acting rationally, but this has no moral significance. It is, of course, true that we cannot say that all acts in conformity to the nature of things are moral acts, nor, even, that all contradictions are immoral. It does not follow from this, as Irons thinks, that we have to seek elsewhere for our moral criterion. He takes the position that if conformity is to constitute the criterion of right, then "every act which is performed by an intelligent being is right." No, an A proposition does not distribute its predicate but only its subject; consequently it does not follow that because the right is always that which conforms to the truth, that the truth is always moral and certainly not that every act of an intelligent being will be moral. If Wollaston's criterion be true, says Irons, it follows that the murderer who takes a life conforms his conduct as much to the nature of things as does the good Samaritan who saves a life.<sup>97</sup> This cannot be said with truth for while the murderer does conform to certain laws of physics his act virtually denies many essential life relations and meanings. He acts, says Wollaston, as if certain things which are true were not true.<sup>98</sup> The act of the good Samaritan is quite different for it is consistent with the true nature and relations of things. He conforms not only to a few physical laws but to the very nature of the universe, while the murderer's act is in contradiction to the greater truths of the universe and in conformity only to a few relatively insignificant physical laws. As Wollaston expresses the matter, "In order to judge rightly what anything is, it must be considered not only . . . in one respect, but also what it may be in any other respect; . . . the whole description of the thing ought to be taken in. . . . All truths are consistent, nor can any-

<sup>96</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 15, 27 and 31.

<sup>97</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Modern Ethics*, *Phil. Rev.*, vol. 12, pp. 142-3.

<sup>98</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 9.

thing be true any further than it is compatible with other things that are true."<sup>99</sup>

The most absurd criticism passed upon Wollaston from this point of view is that of Hume. In discussing judgments "which are the effects of our actions, and which when false, give occasion to pronounce the actions contrary to truth and reason," Hume makes the very clever assertion that actions never cause judgments in our own minds but only in the minds of others. Hume's argument is very subtle but is, I think, false. My wrong act, he argues, is based on a true proposition, for I know the facts to be as they are. He takes the case of someone seeing through a window the lewd behavior of a man with his neighbor's wife. The innocent spectator might suppose the woman to be not the wife of a neighbor but the man's own wife and so might make a false judgment in regard to the situation. "In this respect my action resembles somewhat a lie; only with this difference, which is material, that I perform not the action with any intention of giving rise to a false judgment in another, but merely to satisfy my passion. I cause, however, a mistake and false judgment by accident; and the falsehood of its effects may be ascribed, by some odd figurative way of speaking, to the action itself."<sup>100</sup> In reply, I will say, that the immoral, as Wollaston thinks of it, always rests on a true judgment of the actor and it is this which constitutes the differentia of the immoral from the merely erroneous. The essence of immorality consists in acting as if the known truth were not the truth. Wollaston mentions a case very much like that of Hume, namely, that of Isaac and Rebecca. In discussing this case Wollaston says that a man may act a lie, and such acted lies are such because there is a contradiction between the actions and the evident truth of the situation.<sup>101</sup>

Hume, even, undertakes to refute Wollaston's point in regard to freedom, saying that this does not clear up the difficulty in regard to identifying goodness with truth be-

<sup>99</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, Sec. I, Prop. VI.

<sup>100</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 461.

<sup>101</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 11.



cause freedom does not explain how an action produces in us an erroneous conclusion. He argues that, according to Wollaston's principle, if the man, who was having illicit relations with his neighbor's wife, had taken the precaution to close the blinds there would have been no immorality because in that case the action would have given rise to no false propositions.<sup>102</sup> Wollaston would answer that while neither the man nor the woman were affirming false propositions but true ones, factually speaking; yet, by their action, they were denying true propositions. Intellectually they could but assent to the truth of their natures and relations, and yet practically they were denying the truth of those natures and relations. All the while things were as they were, and to that they could not refuse to give their assent, but being morally free they could by action deny the truth, that is act as if the truth were not the truth, but as if the truth were quite otherwise.<sup>103</sup>

### III. CRITICISM

#### THAT WOLLASTON OBSCURES THE REAL NATURE OF MORALITY

One very common criticism against Wollaston's system is that the real nature of morality is obscured by his intellectualistic criterion and that, consequently, no content is given to morality. The criticism appears in several forms. One set of critics simply say that it is an empty form and that it is, consequently, entirely useless as a guide to one who is seeking the way to live morally. Others object to the system simply because they have no faith in the intellect as the criterion and guide of morality. They think that the criterion is a moral sense or a moral faculty and that reason is only a means to an end. This criticism is based largely on an entirely wrong interpretation of Wollaston. In the first place this intellectualism is given an intuitionistic interpretation, the good being made a matter of simple and immediate intellection; while, as a matter of fact, it is really an objective system of ethics based almost en-

<sup>102</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 461.

<sup>103</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

tirely on experience and ratiocination.<sup>104</sup> Then, too, his notion that intellectual assent is necessitated, but that moral acts are free is not properly evaluated.<sup>105</sup> We cannot do otherwise than assent to what we think to be true. This he makes to be the very corner-stone of his system, but his critics say that it is a mere truism to say that we must assent to the truth. It is a self-evident fact that an intelligent being cannot deny intellectually what he knows to be true, and that a free moral being can act contrary to the recognized truth. That a thing should be treated as what it is is as much a truism as are the primary laws of thought. Wollaston sought to base Ethics on a foundation as indubitable as that of logic. Just as surely as the fact that A is A is the ethical truth that A should be treated as A. But an intelligent being must be intelligent and assent to truth, but he is under no compulsion in regard to acting morally.<sup>106</sup> Immorality is as inconsistent as intellectual contradiction, because the immoral person realizes that he is acting on the assumption that something he knows to be false is true or that something he knows to be true is false. So the critics say that if this is all there is to the system of Wollaston, then, his conception is self-evident but that his system is purely formal.

Wundt says that the extreme intellectualism of Wollaston's system "almost entirely obscures the specific content of morality (der spezifische Inhalt des Sittlichen völlig zum verschwinden kommt)."<sup>107</sup> If he objects to Wollaston's system on the ground that it does not give content to morality. We might say that this same objection can be made against any principle of morality. The content of morality cannot be prescribed in any theory of morals. Circumstances will largely determine the content of morality, and judgment must decide in the particular situations of life just what is the right thing to do. An ethical ideal can only guide the judgment and only a legalistic principle

<sup>104</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 23.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8 and 42.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> Wundt, *Ethik*, p. 323.

of morals can do more than this. Wollaston does, however, give copious suggestions as to the application of his principles to the various kinds of situations of life.

Jouffroy says that he grants that a good act is never false but is always in harmony with truth, that it is conformable with the relations resulting from the nature of things. He thinks, though, that there are only "certain relations which are moral, only certain true propositions, which we are bound to express by our acts." He says that Wollaston's system fails in that it does not give the differentia of morality in such a way that one can know just what acts are moral. He does not, Jouffroy says, differentiate between moral and reasonable or between immoral and unreasonable. The defect of his system is, Jouffroy thinks, "confirmed by the fact that the psychological coincidence is equally wanting with the external coincidence." He grants that we do find it necessary, oftentimes, to consider both our own nature and the nature of other beings and the relations existing between them and ourselves before we can decide what we ought to do. This, he says, is to enable us to ascertain what is good and what we ought to do.<sup>108</sup> This is Wollaston's position only he contends that this is all that is needed to determine what ought to be done in any situation of life. Wollaston's criterion is an objective one. He says: "Just let things speak for themselves," which means that we are to find out what things are and then treat them accordingly.<sup>109</sup> Jouffroy, unlike Wollaston, thinks that there must be some specific moral principle.<sup>110</sup>

If all truth be so very sacred, says John Clarke, that men should have regard for it in all their conduct and if vice consists entirely in its opposition to truth, it follows that "the affirming of truth, any truth whatever by word or deed . . . should be looked upon as a virtue." He, then, attempts a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. He says that silly idle consequences follow from such a view. The

<sup>108</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, pp. 336-8.

<sup>109</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> Jouffroy, *Intro. to Ethics*, p. 339.

affirmation of every truth becomes a duty. He says, "it will be a glorious exercise for a man to spend his time in thrumming over such worthy and weighty propositions as these, a man's no horse, a horse no cow, a cow no bull, nor a bull an ass."<sup>111</sup> Mr. Wollaston's general idea of moral good and evil cannot be a true conception, thinks John Clarke, "because it does not rest upon the tendency, wherein precisely the moral good or evil of human actions consists; and besides . . . it is hardly applicable to any species of human actions, except those of affirming or denying truth by words." He says that, "To pretend that cruelty and injustice is denying a man to be a man," is nothing but "mere rant," borrowed from a hyperbolic way of aggravating the absurdity of such behavior, without ever strictly meaning what is said."<sup>112</sup>

John Clarke says that, "He everywhere speaks of owning things to be as they are, as in itself a matter of the highest importance, as the *ne plus ultra*, beyond which no man needs or ought to go in his enquiries, what is fit or proper to be done or not . . . as if that alone was a thing desirable in and for itself." This Clarke says "is a contradiction to the common sense and experience of mankind. For a little reflection may quickly satisfy anyone that nothing but pleasure or happiness is or can be desirable upon its own account, without reference to anything else. And that other things are desirable and pursued by us, only so far as they are considered by us to be the means of attaining pleasure or happiness. . . . Happiness, in short, is the ultimate end of all our aims and designs, all our wishes and desires. This . . . we constantly and steadily pursue. Nor can it be otherwise. And for the truth of this I appeal to the inward feeling and experience of all mankind."<sup>113</sup> Clarke says that Wollaston practically admits this, when he says that "pain considered in itself, is a real evil; pleasure a real good. . . . Pleasure is in itself desirable, pain to be

<sup>111</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of Wollaston's Notion of Moral Good*, p. 19.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.



avoided.”<sup>114</sup> Clarke says that “owning things to be what they are” is not in itself desirable, but “desirable” only “as . . . a means, more or less conducive to the end of all our wishes and desires, happiness.”<sup>115</sup>

John Clarke accuses Wollaston of insisting that things be treated as they are “without regard to consequences.”<sup>116</sup> But, as a matter of fact, Wollaston is very insistent upon the fact that things cannot be treated as they are without entering into a consideration of possible consequences, especially as to human happiness. Clarke says that Wollaston talks like one who is a stranger to human nature when he speaks as if happiness were a “matter of secondary consideration to abet the practice of truth.” He says that instead of the Author of Nature appointing happiness “to encourage the practice of truth,” the “regard due to truth . . . is purely and solely with a view to the well-being and happiness of mankind.”<sup>117</sup> This, of course, Wollaston does not deny but he insists that welfare and happiness are what is meant by truth of ethical signification. The essential difference between an objective system of morals, like that of Wollaston, and a view of morals, which makes the rightness or wrongness to depend upon the intentions entirely, is that consequences, in so far as they can be anticipated, are duly considered. The consequences expected to result from an action is the determining factor in the motivation when conduct is objectively evaluated. It would certainly be the height of irrationality to disregard consequences. While Wollaston considers happiness to be a matter of the highest importance and insists that nothing can be really good which makes for the destruction of human happiness, he would not go as far as John Clarke when he says that “mankind, neither are, nor can be concerned for anything but happiness. . . . Owning things to be what they are, or a conduct conformable to truth, can signify nothing to

<sup>114</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 35.

<sup>115</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of Wollaston's Notion of Moral Good, etc.*, p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

mankind any further than it is a means to promote their happiness." <sup>118</sup>

Hume says that no conclusion as to the nature of virtue can be drawn from the mere assertion that "we perceive an act in certain relations to be virtuous or vicious," nor can we say what faculty perceives the relation. It may be granted that the same act in the same relation is always virtuous or vicious, "if relations be taken in the widest possible sense, but," says Hume, "that is a barren proposition." <sup>119</sup> To be sure it is barren in the sense that it does not state the content of morality, but to give definite and fixed content to morality is legalism. No ethical theory undertakes to give the specific content of morality. It is true that some of the intuitionists say that certain acts are always and everywhere virtuous or vicious in all relations, e. g., telling the truth and keeping faith. Wollaston thinks that even these are but instrumental or the mere means to the realization of personality and that there are circumstances when to be true to real relations would involve breaking a covenant or the violation of some other general moral rule. He would say that no particular thing is always right or wrong. It is, he says, generally right to tell the truth but there are occasions, when the telling of truth would contradict truths more important to humanity than merely verbal lying. To "merely deny truth by words . . . is not equal to a denial by facts." He says that "all sins against truth are not equal, and certainly a little trespassing upon it in the present case, for the good of all parties," and where humanity demands it, is justifiable. <sup>120</sup>

After Von Hartmann's long quotation from Garve, which he thought to be Garve's translation of Wollaston, in which he gives cases of morality explicated in terms of the criterion of truth, he makes this criticism: "Aside from the partial inaptitude of this concrete exposition there appears, at first sight, a forced and artificial nature in the whole mode of

<sup>118</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of Wollaston's Notion of Moral Good, etc.*, p. 51.

<sup>119</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 469. Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, p. XXXV.

<sup>120</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 30.

action."<sup>121</sup> I understand Von Hartmann to mean that when Wollaston says "that to make a slave of a man is the same as to say: *dieser Mensch ist ein verouuftloses Wesen*, which I can treat as horses and oxen," that he understands him to merely assert that a man is a creature without feeling and that he does not at all show wherein the wrongness consists. He says that Wollaston presupposes that every action is consciously a logical consequence of certain premises and that the consciousness of the immorality of the action consists in the consciousness of the fallaciousness of one or more of the premises. "To tell the truth, however, an action," says Von Hartmann, "hardly ever comes about in the manner here supposed, and where this is really the case and the fallaciousness of one of the premises really enters into consciousness, this theoretical consciousness is only an incidental circumstance and no how identical with the consciousness of the immorality of the action."<sup>122</sup>

Von Hartmann says that there is nothing in the system of Wollaston which is not a truism and gives that as the explanation of its unfruitfulness and for the fact that it had little influence on subsequent systems. At the very most the demand of objective reasonableness, the moral principle of truth, is an inadequate solution of the problem, for it only teaches us how to avoid wrong and directs us to the right path for the solution of the problem.<sup>123</sup> I would answer that Wollaston's principle is supposed to be acceptable to all rational beings. It is supposed to be as indubitable as the laws of thought, and this I suppose, is the pre-condition of its being true. Wollaston, everywhere, insists that reasonableness of principle coincides with objective reasonableness. He, everywhere, pre-supposes that acting rationally means the same as acting in conformity to the nature of things.<sup>124</sup>

Falckenberg makes a similar criticism to that of Von Hartmann: "The course of moral philosophy has passed

<sup>121</sup> Von Hartmann, *Phänomologie des Sittlichen*, etc., p. 345.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>123</sup> Hartmann, *Phänomologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins*, p. 345.

<sup>124</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, Sec. I, Paragraph V.

over the Ethics of Clarke and Wollaston as an abstract and unfruitful idiosyncrasy."<sup>125</sup> Of course Ethics must be abstract in principle, for how else could it be universal and ideal? And if by unfruitful he means lacking in concreteness, I would answer that the content of morality can be as easily supplied to this as to any other system of Ethics. It can, in fact, be supplied more easily because the natures and relations, the conformity to which constitutes morality, determine the specific content of morality. Falckenburg, however, says this of the effort to find an objective and universal standard in place of the subjective and individual standard of the school of Hedonism; that while these thinkers had plans greater than their performance still "the search for an ethical norm which should be universally valid and superior to the individual will did not lack justification."<sup>126</sup>

Leslie Stephen characterizes Wollaston's system as Intuitionism. "He tried to argue from our a priori knowledge of the essence of the divine and human nature, and not from the a posteriori experience of their relations." He says that this effort of Wollaston represents an attempt to use a method belonging to the theological stage of thought. The a priori method, he says, could be used appropriately in a system of theological Ethics. A set of rules independent of experience might be deduced from the belief in an omnipotent ruler, for given such a Supreme Being "it was easy to infer what should be the conduct of his creatures." But Leslie Stephen thinks that this method is inapplicable when for the God of traditional theology is substituted the "conception of a supreme nature."<sup>127</sup> I agree entirely with him that the doctrine of an infallible conscience must go with the giving up of the doctrine of a personal God. I do not, however, agree with his characterization of Wollaston's system as intuitional. Stephen says that "the nuga-

<sup>125</sup> Falckenberg, *His. of Modern Phil.*, p. 190.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>127</sup> Leslie Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, vol. II, p. 8.



tory character of Clarke's system appears in the curious development given to it by Wollaston." He says that Clarke "wished to elevate morality into the sphere of pure mathematics where the promptings of passion and the lessons of experience should be entirely excluded." He thinks that Wollaston's development from Clarke is in the direction of considering absolute and abstract logical truth as the criterion of morals. I cannot think this to be a true interpretation. I think that Wollaston did develop from the position of Clarke, but not in the direction of Intuitionism. The development was towards a more completely rationalistic position, or, perhaps, it would be better to say that it was a development in the direction of a more purely rationalistic position. Clarke thought that the reason is an all-sufficient moral guide but thought that revelation was necessary to reveal the sanctions of morality, without which the majority would not have strength enough to do that which their reason prescribes. Wollaston thought revelation to be entirely unnecessary.<sup>128</sup>

I cannot reconcile Leslie Stephen's statement that "he refused to interrogate nature, in order to discover what is pleasing to the God of nature," with Wollaston's injunction to "just let things speak for themselves and they will proclaim their own rectitude or obliquity."<sup>129</sup> Wollaston can only mean by this that the nature of things determine moral obligation. I am very sure that Leslie Stephen is wrong in thinking that Wollaston bases all truth upon intuition. He says that Wollaston's system was based upon an objective basis but claims that this objective truth is deduced intuitively.<sup>130</sup> The only ground for this interpretation is the fact that Wollaston believed that there is a rational factor in knowledge and in morality. In regard to the rational and necessary factor in morals, Wollaston only said that it is necessarily true and so can be known *a priori*, that one's acts should conform to the truth of

<sup>128</sup> Anon. Art., Wollaston, Chambers' Ency., vol. 16, p. 709.

<sup>129</sup> Wollaston, Reli. of Nat. Delin., p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> L. Stephen, Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen., vol. II, p. 9.

things. As to what things are and our relations thereto, that belongs to the a posteriori, the empirical factor.<sup>131</sup>

Jodl thinks that Wollaston's moral criterion is not ultimate. He does not believe that even Wollaston himself is guided by such a relative standard. He says that according to such a method there can be no absolute distinction between good and evil, "because it nowhere leaves the neighborhood of relativity." Jodl characterizes Wollaston as a symptomatic moralist, "symptomatische Ethiker" by which he meant that Wollaston really resorted, in the last analysis, to a higher ethical standard and that conformity to nature was not his criterion but only a symptom of the ethical. Jodl says that he did not deny the influences of religion and that he believed that the human being is dependent upon "another of endless goodness." Jodl says that Wollaston believes that "from this source as well as from the unity of all individuals arise the virtues of piety and justice, of kindness and sobriety in connection with the Golden Rule of the gospel."<sup>132</sup>

In connection with his exposition of the ethical teachings of Hume, Von Gizycki takes occasion to offer a criticism of the ethical system of Wollaston. He thinks that Wollaston was the most consistent thinker of his school, but he agrees with Hume that his method was artificial and that he was guilty of reasoning in a circle. He says that "Wollaston's doctrine has the relative merit to have expressed with naïve frankness the actual consequences of this entire tendency."<sup>133</sup> He understands this to be purely formal Intellectualism.

In his exposition of the Ethics of Home of Kames, Norden gives some consideration to the Ethics of Wollaston. He agrees with Lord Kames in his estimation of Wollaston. Norden characterizes his Ethics as resting on an autonomous foundation, "autonomer Grundlage," and he agrees with Kames that this is an impossible foundation upon which to rest a system of Ethics. It may be said that, as a matter

<sup>131</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 42 ff.

<sup>132</sup> Jodl, *Ethik*, p. 145 ff.

<sup>133</sup> Von Gizycki, *Ethik Hume*, p. 7.

of fact, Wollaston did not believe that Ethics could rest on an "autonomer Grundlage," but, rather, that he was very insistent upon the fact that morality must be made to depend upon real objective relations. Lord Kames' system is also objective in a sense. He says that "any action conformable to the common nature of the species, is considered by us as regular and good." This "common nature . . . every person . . . who is not a monster possesses. It is fit and proper . . . and it is a beautiful scene to find creatures acting according to their nature."<sup>134</sup> Kames, like Wollaston, says that the moral rule "by which we ought to regulate our actions" is that of "acting according to nature, acting so as to answer the end of our creation." Kames, however, differs very greatly from Wollaston in regard to the way we discover what is and what is not conformable to nature. He thinks that we have a moral sense, for he says "thus we find the nature of man so constituted, as to approve certain actions and to disapprove others; to consider some actions as fit, right and meet to be done, and to consider others as unfit, unmeet and wrong."<sup>135</sup> Norden and Kames agree that Wollaston is right when he makes morality to consist in a life conformable to nature but wrong in that he "puts reason in the place of feeling." It can be said that their interpretation of Wollaston makes him an intuitionist rather than a rationalist. It may be also said that Kames and Norden believe in an "autonomer Grundlage" and that their Ethics is really intuitionistic, for a moral sense as truly as an innate idea of morality is equivalent to an intuition. Norden agrees with the contention of Kames that Wollaston's reduction of all immorality to the lie is unnatural and forced. He also agrees that Wollaston is guilty of the fallacy *Petitio Principii*. "Why," asked Kames, "is theft a lie?" He answers, "Of course because the thief has obliterated the distinction between mine and thine. But what is meant by this is mine? Nothing but: I have a right to that particular one, and it is therefore wrong if someone else robs me of it. So the idea

<sup>134</sup> Norden, *Die Ethik Henry Home of Kames*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>135</sup> Kames, *Essay on the Prin. of Morality*, *Brit. Moralists*, 300 ff.

of right and wrong are here already presupposed." He says that what is said of theft may be said of other vices; we know that they are wrong immediately. Norden says that one would naturally expect for Wollaston to tell why the lie is immoral but he does not do so. "He has," says Norden, "left it to everybody's conviction, with the same right, however, he could have left the other vices to our inner conviction (unserer inneren Uberzeugung)." <sup>136</sup> Kames goes so far as to say that: "To maintain that the qualities of right and wrong are discoverable by reason is no less absurd than that truth and falsity are discoverable by the moral sense." <sup>137</sup>

Von Hartmann thinks that Wollaston used the criterion of truth in a purely formal way. Von Hartmann, however, accepts truth as his own standard of morality, but supposes that he is using it in a very much broader sense than did Wollaston. This is not, by any means, the case, for "truth to all of life" and not just formal truth is certainly Wollaston's idea of morality. He thought that Wollaston's use of truth is quite other, so, he says: "If we ask what remains of the moral principle of truth when we have removed the erroneous presupposition upon which it rested with Wollaston we find the demand for the objective reasonableness of our actions for which a criterion other than that of Wollaston's formal theoretical principle must be sought." And we find, also, "that all moral laws and ethical rules are comprised in their systematic connection in the principle of truth." This does not mean that every individual act can show in all cases harmony with individual truth, which he thinks to be Wollaston's idea; theory and practice are far too independent for that, and besides our entire knowledge of the phenomenal world may not suffice to form the basis of absolute morality. In fact, he says, only that theoretical knowledge is capable of this "which leads beyond the phenomenal world to the reality revealing itself in it, that is

<sup>136</sup> Norden, *Die Ethik Henry Home of Kames*, p. 29. Kames, *Essays on the Prin. of Morality*, Brit. Moral., 306.

<sup>137</sup> Home, *Sketches*.



metaphysics.”<sup>138</sup> So, Von Hartmann says, “if one understands by truth . . . the true metaphysical knowledge, then Wollaston’s principle receives a significance, of course, far from being recognized by Wollaston himself, namely that true Ethics can be based only on true metaphysics.”<sup>139</sup>

#### IV. CRITICISM

##### THAT THE NATURE OF VIRTUE IS NOT DEFINED BUT ASSUMED

There is another criticism which has frequently appeared to the system of Wollaston, namely, that he does not define the nature of virtue but merely assumes it. Those who make this type of criticism are, as a general thing, those who hold either the view that virtue is *sui genesis* or else that it is based on feeling. If one believes that the criterion of morals is an inner sense or an intuition, which is immediate and indubitable requiring neither experience nor ratiocination, it follows, of course, that any attempt to state a moral ideal in rational terms is a gratuitous procedure. The same, of course, can be said of the view of the world that would make morality a matter of feeling.

This criticism was first offered by the contemporary ethical writer, John Clarke,<sup>140</sup> who asked: “But supposing actions rightly denominated immoral did really imply a denial of truth, . . . a denial of things to be what they are; yet how will it follow from such a denial, that those actions therefore are truly and properly immoral, that is contrary to the will and good pleasure of God, declared by the voice of reason, or the light of nature?” For this, he says, Wollaston offers several reasons. Clarke goes on to say that “the difficulty of making a determination will grow with the number of significations the same action may have . . . to different people.” The “civility of a sharper,” for

<sup>138</sup> Hartmann, *Phänomonologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins*, p. 345.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>140</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of Wollaston’s Notion of Good, etc.*, p. 19.

example, makes a very different impression upon a greenhorn to that made upon a man of the world.

Selby-Bigge is rather typical of those who make this criticism. He says that "relation" can only be used "figuratively" in morals. He says: A "good deal of the intellectualist argument turns upon merely verbal ambiguity; relation, agreement, congruity, suitability, fitness form a series which lead, conveniently but loosely, from the non-moral to the moral." These terms are meaningless, Selby-Bigge thinks, except when thought of in connection with happiness or some other end without which they have no moral connotation. Abstract conformability of actions to things "is certainly not sufficient to constitute virtue, and it is impossible to give a definition of virtuous conformability without including in the definition the idea of virtue."<sup>141</sup> Conformity of life to the nature of things does, it seems to me, define morality as clearly as does any other ideal of morality. Any ideal must be stated in an abstract and formal way, or else it will not be universal and consequently not an ideal at all. The content always comes from experience and involves moral judgment. It is a stock argument and has been offered against many ethical systems that another criterion is implied in the very statement of the ideal. Intellectualists can certainly use it as effectively as can any other school, for they all presuppose the universe to be consistent and so must think of morality as acts that cohere with the rest of things. So can we not say that the other ethical systems all presuppose the idea of consistency? Wollaston does, in fact, do just that thing with happiness when he says that no one can refuse to consider happiness as what it is for it is a part of the real nature of man.<sup>142</sup>

In criticism of Wollaston, Rogers says that to say that right action is reasonable or natural appears to mean little more than that it is reasonable and natural to do what is right. Rogers says that these moralists, Clarke and Wollaston, constantly insisted upon the fact that moral and scien-

<sup>141</sup> Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, p. XXXIII.

<sup>142</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 37.

tific truth have the same rational characteristics in order to show that all truths are universal and objective.<sup>143</sup> Saying that it is reasonable and natural to do what is right does not preclude the idea of reasonableness and naturalness as the standard of what is right, nor does the belief that moral truth is as universal, as rational, and as objective as scientific truth preclude the possibility of morality being essentially another kind of thing from intellectual truth.<sup>144</sup>

Martineau agrees with Wollaston that morality cannot rest on the senses. "But the next step," he says, "I find impossible to take; I cannot say that this exclusion from the category of sense drives the moral insight into that of the understanding." He thinks that there is a middle ground between sense and intellect. He believes that there are "intuitive rules of the will," which present themselves to us not as "theoretical disclosure" but as a "practical imperative." The moral consciousness does not present itself to us as "so it is" but as "so it ought to be."<sup>145</sup> Very true, but it is an intellectual matter and is based on the real nature of things empirically and rationally arrived at. I cannot believe that there is any middle ground between sensationalism and rationalism in morals. Wollaston reconciles the empirical and rational factors in knowledge and says that both experience and ratiocination have a part in determining what our duty is.<sup>146</sup> A true intellectualism will also treat the entire sense life as good when properly controlled by intelligence.<sup>147</sup>

Hume says of Clarke and Wollaston: "They thought it sufficient if they could bring the word relation into the argument without troubling themselves whether it was to the purpose or not." He thinks that it is an incorrect theory of morals which places virtue and vice in relations, because if the virtue of an act is a relation, then "all relations discoverable by reason obtain as much between inanimate ob-

<sup>143</sup> Rogers, *Short His. of Ethics*, p. 151.

<sup>144</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>145</sup> Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 478.

<sup>146</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 43.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

jects or animals, as between persons.”<sup>148</sup> No, Wollaston would reply, the same kind of relations cannot obtain between mere things and animals as obtain between persons and things, persons and animals, and persons and persons. The correlatives have considerable to do with the determination of the relations. Wollaston takes the position that breaking drinking glasses is different from breaking heads and that treating a post as a man is different from treating a man as a post. He says in effect that a person must be one of the correlatives in moral relations.<sup>149</sup>

Hume denies that there is any such thing as a moral relation. I understand Wollaston to take the same position. It is not the relation itself that determines whether the situation be moral or non-moral but the things related. An act of man is moral, immoral or non-moral according to its conformity to the real nature of things, including persons and God. I cannot see the force of the criticism that this leaves the nature of the moral relation unexplained and that the standard of morality is either assumed or still to be found.<sup>150</sup> Hume says that there must be an “oughtness relation” in order for morality to be a matter of relations. And he thinks, also, that this relation must be perceived by a different kind of reason.<sup>151</sup> This objection is based on a misunderstanding of Wollaston, namely, in regard to the distinction between existential and moral judgments. The different thing involved in the moral relation, the thing that can convert almost any factual relation into a moral relation, is the clear recognition by a moral agent of the nature and relations of things and of his relation thereto. Morality, then, from this point of view, is just the form of action which devolves upon us because of the relation of ourselves to the rest of things, because of the indissoluble unity of life and the world.<sup>152</sup>

Hume says that the person who takes the property of another does in a manner declare it to be his own. “This

<sup>148</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 464.

<sup>149</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 27 and p. 15.

<sup>150</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 464.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>152</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 50-1.



falsehood is the explanation of injustice, but these notions of property right and obligation presuppose an antecedent notion of morality." Wollaston's explanation only shows why any wrong act is wrong, but what wrong itself is, that, Hume says, is presupposed. So he is driven back to answer the question why truth is virtuous and falsity vicious.<sup>153</sup> In answer I will say that Wollaston did not say that truth is virtuous or falsity vicious, but only that virtuous acts are acts which are conformable to true natures and relations.<sup>154</sup>

Janet says that if there were in nature only factual relations, "relations of parts to whole, of orders, species, law and phenomena, there would be mathematical, logical, and physical sciences, but there would be no moral sciences." I cannot see that Ethics requires relations other than these, or rather that these, when related to human lives, become ethical relations. Janet follows Malebranch in saying that moral science implies that there are between things "relations of perfection, of dignity, and excellence. . . . It is because one thing is better that it is our duty to prefer it." Janet says that the idea "good implies that there is between things or attributes, an order of quality distinct from the order of quantity, whether mathematical or logical. If you suppress the quality of things, you suppress all that renders one thing more estimable than another."<sup>155</sup> The moral judgment is certainly a quality judgment, but is this quality not determined by relations of truth? But Janet says that "if you refuse to accept an objective hierarchy of goods, nothing remains but a subjective scale of pleasures." Wollaston agrees that this is the case. He is as insistent as Janet upon the belief that a true system of Ethics must be objective. He believes that there is "an objective hierarchy of goods" but thinks that these are constituted by the real relations of things and persons and that all relations are capable of becoming moral relations.<sup>156</sup> The

<sup>153</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 462.

<sup>154</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 9.

<sup>155</sup> Janet, *Theory of Morals*, p. 109.

<sup>156</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 23.

mere mathematical, logical and physical become moral when human lives become involved with them. There are between things "relations of perfection, of dignity, and of excellence," but this does not mean that one thing is per se better than another, that all depends entirely upon circumstances and relations. Shakespeare has one of his characters say: "I perceive that there is nothing good without respect." Janet continues: "Truth in general comprises, then, all kinds of objective relations: good concerns only relations of perfection."<sup>157</sup> To this Wollaston would agree provided he means that there can be morality only when human ideals and human volitions are involved. Wherever these are involved we have "relations of perfection," in addition to the mathematical, the logical and the physical relations. It is not true that there are any things that are always and everywhere good or bad, only their relations to human lives constitutes them good or bad.<sup>158</sup>

Janet grants that when the question is pushed back into metaphysics the good and the true become the same kind of eternal relations. "Can it, then, be said that the good and the true have not mutual and profound affinities, or even that they do not flow from a common source? The good and the true, which are separate in human vision, must mingle at their source. From the same origin comes the being and the goodness of things." He agrees with Descartes that God is the author of eternal verities. The ideal for man is not, Janet says, something foreign to him, but "it is his own essence. Being born a man, he ought to try to be a man so far as is possible." To do this often involves a struggle between a man's larger self with his narrow individual self. "But the individual himself has a distinct essence which he should respect." This, he says, is our author's view and it is also Kant's idea. It is the view that attributes to the human personality an intrinsic worth, an absolute value. Janet admits that it is this worth of personality which must constitute the relations of perfection, dignity, and excellence, but he does not seem to realize the

<sup>157</sup> Janet, *Theory of Morals*, p. 110.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

implication of his admission.<sup>159</sup> Consistency would demand that he recognize that there is no great difference between Wollaston's philosophy and his own. He makes the good to consist in the coordination of all ends, which is precisely Wollaston's view, who is very insistent on the point that all relations must be considered.<sup>160</sup> But still Janet speaks of morality as if it were *sui genesis* saying that good and perfection are ends for man, and, he says, "it would be more exact to define the end as being the good, than the good as being the end."

Garve says that this system of Wollaston would be one of the most complete if it were not too metaphysical for use, and if a moral philosophy is to set forth only the nature of an already accepted virtue and not also the origin and development of virtue in human nature. Garve says that people had ideas of virtue long before any such criterion, as conformity to nature, was proposed. So instead of this being the true and original idea, it is rather a derived and artificial formula to which they attach their original and natural conception of virtue.<sup>161</sup> I think that Garve has a wrong conception of the task of Ethics. I understand Ethics to be a normative science, the business of which is to evaluate human conduct, which it must do in the light of an ideal or criterion of morality. The natural history of morals is a most interesting and enlightening study, but it belongs rather more to psychology and anthropology than to ethics. Garve criticizes Wollaston, also, on the ground that "no man in acting morally or immorally is conscious of making any such speculation in regard to the moral judgment of his action. He says that it is not the testimony of moral consciousness that his conscience accuses him of nothing but lack of veracity, when it accuses him of unjust and treacherous actions, and that accords approval for charitable and beneficent acts only because he has expressed true propositions thereby." Garve says that since this is true we must look elsewhere for a criterion for what does not

<sup>159</sup> Janet, *Theory of Morals*, p. 111.

<sup>160</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>161</sup> Garve, *Ubersicht der vornehmsten Prin. der Sittenl.*, p. 171.

really move man to virtue can also not be the human principle of virtue, "Was aber keinen Menschen zur Tugend wirklich bewegt, das kann auch nicht das menschliche Principi der Tugend sein."<sup>162</sup> Now, as a matter of fact, Wollaston does not say that one makes such speculations at the moment of action. He only says that a bad man in acting in a manner unsuitable to the nature and relations of things is acting in a contradictory manner. He is not, according to Wollaston, making false existential judgments, but his actions are as false as such judgments.<sup>163</sup>

Brown thinks that this system is dependent upon some other for the determination of virtue and vice. He says: "If we had no previous notions of moral good and evil, no love of the happiness of others more than their misery, it would be absolutely impossible to determine whether virtue or vice were truth or falsehood." If we make the presupposition or take for granted that it is the true nature of the child to love its parents, Brown says, that, of course, we can say that when the child acts tenderly in its dealing with its parent, that it "treats the parent according to his true nature," and that if his treatment were unkindly, that "he would not be treating his parent according to his true nature, but as if he were a foe, to whose true nature such usage would be accordant." So, Brown says, that Wollaston takes virtue for granted in the conception of true nature. He thinks that this principle is worthless and that it really implies another criterion of virtue, namely, that of Intuitionism. Immorality is conduct which "is false to nature, but it is false to nature only, because it is false to that virtue," which is "a natural idea" in the minds of men.<sup>164</sup> This objection can be made of any principle which tries to explain morality, but to denominate virtue "native," "intuitive," "immediate" is certainly not to explain it. Wollaston dealt with this type of ethical theory in this way; the difference between good and evil cannot be deduced from the common sense of mankind: "For it is much to be suspected

<sup>162</sup> Garve, *Ubersicht der vornehmsten Prin. der Sittenl.*, p. 175.

<sup>163</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>164</sup> Brown, *Phil. of Mind*, p. 264.



there are no such innate maxims as they pretend, but that the impressions of education are mistaken for them: and besides that, the sentiments of mankind are not so uniform and constant, as that we may safely trust an important distinction upon them.”<sup>165</sup>

Blakey takes Brown to task for his superficial criticism of Wollaston. How can anyone, Brown had said, believe that parricide is a crime, only because it is absurd, “only for the same reason which would make it a crime for any one to walk across a room on his hands and feet, because he would then be guilty of the practical untruth of using his hands, not as if they were hands, but as if they were feet, as, in parricide, he would be guilty of the practical untruth of treating parents as robbers.”<sup>166</sup> This, Blakey says, is a strange misconception of the reasoning of Wollaston. To treat parricide as no worse crime than walking across the floor on hands and feet, “is not to treat those two actions according to the nature of things, or as being what they really are, but the contrary.” He mentions the fact that Wollaston anticipates this very objection in his case of a man talking to a post, which act he characterizes as absurd but not immoral.<sup>167</sup>

In his defence of Wollaston against the misinterpretation of Brown, Blakey seems to understand the position of Wollaston, but later in his treatment he says that this philosophy, really, goes back to an ultimate Intuitionism. He thinks that man has a special faculty for discerning moral relations, that the ordinary reason is impotent as to the decision of moral questions. If this is really Wollaston's position, of course, Blakey is right in saying that “this amounts to the same as a moral sense, a moral intuition.” I do not think, however, that his argument, which attempts to prove Wollaston an Intuitionist, is at all convincing. He says that Wollaston takes the position that when a man performs a given moral action, that action bears a certain relation to the constitution of things that all men are capable

<sup>165</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 24.

<sup>166</sup> Blakey, *His. of Moral Science*, pp. 195-6.

<sup>167</sup> Brown, *Phil. of Mind*, p. 264. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 15.

of discerning this relation. How is this to be done? How are men to perceive those relations between moral actions and the natures of things? Wollaston has not shown, he says, "that this power differs in any respect from moral sense." Wollaston's idea, according to Blakey, is that men "approve of moral actions by the power of perceiving a relation between those actions and other things," which is certainly a fair characterization.<sup>168</sup> These two interpretations cannot be reconciled and the fact is that the last one must be accepted for there is not the slightest evidence for the position that Wollaston believed in a moral sense. For Wollaston reason is the only guide and he did not believe in any special moral reason, but, rather he thinks that moral relations are discerned by the same reason as logical and mathematical relations.<sup>169</sup> Wollaston definitely denies that he believes in innate ideas of morality or in a moral sense. He says "They, who . . . deduce the difference between good and evil from . . . certain principles that are born with us, put the matter upon a very infirm foot, for it is much to be suspected there are no such innate maxims."<sup>170</sup>

Price says that which determines whether an action is right or wrong is "the truth of the case," by which he means "the circumstances and relations of the agent and the objects." In certain relations "there is a certain right thing to do. A certain manner of behavior we approve as soon as the circumstances and relations are known. What is good or bad, it is certain, must vary according to the different natures and circumstances of beings."<sup>171</sup> Price thinks that if the relations were otherwise a different kind of behavior would be demanded by the situation, and this different kind of behavior would, then, be right. After practically stating Wollaston's view as his own, Price proceeds to say that such expressions as "acting suitably to the natures of things, treating things as they are, conformity to truth, congruity and incongruity between actions and rela-

<sup>168</sup> Blakey, *His. of Moral Science*, pp. 201-2.

<sup>169</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 23.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>171</sup> Price, *Questions in Morals*, p. 205.

tions, have little meaning if they are intended to define virtue." These expressions, he says, "evidently presuppose an idea of virtue." Saying that virtue consists in conformity to the relations of persons and things does not define virtue, Price says, "and we will still have to tell why it is right to conform ourselves to these relations." To answer this, he thinks, that we can only fall back on "something ultimately approved for which no justifying reason can be assigned." Saying that virtue is the conformity of our actions to reason is just saying "that our actions are such as our reason discerns to be right." Price says so far from conformity to nature being a guide to us in critical situations of life, as a matter of fact, when we cannot determine what is right we are equally unable to tell what is conformable to the nature of things.<sup>172</sup> He is saying that we must have a more ultimate criterion than that of truth because we cannot always discover the true nature of things or decide just what conduct is conformable thereto.

Price is wrong in saying that a more ultimate definition of virtue is implied by this one for no more ultimate conception can be conceived than that of conformity to the real nature of things. This conformity of life to reality must be the ground of morality and so must be the criterion of every view of Ethics. For, as Wollaston says, "if the formal ratio of moral good and evil be made to consist in a conformity of men's acts to the truth of the case . . . the distinction seems to be settled in a manner undeniable, intelligible, practicable. For as what is meant by a true proposition and matter of fact is perfectly understood by everybody."<sup>173</sup> But Price thinks that there is a more ultimate conception and that it is a matter of immediate perception. He says that morality is not a matter of any deductions of reasoning; but, he says, morality is determined by the natures and relations of things. "Treating an object as being what it is, is treating it as it is right such an object should be treated." Conforming ourselves to truth is the same as doing what is right to be done in the situation in

<sup>172</sup> Price, *Questions in Morals*, pp. 206-7.

<sup>173</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 25.

which we find ourselves, and Price seems to think that we have immediate knowledge as to what we ought to do. He thinks that the notion of right and wrong is presupposed in acting according to truth. He says that Wollaston is wrong in making his notion of good and evil to consist in the "signifying and denying of truth," because it is an attempt to reduce "all virtue and vice to these particular instances of them." This, he says, leaves the nature of them undefined, "nor does he tell us how we come to the idea that virtue is observing truth and vice the violation of it." Price says that Wollaston merely takes these as self-evident truths. Price agrees that they are such but, he says, "not more so, than our ideas of the other principles of morality." Cruelty, for example, is for Price a vice sui genesis and it cannot be made to consist of the denying of truth, because when one acts cruelly he may have "no intention to deny anything true." One may, Price says, be said, figuratively speaking, to contradict truth when he acts in a cruel manner." One could not, however, use such language did he not "perceive antecedently to this application, that such a manner of acting, in such circumstances, is wrong."<sup>174</sup> Price grants that Wollaston used the relation in a figurative way, so the real difference between them is not this, but as to the real nature of the moral judgment. Price makes it "a simple perception, . . . something ultimately approved for which no justifying reason can be given."<sup>175</sup> When virtue is said to consist in the conformity to the relations of persons and things, one cannot be said to have really defined virtue in the sense of giving a guide to life, for saying that virtue is conformity of our actions to reason is just saying that virtuous actions are such as our reason discerns to be right.<sup>176</sup> Wollaston does not agree with this, for he says the conformity of our actions to reason is precisely what we mean by acting virtuously, and he would also say that we must use our reason to find out just what is the rational thing to do.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Price, *Questions in Morals*, pp. 207-8.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>177</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, Sec. I, Paragraphs VI and IX.



John Gay says that most moralists agree as "to what are virtuous and vicious actions," that is as "to what particular actions are virtuous and what otherwise," but he says they differ "very much . . . concerning the criterion of virtue." He says that some "have placed it in acting agreeably to nature, or reason; . . . others in conformity with truth; others in promoting the common good; others in the will of God, etc." Now, he thinks, that this agreement as to what particular actions are right and wrong, along with this great disagreement concerning the criterion of morality, makes one suspect, "either that they had a different criterion" or "that all of them have the same criterion in reality." He takes the latter view saying that they all have the same ultimate standard and that this is that of acting agreeably to the will of God. Because God is infinitely good "he could have no other design in creating mankind than their happiness," consequently my own duty consists in "promoting the happiness of mankind. How shall I know what is for the happiness of mankind? He says that "this is to be known only from the relations of things."<sup>178</sup>

Gay takes Wollaston's criterion of virtue and makes it his criterion of happiness. He asks how one is to discover what does conform to the nature and relations of things, and he answers "either from experience or reason." So he agrees with Wollaston as to the method of ascertaining truth and the nature of the actions that are conformable thereto. "Thus the criterion" of conformability to the nature of things "may in general be said to be reason; which reason, when exactly conformable to the things existing, i. e., when it judges of things as they are, is called right reason."<sup>179</sup> He gets very near to Wollaston's position when he says that we speak "of the reason of things," meaning "that relation which we should find by our reason, if our reason was right." He says that "reason," "truth," "conformity to relations," "fitness and unfitness of things,"

<sup>178</sup> Gay, *Concerning the Fundamental Prins. of Virtue*, *Brit. Moralists*, pp. 270-2.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

“the happiness of mankind”; “may in some sense be said to be criteria of virtue; but it must always be remembered that they are only remote criteria of it; being gradually subordinate to its immediate and proper criterion, the will of God.”<sup>180</sup> Wollaston would answer that virtue is acting conformably with the will of God but that this is revealed to us in the very nature of things. In discussing the idea of Plato that virtue is “likeness to God” Wollaston says that such likeness can be attained only by “the practice of truth, God being truth, and doing nothing contrary to it.”<sup>181</sup> Again, he says, the great law of natural religion, “the law of nature or the Author of nature, is, that every intelligent, active, and free being should so behave himself, as by no act to contradict truth; or, that he should treat everything as being what it is.”<sup>182</sup> Instead of admitting that Gay is right in his position that every ethical standard can be reduced finally to that of conformity to the will of God, I would say, rather, that Gay is compelled to use the criterion of conformity to truth in order to give any meaning to his criterion. This means that conformity to nature is his real criterion for, like Wollaston, when he asks “Lord what would Thou have me do?” he can get no other answer than that of Wollaston’s principle of conformity to the nature of things. He admits that God’s will is revealed in the nature of things. Man’s duty, he says, is to promote “the happiness of mankind,” and what this is can “be known only from the relations of things.”<sup>183</sup>

## V. CRITICISM

### THAT WOLLASTON’S SYSTEM IS OVER INTELLECTUALISTIC

This criticism is that Wollaston’s system is exclusively intellectualistic and that it neglects the proper consideration of feeling as the real dynamic of moral action. I do not believe that this criticism can, with justice, be made

<sup>180</sup> Gay, *Fundamental Prins. of Virtue*, Sec. V, p. 274.

<sup>181</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 24.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec. I, Paragraphs X and XI.

<sup>183</sup> Gay, *Fundamental Prins. of Virtue*, Sections I and II.

against his system of Ethics. It is true that his criterion is based upon reason, rather than upon feeling, but he also insists that everything is to be considered. It is reasonable to consider happiness and other feelings, so these must go into the motivation of the man who is trying to do the moral thing and not alone the rationality of things. An objective standard of morals is one that is based on the nature of things, which is learned through experience. Moral relations are dependent upon real relations and the moral law is that everything is to be treated as what it is. Feelings are included in this catalogue.

In his defence of the thesis "Moral distinctions are not derived from reason," Hume takes occasion to criticize Wollaston severely as the most outstanding defender of the opposite thesis. He says that "there are in men's minds two kinds of things, namely, impressions and ideas." This distinction, he says, gives rise to the ethical question as to whether our distinctions of right and wrong, are based on the senses or on reason. Hume takes the position that philosophers, like Wollaston, affirm that virtue is but the conformity of actions to reason and that morality, like truth, is "discerned merely by ideas." Now, says Hume, "in order to judge of these systems, we need only consider whether it be possible, from reason alone, to distinguish between moral good and evil, or whether there must concur with some other principles to enable us to make that distinction." He thinks that reason can indicate the means of attaining a desired end, but it cannot itself determine that end. Reason, he further objects, is powerless to move the person to moral action, and "can never be the source of so active a principle as a conscience or a sense of morals." He, therefore, concludes that the principles of morality cannot be "conclusions of the reasons."<sup>184</sup>

Reason, Hume argues, has to do only with truth and truth consists of agreement or disagreement of ideas to ideas and to real existence. Now, actions and volitions can have no such relations " 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either con-

<sup>184</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, pp. 413-18 and 456-7.

trary or conformable to reason.”<sup>185</sup> Literally speaking, he is right, and Wollaston agrees with him on that point. As has been shown, at length, Wollaston does not identify morality and truth, but just takes the position that morality is conformity of life to the real nature of things and is as true as is the conformity of thought to the real nature of things.<sup>186</sup> Hume goes on to say that: “Actions do not derive their merit, nor their blame from a contrariety to it. Moral distinctions are not the offspring of reason.”<sup>187</sup> He says that reason alone is not sufficient to offer either moral blame or approbation. The reason can only judge between a question of fact or of relations and there is a great difference between a question of fact and one of right. He takes as an example, a case of ingratitude, and asks how it can be shown by reason alone that ingratitude is immoral and “wherein the crime consists?”<sup>188</sup> Wollaston might very easily ask Hume how he is to show “wherein the crime consists” by any faculty other than that of reason, for Hume grants that only the reason is capable of judging facts and relations.

He tries, further, to show the impotency of reason as a moral guide, by saying that “there is the same contrariety in returning good for evil as in returning evil for good, and yet the moral aspect is entirely different.” This means, he thinks, that moral distinctions cannot rest on the reason, but they must depend “on some internal sense or feeling which nature has made universal in the whole species.”<sup>189</sup> Wollaston has an entire division devoted to answering this very objection. He says that it is absolutely necessary to consider a thing in all its relations before we can pass a correct moral judgment. He takes the case of riding a stolen horse. A man who rides a stolen horse both conforms to reality and violates the nature of things. So, Wollaston says, that a consideration of all relations would show that returning good for evil conforms to the larger relations and

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

<sup>186</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>188</sup> Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 458.

<sup>189</sup> Hume, *Inquiry Concerning the Prins. of Morals*, App., Sec. I.



so is conformable to the bigger truth and the more important natures and relations.<sup>190</sup> There is, this principle would admit, some contrariety in returning good for evil, but in the returning of evil for good one acts contrary to the larger truth, one acts in violation of the more essential life relations.

Wollaston anticipates this criticism of Hume in his case of a man treating an enemy as an enemy. He says "If everything must be treated as being what it is, what rare work will follow? For to treat my enemy as such is to kill him, or revenge myself soundly upon him. . . . To this it is easy to reply from what has been already said. For if . . . the enemy . . . was nothing more than an enemy, there might be some force to the objection; but since he may be considered as something else besides that, he must be used according to what he is in other respects, as well as in that from which he is denominated my enemy. For my enemy in the first place is a man; and as such may claim the benefit of common humanity." Not only is he a man and so demanding to be treated as such but he is also a citizen and so as such should not be punished without due process of law. If truth, therefore, be observed, the result will be this "I must treat" my enemy "as something compounded of a man, a fellow-citizen, and an enemy, all three; that is I must only prosecute him in such a way, as is agreeable to the statutes and methods, which society" has established.<sup>191</sup>

Blakey says that Wollaston's principle, that when a man acts virtuously his actions are in conformity with the nature of things, is capable of being understood in two ways. It may, he says, merely state that, as a matter of fact, the virtuous actions of mankind are in conformity with the nature of things. It may mean, on the other hand, that the ideal of moral obligations is derived from the perception of this conformity between moral actions and the nature of things. Blakey says that it is not at all clear whether Wollaston means to say that the conception of this

<sup>190</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

conformity is the reason why men act virtuously, or merely the source of their notions of moral relations. He says that it is inconceivable, though, that the mere perception of conformity between actions and things could possess the power to prompt one to moral action. In a word, he criticizes Wollaston's system on the ground that it is merely intellectual and consequently has no dynamic. "If I fly to the succor of my child in distress, can my sympathy be said to be moved, or my sense of duty awakened, by viewing an agreement between the hitherto unperformed act of rendering assistance and the nature of things? Certainly not."<sup>192</sup>

Blakey, very properly, says that the principal part of Wollaston's moral theory rests upon the third proposition of the first section, "A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds as well as by express words," but I am not at all sure that he gets Wollaston's point, that things may be affirmed or contradicted by practice. Blakey takes the same view as to the impotence of the intellect as does Hume "It shows the different paths and the direction to take, but it does not choose one path rather than another."<sup>193</sup> Wollaston says that man possesses intelligence and freedom of will. It may be asked if Ethics has not accomplished its task when it has shown us what our duty is, and assured us that we are free to do our duty?<sup>194</sup> That Wollaston is somewhat deficient as to the psychology of feeling and volition I would gladly admit, but I cannot see that that constitutes a criticism of his ethical criterion. The psychology of action is one thing, the ethics of action is quite another. The first is a descriptive, a matter of fact, study; the second is a study of norms, a study of criteria of conduct. Wollaston was a moralist, primarily, and was interested mainly in the normative study.<sup>195</sup>

The faculty of reason is impotent, says Hutcheson, "not being able either to justify or to condemn. Those who

<sup>192</sup> Blakey, *His. of Moral Science*, p. 192.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>194</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, Sections III and IV.

identify moral goodness and conformity to truth unconsciously employ the moral sense criterion." Hutcheson says that it is necessary to suppose that there "is a natural and immediate criteria of morality, a sense or instinct, for it is inconceivable that God should have made us so that we would be left at the mercy of the slow and uncertain processes of reason."<sup>196</sup> By the use of his reason Hutcheson tries to prove that the reason is incompetent to decide moral matters and impotent to move one to act morally. He admits, however, that we must depend upon the reason to supply all the meaning and content, and to suggest all the means towards the attainment of the moral end.<sup>197</sup> The question might well be asked just what function the moral sense or instinct performs in the moral life? It is granted that it is a blind guide in the sense that it must depend upon the ordinary knowing processes for all its knowledge and upon the reason for suggestions as to just what should be done in any given life situation. If the intellect is to tell us what we ought to do, if that is admitted to be a matter of judgment, what is the use of a power that can only tell us to do our duty when we find out what it is? Why not make the other a matter of reason also? Is the moral sense a blind giant carrying on his back a lame intellect who can see? One certainly gets that impression of the moral faculty from the writings of the intuitionists. Wollaston thinks that no endowment is necessary to make one a moral being. The possession of reason, of intelligence, alone, is sufficient explanation. An intelligent being will inevitably perceive the natures and relations of things and his own connection therewith. He will naturally and necessarily perceive that his actions should conform to the natures and relations.<sup>198</sup>

Leslie Stephen says that, in a sense, the universe is reasonable throughout. The fall of a stone is as reasonable as the working of a logician's brain. From this point of view, every conceivable event is reasonable, therefore no kind

<sup>196</sup> Hutcheson, *System of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 56-8 and 272.

<sup>197</sup> *Inquiry into the Origin of Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, p. 195.

<sup>198</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, Sec. I, Par. III, and Sec. III.

of conduct can be considered more reasonable than any other. In another sense only the conduct of a being capable of knowing what he is doing is reasonable. "We may say that a man is reasonable in so far as reason controls his passions. And again we call a man reasonable, in proportion as he apprehends certain general principles, and as they affect his conduct."<sup>199</sup> Stephen says "Reasoning and feeling are bound together in an inseparable unity. Every choice is a struggle between passions involving more or less reasoning, but not resolvable into an emotionless process. Every moral struggle has, not feeling on one side and reason on the other, as is often supposed, but feeling and reason on both sides, or there could be no struggle." He says that the mere intellectual perception could have no effect on a man tempted to drink "if the sense of duty and love of family did not represent a strong fund of emotion capable of being called into vigorous operation."<sup>200</sup> Wollaston would not be disposed to deny this. This would all be involved in a full and complete consideration of the natures of things. A man is, what? Why, in this case, the husband of a loving wife, etc. Even though we grant the impotence of the "mere intellectual perception" of what one ought to do, what is established thereby with reference to truth or conformity to the nature of things as the criterion of virtue? Nothing, because a criterion has performed its function when it has prescribed the appropriate conduct in any given life situation.

Leslie Stephen says that reason can make anything seem consistent to our prejudiced minds. Perhaps so, but are we not even more likely to be prejudiced through feeling than through reason? "To give a merely formal consistency to my conduct, it is sufficient that this cause should become a reason; that the motives by which I am actually determined should be represented in the general rules which I frame. If hatred to the red-haired actually influences me, I have only to dislike the red-haired man in theory to make

<sup>199</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, p. 56.

<sup>200</sup> L. Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, pp. 58-66.



my conduct consistent.”<sup>201</sup> Wollaston would answer this by saying that a certain limited consistency would characterize such conduct, but that moral conduct means actions that are in entire conformity to the nature of things. He insists, in this connection, upon the necessity of considering things in all relations. He says that “any thing . . . must be considered not only . . . in one respect, but . . . the whole description of the thing ought to be taken in.”<sup>202</sup> Again he says “all truths are consistent, nor can anything be true any further than it is compatible with other things that are true.”<sup>203</sup> It is not consistent with all life and world relations for me to hate the red-haired and such conduct is therefore wrong. Wollaston considers this objection to the criterion of truth in the case of the proper treatment of an enemy. I do conform to a small segment of truth, says Wollaston, when I mistreat my enemy but I violate a world of truth by so doing. So to hate the red-haired I make my conduct consistent with a small segment of life’s circle but it is inconsistent and immoral behavior, because it neglects to consider the red-haired man in all relations.<sup>204</sup>

Leslie Stephen takes a position like that of Wollaston’s contemporary critic, John Clarke, which position is an absolute denial of the entire objective point of view in Ethics. They hold that the motive alone determines the morality of an act. John Clarke said that “in order to a person’s affirming or denying the truth, an intention to affirm or deny is required, without which he cannot be said to affirm or deny it. . . . It matters not, what notions or propositions his words or actions may naturally excite in the minds of those that hear the one, or see the other; if he himself had no such propositions in his own mind, had no intentions of communicating any such propositions to others, he cannot in any propriety of language be said to affirm or deny

<sup>201</sup> L. Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 66.

<sup>202</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 19 and 24.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

them.”<sup>205</sup> Leslie Stephen says that a man who gives to the poor conforms externally to the rule dictated by charity, but his act is not charitable unless his motives are those of sympathy. This proves, he thinks, that motives and not external conformity to the nature of things determine the morality of an act.<sup>206</sup> How would our author answer this objection? He would say that both right motive and conformity to the situation are required to constitute an act completely conformable to the natures of things. Just as everything enters into the motivation of the act so everything enters into the evaluation of the act. Wollaston does not deny that motive is an important factor in the evaluation. It is true that his standard is that of conformity to the nature of things, that he insists that “if things are but fairly permitted to speak for themselves . . . they will proclaim their own rectitude or obliquity”; but it is just as true that he insists that “That act which may be denominated morally good or evil, must be the act of a being capable of distinguishing, choosing, and acting for himself; or more briefly of an intelligent and free agent, because in proper speaking no act at all can be ascribed to that, which is not indued with these capacities.”<sup>207</sup> Why this insistence upon intelligence if he does not regard motive as an all-important factor in evaluation? Wollaston goes further and says that for an act to be a moral act “it must be the act of an agent” and that he must act “from an internal principle.”<sup>208</sup>

Irons offers the criticism that this system “attempts to eliminate the feeling and the will from the sphere of action, and moral obligation from morality.” He grants that reason “is a light which guides our steps, but not the power which makes us move.” It might be asked, if it is not the exclusive business of a moral standard “to guide our steps,” to enlighten; and if this is true can rationalism in Ethics be said to have failed only because it is impotent to make

<sup>205</sup> J. Clarke, *Exam. of the Notion of Good and Evil in the “Reli. of Nat. Delin.”* p. 9.

<sup>206</sup> L. Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 311.

<sup>207</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 7.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

men do what they know they ought to do? But Irons next proceeds to criticize the system of Wollaston on the ground that it makes of reason not only the faculty which perceives moral relations, but also the impulse by means of which they are realized in action.<sup>209</sup> Surely Irons would not deny that when a man acts morally his will is guided and determined by intelligence. Wollaston does not deny the place of feeling and will in morality. The feeling accompanying the thought when we make a mere existential judgment is different from that which accompanies thoughts of personal duty and responsibility, nevertheless it is the natures and relations of things which constitute the moral situation and the moral obligation. Yet, he would say, with Clarke, "the faculty which determines what things are, determines what ought to be."<sup>210</sup> But this does not mean the identification of the two processes, as Irons thinks. The position is not that: "The same faculty which decides in regard to the law of right supplies the dynamic force which is necessary for the realization of the law."<sup>211</sup> Clarke and Wollaston do not rule out feeling as the dynamic nor the fiat of the will. But since morality must not be individual and subjective and since the feelings are the idiosyncrasies of the individual, the criterion of morality cannot be based on the feelings. It is reason which constitutes the universal in man, consequently morality must be grounded on the reason.<sup>212</sup> Morality when so conceived is objective, because the reason in the individual man is but the conformity of thought to the real nature of things.<sup>213</sup>

Simmel takes the position that "the notion of good and evil is a merely subjective category, possessing no objectivity." Rashdall undertakes to refute this position. He asks, how can we tell that the notion of duty is not a mere emotion as Simmel claims? He answers, in the same way that I know that the judgment, six is greater than four, is no mere feeling. We have, says Rashdall, the same reason

<sup>209</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Mod. Ethics*, *Phil. Rv.*, vol. XII, p. 86.

<sup>210</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 86.

<sup>211</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Modern Ethics*, *Ph. Rv.*, vol. XII, p. 141.

<sup>212</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 45-6.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

for believing in the objectivity validity of moral consciousness, as we have for supposing that the proposition two and two make four is objectively true. The notion of duty, he thinks, is as inexpugnable a notion of the human mind as the notions of quantity or cause and we have as much reason to believe in the validity of our moral judgments, as we have for confidence in the validity of those other categories." Rashdall believes that moral judgments are the work of reason and that there are such things as self-evident moral judgments. "The real ethical judgment," he says, "is the judgment of value which affirms that such and such things are good." They must come from "the rational or intellectual part of our nature," for they "represent one particular activity of the same self which gives us the fundamental intellectual truths." His answer to Simmel is very much the same answer that Wollaston makes to that type of moral theory, and his idea of the moral judgment is very much the same as that of Wollaston, namely, the discernment of the really congruous act in any life situation.<sup>214</sup>

Irons says that all purposive action is to make things different from what they are, consequently we could better define morality by saying that it is "the effort to make things other than they are." The question for Ethics, then is: what is the ideal which ought to be actualized in the world? Irons says that reason cannot answer this question, consequently rationalism as the method of Ethics must be abandoned. It is not true that in the moral world things of every kind are now treated according to their true nature, as Irons thinks. He says that to treat everything as that which it is cannot be denominated moral because it is natural to treat things in that way. He thinks that morality belongs to the world that ought to be, not to the world that is. The identification of truth and goodness would result in the annihilation of the ideal world, Irons thinks. This, Wollaston would gladly admit, but he would say that an intellectual system of morals need not identify the intellectual and the moral. As I have tried to show Wollaston

<sup>214</sup> Simmel, *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, vol. II, p. 347. Rashdall, *Is Conscience an Emotion?* p. 36 ff.



certainly does not identify the two. Irons says that the identification of the intellectual and moral would annihilate the ideal world, because reason deals with that which is and that only, so the rules of conduct prescribed by the reason must be limited in the same way. If we act according to reason alone, we must act in accordance with things as they are, and Wollaston, Irons says, did not hesitate to define the whole duty of man as treating things as they are.<sup>215</sup>

Wollaston denies that the moral ideal of truth, or that of acting conformably with the real natures of things, is the annihilation of the ideal world. The whole duty of man does consist in living a life every act of which is consistent and in conformity to the nature of things, but Wollaston insists that the ideal life is that kind of life. If everything was treated as that which it is, the world that is would be the world that ought to be. If God, man, beast, bird were so considered, then would this world be an ideal world. It is certain that the ideal cannot be realized by disregarding the actual, but only by living truly which can only mean acting conformably to the natures and relations of things. Clarke well expresses this conception of the ideal of life by saying that virtue consists in considering things to be what they are and that vice consists in "the endeavor to make things to be what they are not and cannot be."<sup>216</sup> I do not understand this to be a static view of life and the world. Things may very well be different each moment and for each person in all the world, but things are always as they are and our duty as free rational beings is to be found by truly conforming our lives to the natures of things. Wollaston thus expresses it: "In view of the eternal and necessary relations which exist between things, reason lays an obligation upon us; but what is this obligation? simply that our actions be in conformity with these eternal and necessary relations."<sup>217</sup> Our entire duty is, then, "that we should act in accordance with the nature of things."

<sup>215</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Modern Ethics*, Phil. Rv., Vol. 12, p. 142.

<sup>216</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 66.

<sup>217</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, Sec. I, Paragraph X.

## A CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF WOLLASTON'S SECTION ON HAPPINESS

### I

#### EXPOSITION OF SECTION II "OF HAPPINESS"

"That which demands to be next considered, is happiness; as being in itself most considerable; as abetting the cause of truth; and as being indeed so nearly allied to it, that they cannot well be parted. We cannot pay the respect due to one, unless we regard the other. Happiness must not be denied to be what it is; and it is by the practice of truth that we aim at that happiness, which is true." Wollaston says that a being may be said to be happy the sum total of whose pleasures exceeds the sum total of his pain. "To make itself happy," Wollaston says, "is a duty, which every being, in proportion to its capacity, owes to itself; and that, which every intelligent being may be supposed to aim at in general."<sup>1</sup> This, it must be admitted, when taken alone, reads like Hedonism. And we can admit that Wollaston does rank happiness very high among the hierarchy of the real and true things of life. It is not true, however, as some have thought, that he considered happiness as the end and truth only as the means to that end. It is not true to his teachings to define Wollaston's system as the search of happiness by the practice of truth.<sup>2</sup> Wollaston does, in the metaphysical portion of his treatise, profess his faith in the rationality of the universe and so his belief in the ultimate coincidence of truth and happiness; and, from that point of view, says that Natural Religion may be regarded "as the pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth."<sup>3</sup> This is

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Anon., *Art. Wollaston*, in *Britannica*.

<sup>3</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 52.

the basis of Hurst's statement that his "creed was the pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth."<sup>4</sup>

It is somewhat surprising that one who takes the intellectual attitude towards morals, as does Wollaston, should give so much attention to happiness. I think that the explanation is to be found partly in the historic situation, and partly in the fact that an objective system of morality must regard human happiness as of the highest importance. Many of his predecessors and contemporary ethical writers sought to find in happiness the criterion of morality. Wollaston grants that the consideration is of the highest importance, but he denies that it alone can be the criterion. Happiness, like everything else, must be treated as what it is. "We cannot," says Wollaston, "act with respect to either ourselves, or other men, as being what we are and they are, unless both are considered as being susceptible of happiness and unhappiness." This, however, is not all that must be considered, as Hedonism teaches, but happiness is only one of the things that must be considered in treating men as what they are. So far from happiness being the ultimate criterion for him, he says, that "the true and ultimate happiness of no being can be produced by anything that interferes with truth, and denies the natures of things; so neither can the practice of truth make any being ultimately unhappy."<sup>5</sup> The ultimate criterion, then, is truth and not happiness, for truth of every kind cannot be reduced to happiness, but happiness is significant for morals only in so far as it is reducible to truth. So far from Wollaston going over to Hedonism, as some of his critics accuse him of doing, he compels Hedonism to come to his standard. There are, he says, higher and lower, true and false pleasures.<sup>6</sup>

Wollaston takes the position that to treat people "as being what they are" is to treat them "as beings both desirous of happiness and as requiring happiness for their self-realization. He goes so far as to say that: "To make it-

<sup>4</sup> Hurst, *His. of Rationalism*, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

self happy is a duty which every being . . . owes to itself, and which every intelligent being aims at." While all men desire happiness and seek to realize it, all do not find it. The reason for this failure is due to the fact that their lives are not guided by the light of truth. Happiness, says Wollaston, is closely allied to truth, and it is "by the practice of truth" that men attain "that happiness, which is true." The false life cannot be a happy life, says Wollaston, but only that life which is lived in conformity to its own true self and to the real nature of things can be a happy life. He is especially insistent upon the fact that: "The happiness of every being must be something that is not incompatible with . . . its nature. . . . For instance, nothing can be the true happiness of a rational being, that is inconsistent with reason. . . . If anything becomes agreeable to a rational being, which is not agreeable to reason, it is plain his reason is lost, his nature deprest, and that he now lifts himself among irrationals," for "a rational being can like nothing of that kind without a contradiction to itself. For to do this would be to act, as if it were the contrary of what it is," and "whatever interferes with reason, interferes with truth."<sup>7</sup> According to Wollaston there are two things that "are to be religiously regarded in all our conduct," and "these are met together and embrace each other." These are truth and happiness. Wollaston does not subordinate either to the other, but he does define happiness in terms of truth, which is the same as saying that truth is a more ultimate category. He says that happiness is the natural and necessary consequence of a life of truth, and consists of "such pleasures, as company, or follow the practice of truth, or are not inconsistent with it." The criterion of morality is truth and one can be happy only by living a life that is conformable to truth.<sup>8</sup>

Wollaston argues for the ultimate coincidence of happiness and truth on the ground, that "that which contradicts nature and truth opposes the will of the Author of nature." Because of the freedom he possesses as his birth-right, a

<sup>7</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.



finite being may act in opposition to the Divine will, and, in so doing, may "break through the constitution of things" or violate the nature of reality. He denies, however, that happiness can be attained in that way. In a consistent universe, he says, in effect, those who live conformably with the true nature of things must be ultimately happy; and those who live contradictory lives must be, in the long run, unhappy.<sup>9</sup> Things could be otherwise only in a crazy world. In a consistent world the true way of life must lead to happiness, so the way to truth and the way to happiness must be ultimately the same. He postulates religion as the necessary ground of the unity of truth and happiness. An intelligible world must be a rational and consistent world, a world in which good and evil, true and false are grounded upon the real and ultimate nature of things. Happiness must, also, somehow find its true place in the scheme of things. The rationality shown in this cosmic unity is natural religion. "The way to happiness and the practice of truth incur the one in the other." He had, in an earlier passage, said that "nothing can produce the ultimate happiness of any being, which interferes with truth; and therefore whatever doth produce that, must be something which is consistent and coincident with this."<sup>10</sup> These two things, then, "are both to be religiously regarded in all our conduct. And since both these units unite so amicably, and are at last the same, here in one religion which may be called natural upon two accounts."<sup>11</sup>

Wollaston certainly did not think himself to be a Hedonist, not even a universalistic one, of this fact I think we can make sure from his own writings. He says that the immutable distinction between right and wrong is the same as that between true and false, that is in conformity or non-conformity to the real nature of things. They who say that goodness consists in "following nature" are correct, he says, if by "following nature," not the acting according to one's desires as the Hedonists teach, but "the acting according to

<sup>9</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 38, 40 and 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 42 and 172-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

the natures of things," the "treating of everything as being what they are in nature or according to truth." Wollaston says that "this does not appear to be their meaning. And if it is only that a man must follow his own nature, since his nature is not purely rational, but there is a part of him, which he has in common with the brutes, they appoint him a guide which I fear will mislead him, this commonly being more likely to prevail, than the rational part."<sup>12</sup> By following nature, he in effect says, we must mean, if this formula is to serve as a criterion of virtue, not the following of our physical desires and appetites, which nature we have in common with the brutes, but the following of our higher and rational nature, that nature which is the peculiar endowment of man. This is certainly very far from a hedonistic conception of life. Pleasure and happiness, like everything else good and true, must get their due realization, but the criterion is not in the senses nor in the feelings, but in the reason. Wollaston, to be sure, grants that human nature is not purely rational, a part of his nature being like that of the brutes, but this animal side of man is not his essential nature. The essential thing about man is his reason, and whatever will stand the test of reason is right and that which will not stand that test is wrong. "Right reason" meaning that "which is found by the right use of our rational faculties," is "coincident with truth."<sup>13</sup>

Wollaston offers still another argument against Hedonism; he says that those who undertake to define morality in terms of pleasure and pain end in leaving it undefined, because men are even more different in their ideas and tastes as to what constitutes happiness than as to what constitutes the good. "As men have different tastes, different degrees of sense and philosophy, the same thing cannot be pleasant to all; and if particular actions are to be proved by this test, the morality of them will be very uncertain; the same act may be of one nature to one man, and of another to another." He goes further and says that "unless there be some limitation added as a fence for virtue, men will sink

<sup>12</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

into gross voluptuousness, as in fact the generality of Epicurus' herd have done (notwithstanding all his talk of temperance, virtue, tranquillity of mind, etc.)." He then proposes a "limitation as a fence for virtue. For not all pleasures, but only such pleasures as are true, or happiness, may be reckoned among the fines, or ultima bonorum."<sup>14</sup> Butler in commenting upon this passage, has this say: the "A late author of great and deserved reputation saith, to place virtue in following nature, is at least a looseness to talk. And he has reason to say this, if what I think intends to express be true, that scarce any other sense can be put upon these words, but acting as any of the several ways, without distinction, of a man's nature, happened most to incline him."<sup>15</sup>

A rather strong case can be made against Wollaston on the charge of Hedonism, and I have no disposition to evade the charge. The charge takes about this form. Wollaston does say that the criterion of morality is truth or conformity to reality. But, when he is asked, what truth must be conformed to, to constitute virtue? he is compelled to answer, truths concerning personality. And when he is pushed back still further and asked, but how, in particular, can one contradict the nature of personality or conform to the nature of personality? he has, practically, said that we must behave in such a way as to promote human happiness. One cannot be said to be living true, when he is promoting human misery. The case mentioned by Wollaston of failing to go to the assistance of a man grievously hurt is a case in point; after saying that by so acting, one denies "human nature to be what it is," he then, to all appearance, explicates his meaning in terms of Hedonism. He, who so treats a human being, thereby denies "those desires and expectations, which I am conscious to myself I should have under the like misfortune, to be what they are."<sup>16</sup> The same resort to Hedonism is made when Wollaston wishes to explain degrees of crime. It is true that he says that immorality consists in the viola-

<sup>14</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Butler, *Preface to Sermons*.

<sup>16</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

tions of truth, but when he tries to explain these violations of truth in concrete human terms, it appears that it is human happiness which is violated. The one who steals a book deprives the proprietor of happiness. "It is true A is guilty of a crime in not treating the book as being what it is, but if A should deprive B of a good estate he would be guilty of a much greater crime." Why? Because of the love of happiness accruing to B from the estate than from the book. Wollaston, though, takes the position that happiness is just truth violated, and so makes his ultimate criterion not happiness but truth.<sup>17</sup>

There is a notion held by some moralists that a purely intellectual system of ethics will be absolutely abstract, and consequently entirely unrelated to the actual world of lives among which we live. This has certainly characterized the intuitional intellectualism in morals. A proper evaluation of happiness, it is said, relates morals more closely to real life. I think that there is considerable truth in this contention. Certainly a view of ethics that entirely disregarded such an important human consideration can be no true guide to life. In fact those who interpret Wollaston intuitionally say that he would have one conform to the absolute truth, regardless of all human consequences. They mention especially his hesitancy to tell a lie, even to save a life.<sup>18</sup>

Now, one can take a position that considers happiness of the very highest importance without going over to Hedonism. It is possible to treat happiness purely objectively, and when so considered it is evaluated according to the criterion of truth just as other life values. I think that Carneri is correct in thinking that Wollaston truly harmonized truth and happiness. He says that "the sensualistic principle . . . lent . . . the weight of experience or at least never permitted Wollaston to lose himself in metaphysical

<sup>17</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Bott, *Refutation of "The Reli. of Nat. Delin."* p. 20. J. Clarke, *Examination of "The Reli. of Nat. Delin."* p. 61. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 27.



flights." Carneri characterizes his ethics as "realistic" or objective. It was rationalistic in the sense that the nature of morality was "deduced not from a specific impulse of the individual, but from the fitness of things." It was not, however, rationalistic in the sense that human feelings were disregarded. There results from the life lived "conformably with the nature of things . . . a general harmony for the individual." He says that Wollaston determined the good, not abstractly but in view of "the results" that may naturally be expected. So the good, he came to regard, as that which can be expected to lead to the happiness and well being of the individual and of society. Carneri very truly says, that this placing of "the mark of the good on an objective basis (*das Markmal des Guten in die Objectivität*)" necessarily had the "fruitful result of reinterpreting truth." When speaking morally, anyway, truth must mean not just "abstract coherency (*Zusammenhang*)" but real human desires and life relations, that is *die Wahrheit* must also be thought of objectively.<sup>19</sup>

Windelband says that in order for Wollaston to prove that actions which have "*diese logische Richtigkeit . . . nothwendig auch zur Glückseligkeit führen*," he must substitute for his abstract logical criterion, which is purely intellectual, Clarke's idea of "fitness." I do not feel this difference between the two systems. I think that Wollaston's system is as objective as is Clarke's. Wollaston says that morality is acting in conformity to the nature and relations of things. It is simply being as true in action as in thought. Clarke, it seems to me, just used somewhat different language to express the same general meaning. He says that the moral act is the fitting act. In one place in Wollaston's work he used Clarke's term.<sup>20</sup> Windelband says that in order to prove that the moral act which is in agreement with truth, i. e., "has a correct logical content," also leads to happiness one must show "how the treatment of relations, which rest on a correct knowledge of the same, brings about

<sup>19</sup> Carneri, *Grundlegung der Ethik*, p. 407.

<sup>20</sup> Windelband, *Gesch. der Neuen Phil.*, vol. I, p. 266. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 43. Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 45.

for the agent a favorable form of the same." This does not seem to me to be true. Why can we not believe, with Wollaston, that happiness really ought to be the result of a life of truth and that it would really be the most contradictory thing conceivable for it to result otherwise? Just as it would be inconceivable for morality to be contradictory to truth and reality, so also is it inconceivable for goodness and truth not to lead to happiness.<sup>21</sup>

Gass interprets Wollaston as meaning that a life of truth leads necessarily to happiness. The life of conformity to the true nature of things ought to result in happiness, for it would not be according to the nature of things for it to result otherwise. It would be unfitting for a good life to result in unhappiness. Gass says that the "appropriateness recommends itself through itself (*das Wohlbemessene empfiehlt sich durch sich selbst*). It makes the impression of the fitting, . . . and through its rule it guarantees also happiness (*verbürgt durch seine Herrschaft auch die Glückseligkeit*)." I understand Gass to say that Wollaston teaches that the life of truth is to be lived, not primarily, because it leads to happiness but because it is appropriate and fitting. He very truly says, however, that Wollaston does teach that the true life will be happy. He goes so far as to say, as we will see later, that the next life must make right the contradictions of this.<sup>22</sup>

Noack also interprets Wollaston's system as an effort to reconcile the inclinations and the reason. Happiness is not to be thought of as an additional principle, thinks Noack, but instead he understands Wollaston to teach that "with the moral purpose of the truth that of happiness coincides" for happiness is nothing but "the sum of true pleasures." In other words, he says, that Wollaston insists that happiness is to be treated just as we treat other things and that it is to be similarly evaluated according to its true place and purpose in life. "A being is to be pronounced happy to the

<sup>21</sup> Windelband, *Gesch. der Neuen Phil.*, vol. I, p. 267. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 38-9 and 43.

<sup>22</sup> Gass, *Gesch. der Christlichen Ethik*, p. 19. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 72 and 113-14.

extent that its pleasures are true. . . . A rational being cannot find happiness in irrational pleasures without contradiction; therefore only that makes man happy which is in accord with reason. Therefore the way to happiness and the realization of truth blend, and it is therefore the duty of every being to strive honestly after the realization of reason (äufrechtig nach der ausübung der Vernunft zu streben).” This should be done for there is no other way to realize either goodness, truth or happiness, except through a life lived conformably to reason, both in theoretical and in practical matters.<sup>23</sup>

## II

### AN EXAMINATION OF THE HEDONISTIC INTERPRETATION OF WOLLASTON

I think that there is far more ground for the criticism that Wollaston's system is, in the last analysis, hedonistic than for any of the other objections that have been offered to his ethical philosophy. He certainly reacted very strongly against the asceticism and rigorism that have generally characterized rationalistic ethics, but the question is, did he go over to the other extreme,—that of Hedonism? Many think that he did.

The writer of the unsigned article in the *Britannica* on Wollaston goes so far as to say that he subordinated truth to happiness. “Wollaston starts with the assumption that religion and morality are identical and labors to show that religion is the pursuit of happiness by the practice of truth and reason.<sup>24</sup> He then proceeds to say, continues the article, that moral evil is the practical denial of a true proposition, and moral good the affirmation of it. The article makes it very clear that Wollaston discusses the nature of good and evil, primarily, because to be happy a man must

<sup>23</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 38-9. Noack, *Geschichtliches Lexikon der Philosophie*, p. 931.

<sup>24</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 43-4 and 52. Anon., *Art. Wollaston*, in *Britan.*

pursue the one and avoid the other. Truth and goodness must be practiced because these are the necessary preconditions of happiness, which is for Wollaston the goal of life. Granting this to be a true interpretation, it is not, truly speaking, a hedonistic interpretation of morality for the criterion, even though it be but instrumental, is not feeling but truth. Happiness is, to be sure, thought to be the end of life but it is given an objective signification. The goal of life is happiness but to attain happiness one must be good. The way to be good is to conform one's life to the truth, which means living conformably with the real nature and relations of things, or "treating everything as that which it is."<sup>25</sup> I think that it can be shown from Wollaston's own writing that he makes truth the real end of life rather than happiness, and that he considers happiness one of the things which should be sought, both for ourselves and for others, because it is one of the true goods of life.<sup>26</sup> "There are," he says, "some ends which the nature of things and truth require us to aim at, and at which therefore if we do not aim, nature and truth are denied. If a man does not desire to prevent evils, and to be happy, he denies both his own nature and the nature of happiness to be what they are. And then further, willingly to neglect the means, leading to such an end, is the same as not to propose the end, and must fall under the same censure."<sup>27</sup> I understand Wollaston to be saying in this passage, and this passage is truly representative of his position, that it is our duty to be happy and that it is wrong not to seek our own happiness, but I do not understand him to say that this is the only goal of life, and that happiness should be sought at the expense and to the exclusion of other true things of life.

Hurst says that Wollaston's "creed was the pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth," but he does not stop here but goes on and gives this an extreme interpretation, namely, that "he was the Epicurean of the system which he adopted." This, as we have seen, is an entirely

<sup>25</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 8, 13, 38-9, and 43-4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. Anon., *Art. Wollaston*, in *Britan.*



wrong interpretation of that passage, because Wollaston is here discussing the ultimate coincidence of truth and happiness. In this sense, namely, from the point of view of eternity he can define Natural Religion "as the pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth."<sup>28</sup> Bentham interprets the ethics of Wollaston in the same way as does Hurst. He reduces the extreme intellectualism of Wollaston to nothing but the necessary means to the getting of happiness. "We have," says Bentham, "one philosopher, who says that there is no harm in anything in the world but in telling a lie; and that if, for example, you were to murder your own father, this would only be a particular way of saying, he was not your father. Of course, when this philosopher sees anything that he does not like, he says, it is a particular way of telling a lie. It is saying, that the act ought to be done, when, in truth, it ought not to be done." Bentham thinks that all systems of ethics appeal, in the last analysis, to the principle of happiness, so, quite naturally, he makes of Wollaston's intellectualism the mere rules for the attainment of happiness, the one thing desirable in life. Things other than happiness may be sought but only as means to the attainment of happiness. Wollaston was an exceedingly wise calculator, but, nevertheless, he was a hedonist, a seeker of happiness and that only. In commenting on Wollaston's notion of morality as conformity to nature, he says: "To say that an act is unnatural or repugnant to nature means, ultimately, that I do not like it. It is, therefore, repugnant to what ought to be the nature of everybody else."<sup>29</sup> Very similar to that of Hurst and Bentham is the interpretation of La Rossignol. He says that for Wollaston: "Happiness is the ethical end, and virtue the means to it." This estimation of Wollaston gives the impression that he considered virtue only instrumental, that he would advocate virtue only when it seemed the necessary means to happiness; or, at least, that he does not teach that men ought to live virtuously for any other reason than that a

<sup>28</sup> Hurst, *His. of Rationalism*, p. 101. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> Bentham, *Principles of Morals in British Moralists*, p. 348.

life of virtue is the necessary pre-condition of a life of happiness.<sup>30</sup>

John Brown's interpretation is very much the same as those I have just considered. He tries to convict Wollaston of Hedonism: "In every instance that Wollaston brings, the happiness of man is the single end to which his rule of truth verges in an unvaried manner." Brown undertakes to prove that Wollaston really made the differentia of virtue and vice, not truth but pleasure, and as a proof of this he considers Wollaston's own case of talking to a post. "He considered," says Brown, "the talking to a post as an absurdity," but "he is far from condemning it as an immoral action." Why did Wollaston consider talking to a post absurd but not immoral, he asks, if conformity to the nature of things is his real criterion of morality "for certainly one who talks to a post is far from conforming his actions to the nature of things"? Brown says that in the very same passage in which Wollaston discusses talking to a post he gives an instance of the violation of moral truth. In giving this instance he has, says Brown, recourse to man, "and not only so but to the happiness of man" as the only possible kind of case of the violation of moral truth. He says that the only reason Wollaston gives for saying that it is morally wrong to treat a man as a post and not wrong to treat a post as a man is that a man is capable of happiness while a post is not. Brown claims, further, that Wollaston judges truth entirely by the standard of happiness, proving it to be, in his estimation, a more ultimate moral principle than that of truth. "And I would gladly know," Wollaston asks, "how one truth can be more important than another, unless upon this principle, and in reference to the production of happiness." (This supposed quotation is not found in Wollaston.) Brown goes on to say that "Wollaston, indeed, confirms his interpretation when he speaks as follows: The truth violated in the former case was, B had a property in that, which gave him such a degree of happiness; that violated in the later was a greater violation . . . in that it gave him a happiness vastly superior to the other. The vio-

<sup>30</sup> La Rossignol, *Ethical Philosophy of Samuel Clarke*, p. 88.

lation therefore in the later case, upon this account, is a vastly greater violation than in the former."<sup>31</sup> I understand Wollaston's position to be that happiness is a real aspect of true personality and so persons can be violated in that way, but equally so by the violation of anything pertaining to persons. Wollaston says that when he speaks of acts inconsistent with truth he means any truth whatsoever: "I would have everything taken to be what in fact and truth it is." Elsewhere, however, he says, that there are degrees of good and evil dependent upon and determined by the importance of the truth violated. But, asks his hedonistic critics, what determines this importance? and they are very sure that he is compelled to answer that human happiness is the measure of the importance of truth. Wollaston does say that it is worse to steal an estate than a book, because the owner of the estate is deprived of more happiness. In a sense he may be said also to anticipate Utilitarianism, in this instance, for he says that not only the man himself but also his family, his descendents, will be deprived of happiness if he is deprived of an estate, whereas the deprivation in case of the book is a trifling matter in comparison. It seems to me, however, that Wollaston's position in these cases where happiness is specifically mentioned as suffering violation is really that nature, reality, personality is violated.<sup>32</sup> Albee says, in this connection, that "Wollaston professed to vindicate the absolute character of virtue . . . really introduced hedonistic considerations at the crucial point."<sup>33</sup> There is considerable ground for this estimation of his philosophy. In reply, however, we can say that there is just as much reason to say that, in the last analysis, Hedonism "introduced" other "considerations at the crucial point." I refer particularly to the qualitative distinctions between pleasures, implying a criterion other than that of pleasure.

<sup>31</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 23, 20 and 172-3. Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics*, pp. 172-3.

<sup>32</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Albee, *His. of English Utilitarianism*, p. 84.

## III

AN EXAMINATION OF THE UTILITARIAN INTERPRETATION OF  
WOLLASTON

The only objection that I have to classifying Wollaston as a utilitarian is the historic identification of Utilitarianism with Universalistic Hedonism. It is true that John Stuart Mill's principle, "the greatest good of the greatest number," is a fair statement of Wollaston's ethical ideal. In order, however, for this to serve as his formula it must be given a very decided objective interpretation and it must be absolutely divorced from Psychological Hedonism. Mill, and this has been true of the utilitarians generally, uses the formula "the greatest good of the greatest number" interchangeably with the formula "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Wollaston does not identify the two meanings but would subsume happiness under the other as a case of something which makes for human welfare. But more important than this is the other difference, namely, their very different attitudes towards happiness itself. Mill makes a great advance over his predecessors in that he universalized happiness, but it is also true that he never disconnected his system from that of Psychological Hedonism. In fact he still holds to Psychological Hedonism and starts from it as a self-evident fact. He says that the only reason why everyone should seek to realize "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" is, because each one does, as a matter of fact, desire his own happiness.<sup>34</sup> Wollaston makes a great deal of happiness but he thinks of it as an objective good that should be sought for ourselves and for all men. He thinks of happiness as being an effect of true living, but he thinks that we should plan with reference to happiness in so far as we can anticipate. He would agree with Clarke that actions are only good or evil according as they tend to the benefit or disadvantage of all men. Lines of conduct that result in human misery can be de-

<sup>34</sup> J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chap. IV. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 103. Sidgwick's *Method of Ethics*, Bk. III, chap. XIII, p. 3.



nominated bad, and those that make for human happiness are good. But Wollaston says that this is only saying that in treating things according to their natures, in acting conformably with the real nature of things, that above all else human beings should be considered, and that this means looking out for their happiness and their welfare.<sup>35</sup>

In discussing moral laws and natural relations Selby-Bigge has a line of argument by which he thinks he proves that Wollaston's intellectual principle of evaluating conduct reduces finally to Utilitarianism. It is possible to show "that immoral action is absurd" in the sense that it defeats "its own end," in that it commits the "material absurdity" of "seeking satisfaction in pursuits which cannot afford it." Wollaston uses "material absurdity as a test of vice," says Selby-Bigge. "It appears as the absurdity of treating things as other than they are, the absurdity of treating men as brutes and brutes as stones, of ignoring the natures of things. . . . This line of argument . . . leads easily into Utilitarianism, for to treat men as they are is to treat them primarily as capable of happiness."<sup>36</sup> Taking Wollaston's entire system into consideration this only means that man's real nature and happiness and the good of society must be considered as things essentially real and so deserving of realization. I cannot see that this is going over to Utilitarianism, for treating men as men, as creatures desiring and capable of happiness is but conforming to an aspect of their nature, or treating them as what they are. What Wollaston really does is to treat men not as creatures capable of desiring happiness and as that only, but he treats them as that and treats happiness as one essential aspect of man's nature.<sup>37</sup>

Leslie Stephen says that "Wollaston slides into Utilitarianism." From the bare formula that "what is, is," and as necessarily following from that that everything should be treated accordingly; he passes to the statement "that

<sup>35</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 40-2. Clarke, *Nat. Reli. in British Moralists*, 524.

<sup>36</sup> Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, pp. XXXI-II. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 24 and 38.

<sup>37</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 37-9.

happiness must not be denied to be what it is.”<sup>38</sup> He goes still further towards Utilitarianism, thinks Leslie Stephen, when he says “it is by the practice of truth that we arrive at that happiness which is true.”<sup>39</sup> I do not think that he makes good the accusation that Wollaston finally resorts to Utilitarianism for his ultimate principle of morality. It seems to me that what he really proves is that Wollaston extends the principle of truth to include happiness. His quotations from Wollaston prove that he makes truth the criterion of morality, and since true happiness is a desirable human state that it should be sought as anything else that is true and in conformity to the nature of things.<sup>40</sup>

In one passage Erdmann gives Wollaston an interpretation that would be denominated utilitarian. “He proceeds to the consideration of mankind and after he has designated happiness as the purpose of the society of mankind, also as the purpose of the living together of people in general, he deducts therefrom the law that nothing must happen which disturbs the happiness of other people, but then it is finally not only a privilege to further one’s own happiness, but a duty, since the neglect of the same involves the proposition that happiness is not happiness.” Erdmann is right in saying that Wollaston ranks happiness very high, but I do not think that we can say that he considered it the purpose of human society.<sup>41</sup>

Historically, intellectualism in morals in England has been largely of the intuitional type. For this reason Sidgwick says the other school triumphed. Because intuitional methods were discredited the emotional view of morals became popular, with the result that duty lost its objectivity and morality became a subjective matter. “Only after the extreme position to which Hume finally carried this view, was its dangerous character perceived and also the necessity of bringing into prominence again the cognitive element in moral consciousness.” Sidgwick thinks Wollaston signifi-

<sup>38</sup> L. Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, vol. II, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der Neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 122.

cant in that he duly considered the objective side of morals and the intellect as the moral faculty. "Rightness and wrongness," he says, "must be made dependent upon certain general characteristics of the action, agent and circumstances; and accordingly that the moral truth apprehended must be essentially universal, though particular in our apprehension of it."<sup>42</sup> He says in another passage that "Wollaston sought to exhibit the more fundamental of the received rules as axioms of perfect self-evidence, necessarily forced upon the mind in contemplating human beings in their relations, but Wollaston also took the position that the results of actions, in so far as they can be anticipated, are to be considered and constitute important facts in the motivation."<sup>43</sup> It is this consideration of results of actions that make his system objective. The most important result that can be anticipated and that consequently enters into the motivation is happiness. Considering happiness as one of the results of actions to be taken into consideration, is very different from psychological Hedonism, which takes the position that the action is determined by feeling. Wollaston's position, then, is really rationalistic and objective for he considers everything.<sup>44</sup>

Wollaston's attempt to consider all sides of life and to make ethics objective, by insisting that happiness or unhappiness as the probable result of an action must enter into the motivation, was misunderstood from the very first. Bott, a contemporary of his, thinks that Wollaston is forced to desert the standard of truth, which he started out to maintain, and to accept in its stead the standard of happiness. He thinks that Wollaston resorts to Hedonism, because there is no other way by which the importance of truths can be estimated. That which most promotes human happiness is the most important. Wollaston thinks that this is only applying the criterion of truth to all of life, but this is not Bott's interpretation. After considering Wollaston's intel-

<sup>42</sup> Sidgwick, *Method of Ethics*, pp. 100-2. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Sidgwick, *Method of Ethics*, pp. 100-4. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 11, 14, and 19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

lectual criterion, he says, that "it is observable that he does not always keep strictly to his definition." He is, says Bott, occasionally "forced . . . to vary his notion of morality; and to consider truth, not merely as truth, but according to the importance of it, or its influence upon the state and circumstances of men."<sup>45</sup> Wollaston goes so far towards Hedonism as to define "Natural Religion to be the pursuit of happiness, by the practice of reason and truth."<sup>46</sup> In another passage, says Bott, Wollaston says "I have shown in what the nature of moral good and evil consists, namely, a conformity or disagreement to truth, and those things that are coincident with it, reason and happiness."<sup>47</sup> Bott interprets these passages to mean that Wollaston "takes into his notion of morality, not only the practice of truth, but also the influence of that truth upon the welfare and happiness of mankind. So that morality, according to him, is the practice of such reason and truth, as will have an influence upon human happiness." He says "if there be any such truth, as in its nature has no influence this way, nor can have any, it has nothing to do with morality."<sup>48</sup> Bott is disposed to accept this view of morality as true, but he does not see how Wollaston can reconcile it with his criterion of truth.<sup>49</sup> This reconciliation, Wollaston seeks to effect, by saying that it is true human happiness and true human welfare that constitutes the most important of all truths. It is this that constitutes the standard "by which the importance of truths ought to be measured."<sup>50</sup>

Wollaston agrees entirely with Bott that all other truths, except those related to human life are, morally speaking, relatively unimportant. It by no means follows from this that truth is not his ultimate criterion, for his treatment of happiness is objective. This fact Bott entirely overlooks. It is very significant because when happiness is considered

<sup>45</sup> Bott, *Defence of Wollaston's Notion of Good and Evil*, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 52.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-42.

<sup>49</sup> Bott, *Defence of Wollaston's Notion of Good and Evil*, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



objectively it becomes an object of knowledge and a relation to be considered. Bott's failure to understand Wollaston is due to the fact that he thinks Wollaston means by conformity to truth, conformity to purely abstract formal truth. That this is by no means the case is proven by his many illustrations. Wollaston uses abstract propositions only as representative of values innumerable. There could, of course, be no real conformity to mere abstract truth, except in a formal way, for such truths have no factual existence and morality must be acts conformable to the facts of the universe. Wollaston would agree entirely with what Bott says about the writing pen. "Indeed, let a truth be ever so trifling, e. g., that the pen I am writing with is four inches long; if I know it, and yet assert it is but three, I am guilty of an immorality: why? Not because I offend against truth, or assert what is really false, but because I assert what I think or know to be false; and so am guilty of such an act, as tends to breed distrust and uneasiness. That this is the true reason and not the other is evident; because the guilt would be the same, if, though the pen were really four inches long, I, through a mistake, thought it was but three, and yet asserted it was four."<sup>51</sup> This simply means, from our author's point of view, that one must above all else be true to human relations, the most important of all truths. Bott is not true to the facts when he says that one does not offend against truth when he wills to deceive unless the statement made is contrary to fact. "An act which tends to breed distrust and uneasiness" is false to human relations, morally speaking the all-important thing. After saying what he does about even "trifling" truths being respected, Bott ought to appreciate Wollaston's hesitation to advocate a lie, for lying tends to disrupt human relations and to reduce the world to a chaos.<sup>52</sup>

I think that Bott's view of Ethics was essentially the same as that of Wollaston, I mean as to the naturalness of morality and as to the ultimate coincidence of truth, good-

<sup>51</sup> Bott, *Examination of Wollaston's Notion of Good and Evil*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

ness and happiness. In proof of this I wish to call attention to the contents of his chief work: "An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Warbuton's Divine Legation, &c.," in which he censures Warburton for making morality dependent upon the command of a superior being. There is also an extant sermon of his called, "Morality Founded in the Reason of Things."

John Clarke, a contemporary of Bott, makes a similar criticism of the position of Wollaston. He, too, thinks that Wollaston finally resorts to happiness because the intellectual criterion is inadequate. He says that "the practice of truth, or conduct conformable to truth" can be recommended, not as a thing desirable in and for itself, without reference to aught else, but only as a means for the attaining of happiness. This conformity to truth," Clarke admits, to be "the way to happiness, the true end of life. He says that Wollaston, however inconsistently, came finally to this view. He says that this is proven by his own case of seeking to determine the difference of crime between stealing a book and an estate. The importance of the truth violated he makes to depend upon how much or how little "they conduce to happiness." So he says that Wollaston comes to the view that conformity to truth receives its value and importance from its tendency to produce happiness.<sup>53</sup> So Wollaston must finally grant, says John Clarke, "that what has in its nature, a tendency to promote the well being and happiness of mankind, is morally good, and what has a contrary tendency, morally evil."<sup>54</sup>

John Clarke says "supposing every immoral action, and none but such, did interfere with, or imply a denial of truth, . . . then indeed the interfering with or denying truth would be a certain criterion, whereby to distinguish immoral actions from what is not so; but still the nature of immorality . . . would not consist of that denial, but something else; for if it did, the degrees too of moral evil would depend upon that only." There would, on that assumption, be a concomitant variation between immorality of acts and

<sup>53</sup> J. Clarke, *Exami. of Wollaston's Notion of Good and Evil*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

the number of truths denied, which is not true. This proves that the criterion of morality is not that of conformity to truth.<sup>55</sup> Wollaston uses the method of concomitant variation; but, he, inadvertently, proved thereby, that the real criterion of morality is happiness rather than truth. Wollaston does not pretend, says Clarke, to determine the degrees of morality by the number of truths affirmed nor the degrees of immorality "by the number of truths violated, which he ought to have done, did immorality consist barely and precisely in the violation of truth, as he affirms when he tells us, that the idea and formal ratio of moral evil consists in acting a lie."<sup>56</sup> He has thought fit to take in the importance of truths violated as well as number.<sup>57</sup> The degrees of evil . . . are as the importance and number of truths violated."<sup>58</sup> The importance of truths is determined by the principle of happiness. Clarke takes Wollaston to task for saying that "all denial of truth . . . is . . . immoral." This means that happiness becomes the real criterion, because it alone can determine the importance of the truths conformed to, or violated.<sup>59</sup> There is no immorality in violating many truths, but only those conducive to human happiness. There are cases, says Clarke, when the moral principle of the happiness of mankind demands that we violate truth. Like Bott he makes a great deal of Wollaston's hesitation to violate truth for even humanity's sake.<sup>60</sup> As a matter of fact his position is that "an abuse of language is allowable" in such extreme cases. He says "all sins against truth are not equal, and certainly a little trespassing upon it in the present case," a case of saving a man from a murderer, "for the good of all parties" is "as little a one as any."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> J. Clarke, *Exami. of Wollaston's Notion of Good and Evil*, p. 56. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 138.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> J. Clarke, *Examination of Wollaston's Notion of Good*, p. 59.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51. Bott, *Consideration of Wollaston's Notion*, p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 27.

## IV

AN EXAMINATION OF THE DUALISTIC INTERPRETATION OF  
WOLLASTON

Some of the critics of Wollaston take the position that there is an ultimate dualism in his system. They are not entirely agreed as to whether this is a dualism as to the criterion of morality or as to the ideal of life. The former say that the moral criterion is a dual one, made up of reason and happiness. The later say that there is a dualism as to goodness and happiness as the end of life. Wollaston seems to have thought that truth is the way both to a life of goodness and to a life of happiness. Happiness enters into the motivation but objectively, consequently it is not an aspect of the criterion. Perhaps there is more ground for the dualistic interpretation "in regard to the goal of life," but I think that he had a profound faith in the ultimate coincidence of truth, goodness and happiness.

Sidgwick says that Wollaston clearly recognized "the duality of the regulative principles in human nature," a thing which the Greek and Roman Stoics did not recognize. The Stoic formula of "living according to nature" is also his formula, but whereas the Stoics had only one regulative principle, that of reason, Wollaston has two, reason and happiness." Sidgwick says that "here," in Wollaston's book, "for the first time, we find moral good and natural good or happiness treated separately as two essentially distinct objects of rational pursuit and investigation; the harmony of them being regarded as a matter of religious faith, not moral knowledge."<sup>62</sup> His consideration of happiness as a "justly desirable" end, at which every rational being ought to aim, Sidgwick interprets hedonistically, saying that it "corresponds exactly to Butler's conception of self-love as a natural governing impulse. He says, also, that "the moral arithmetic" with which he compares pleasures and pains is an endeavor "to make the notion of happiness quantitatively precise," and anticipates Benthamism.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Sidgwick, *His. of Ethics*, p. 197.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.



Falckenberg says that: "To the equation of truth and morality happiness is added as a third identical member." He seems to think that Wollaston makes of happiness an entirely distinct principle that acts along with truth and morality. He makes neither truth nor happiness the one criterion of morality, according to Falckenberg, but they are both involved.<sup>64</sup> I do not think that he understands Wollaston, because he certainly speaks of true and false pleasures and of morality as true and of immorality as false.<sup>65</sup> It is also true that Wollaston says that morality and happiness, as well as truth, are conformity to the nature of things. True the former are in practical conformity, the later in theoretical conformity. A rational being contradicts itself when it pursues irrational pleasures or does an immoral act.<sup>66</sup>

Hall says that "Wollaston leaves an unresolved antimony between the ought and happiness. He says plainly that 'to make itself happy is a duty which every being, in proportion to its capacity, owes to itself, and which every intelligent being may be supposed to aim at in general,' but as to a correspondence between duty and happiness he can only say: Now, present pleasure is for the present agreeable, but if it be not true and he who enjoys it must pay more for it than it is worth, it cannot be good for him. This therefore cannot be happiness." And he has a robust faith, says Hall, that the practice of truth cannot make any being ultimately unhappy, but Hall thinks that Wollaston's own doctrine of probalism, "where certainty is not to be had," reveals the fact that the correspondence between truth and happiness is not so easily proven as his theory demands.<sup>67</sup> There is, we must admit an unresolved antimony between the ought and happiness so far as this life is concerned; but if the universe is rational consistency will demand that we believe in the ultimate happiness of the good.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Falckenberg, *His. of Modern Phil.*, p. 189.

<sup>65</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 13 and 38.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec. III, 16. Hall, *Christian Ethics*, p. 453.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-3 and 113-14.

I think that some of the writers have inferred that Wollaston has a dual criterion because Clarke has. While Clarke, with the Stoics, affirms the theoretical self-sufficiency of virtue and insists that it is reasonable to choose virtue, yet he is equally insistent upon the point that men cannot be expected to choose it, if it be not rewarded with happiness. Clarke sought to reconcile the apparent contradiction between reason and happiness, which are irreconcilable from the purely rationalistic point of view of Stoicism, by bringing in the sanctions of religion, rewards and punishments of a future life. There is nothing of the kind in Wollaston. He deals with the problem purely rationalistically and says of happiness simply that it is reasonable to treat it, like every other true thing, as what it is, a desirable human state.<sup>69</sup> Men are virtuous when they act according to the nature of things. Happiness, of course, both in this life and in the life to come will be the natural result of a life lived truly, but such prospects are not treated as the necessary incentive to make one do his duty.<sup>70</sup> Clarke just brought in happiness as a sanction, whereas Wollaston did not, that is the main difference between the two philosophers. In the main they agree even as to the subject of happiness. "The Deity," says Clarke, "acts according to the eternal relations of things, in order to the welfare of the whole universe," and subordinate moral agents ought "to be governed by the same rules for the good of the public." He thus, very rightly, sees the social order as a part of the divine order, moral rules as a part of a higher rationality.<sup>71</sup> I would agree with Burnett that this is just about the way Wollaston thought of the general happiness of mankind. He says that, according to Wollaston, what makes the desire of public happiness a reasonable end is the truth "that it is best that all should be happy. That it is best that all should be happy is necessarily perceivable by all rational natures."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 38-40. Clarke, *Evidences*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>71</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli. in British Moralists*, 482.

<sup>72</sup> Burnett, *Art. in London Journal*, p. 214.

After, to all appearance, completely understanding the moral principle of Wollaston to be an objective one, that of conformity of life to the nature of things, Erdmann then proceeds to say that he brought in happiness as an additional principle. He says that Wollaston made the distinction between basing morality upon a subjective basis, of an inner imperative or a priori laws of morality, and of basing it on an objective foundation. Since there are no common principles innate in the mind of man morality must be based on the objective foundation of conformity to nature. But, says Erdmann, this distinction seems not to have satisfied Wollaston and so he introduces into his ethics still another idea, the idea of happiness. He, now, tries to prove "that seeking happiness coincides with the realization of truth (*das Suchen Glücklichkeit mit dem Verwirklichen der Wahrheit zusammenfalle*)."<sup>73</sup> Both, he says, are so bound up together that neither is thinkable without the other, and the one is determined by the other. Erdmann interprets Wollaston as believing that virtue is its own reward, but that he "is not content with this, but points also to the reward which such action is to have. This reward consists in happiness, the balance of pleasure over pain." He then undertakes to explicate Wollaston's treatment of happiness. In order to define the idea of happiness he starts, says Erdmann, with pleasure and he arrives at the conclusion that happiness is nothing but the sum of true pleasures. Happiness, since pains must be considered, consists in the excess of pleasure over pain, namely, in pure and true pleasure. "This cannot exist in something which contradicts one's own nature (*Dieses kann nicht in Etwas bestehn, was der eignen Natur widerspricht*); Whatever conflicts with one's own nature or is destructive of it cannot be pleasant, and just therefore it cannot render one happy."<sup>73</sup> Erdmann thinks that Wollaston does not really prove the proposition that combines the principle of happiness and that of truth. In order to prove the coincidence of happiness and truth, Wollaston, he thinks, is compelled to resort finally to the idea of God. He tries to show that if a creature were unhappy by opposing its own

<sup>73</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, pp. 118-20.

nature and God's plans, it would thereby show itself more powerful than God, which would be absurd. That there is a gap here, Erdmann thinks, cannot be denied; and it is due, he thinks, to the fact that Wollaston "stand here on the threshold, so to speak, which leads to a more advanced view of ethics which, with an empirical basis, is inevitable, namely, pure Eudæmonism. But only on the threshold, and therefore he asserts throughout, that the objective nature of things determines actions, at the same time, however, he already divines, that the determining factor is only one's own pleasure."<sup>74</sup>

It is very interesting that Erdmann should differ so absolutely in his conception of happiness in Wollaston's system, from Hume and from English Hedonists generally. While they take the position that Wollaston neglects feeling as the necessary dynamic to action, Erdmann criticizes him on the very ground that his Eudæmonism is mixed with Hedonism, that while his ideal and criterion of morality is objective he still thinks that the subjective principle of pleasure largely determines actions. Erdmann thinks that Wollaston found himself in the same difficulty in which Mill found himself, years afterwards, I mean in regard to the gap between psychological and ethical Hedonism. Everyone desires pleasure, this is a psychological fact, but what is there that is ethical about it? And how can we reason from that evident psychological fact to the moral idea that everyone should seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number? Mill, as is well known, made the leap by a fallacy of Ambiguous Middle, namely, by giving "desired" and "desirable" the same connotation.<sup>75</sup> Erdmann represents Wollaston as finding as a connecting link ("Mittleglied") the fact that pleasure and pain are only "what is in accord with one's own nature and purpose (was der eignen Natur und Bestimmung entspreche)."<sup>76</sup> Erdmann says that "this Mittleglied, however, remains an as-

<sup>74</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, pp. 117-8. Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 462.

<sup>75</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 39.



surance only." He says that Wollaston thinks that he has established the truth of the position and proceeds as if he had really proved, what he only postulates, that truth and happiness coincide. He goes on in his depiction of Wollaston: "Only that can give true happiness what is in accord with the purpose of the being. If the being is of a double nature, animal and human, like man, the principle of truth would require that true happiness could be realized only by that which is in accord with his noble part (was der Bestimmung seines edlern Theils entspricht). Therefore only that makes men happy which corresponds with reason. If the irrational gives man pleasure, he thereby contradicts himself (Macht dem Menschen das Unvernünftige Vergnügen, so setzt er sich mit selbst in Widerspruch). By the enjoyment of the irrational pleasure one declares himself to be an irrational being (ein unvernünftiges Wesen), which is an untrue proposition."<sup>77</sup> It may be that Wollaston did not take the position that immorality is the affirmation of a false proposition, but rather that it is a practical denial of a true proposition, a very different thing.<sup>78</sup>

Erdmann thinks that Wollaston has faith in the rationality of the universe and that this faith is Natural Religion. "Since the realization of truth and the seeking of happiness are one and the same thing, all Natural Religion is based on the harmony of truth, reason and happiness; and, as real definition, it is declared that it is the seeking of happiness through the realization of truth and reason (das Suchen der Glückseligkeit durch Verwirklichen der Wahrheit und Vernunft)."<sup>79</sup> From Erdmann's previous discussion, we would not have expected him to agree to this hedonistic definition of religion. This definition certainly subordinates truth to happiness, whereas Erdmann has, so far, interpreted Wollaston as treating them as dual principles of morality. The only possible way of reconciling these very different interpretations is to say that Erdmann under-

<sup>77</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 117. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>78</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 9. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>79</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 119.

stands Wollaston, to not only subordinate truth to happiness, but to make of morality itself only a necessary means to happiness and not an end in itself. It is not unfair to say that Wollaston considers reason in an instrumental way, that is, as instrumental to the realization of life. He does not agree with Kant that the actual literal truth should be told in every case in life. While he hesitates to violate the least truth, still verbal truth is subordinated to life's true meanings.<sup>80</sup> While Wollaston does treat truth instrumentally, it is not true that he ever subordinates truth to happiness in his moral system. If there is any subordination it is the other way, and Erdmann's own interpretation, taken as a whole, conveys that impression. Happiness is good only when founded on truth, on the real nature of things. This is undoubtedly Wollaston's position.<sup>81</sup>

Vorländer takes a position very similar to that of Erdmann, in fact there is some evidence of dependence of the one on the other. Vorländer, though, differs from Erdmann in that he does not find Wollaston at all self-contradictory in his treatment of truth and happiness. He says that Wollaston was able to show that "the moral aim of truth coincides with that of happiness (das mit dem sittlichen Ziel der Wahrheit das der Glückseligkeit zusammenfalle)," because a being can be called happy "only when his pleasures are true."<sup>82</sup> Vorländer is very true to Wollaston in his interpretation in that he says that true happiness is to be found, not so much in freedom from pain or in excess of pleasure over pain, but in conformity to the nature of personality and to the nature of things. "The true and highest happiness of a being cannot be produced by something which contradicts truth and denies the nature of things (Das wahre und höchste Glück eines Wesens kann nicht durch etwas hervorgebracht werden, was der Wahrheit widerspricht und die Natur der Dinge velengnet)." Vorländer interprets Wollas-

<sup>80</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, p. 119. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38. Vorländer, *Gesch. der Philosophischen Moral, etc.*, p. 385.

ton to mean that the true happiness of any man must be found in that which "is not incongruous with its nature (das nicht unverträglich ist mit seiner Natur)," but in those activities which correspond to the purpose and meaning of human life. It is, says Vorländer, absolutely essential to morality that a man find his "echte Glück" in that which is consistent with his "nobler part," with his "reason." He understands Wollaston to mean that a rational being cannot find delight in those pleasures which are irrational without contradicting its own nature, which practically means that a man cannot get real happiness except from that which is consistent with reason. "Daher macht den Menschen nur das glücklich, was der Vernunft entspricht." So, he says, the way to happiness and the exercise of truth merge, and that Natural Religion is based on the unity of them in the furtherance of human welfare, "die menschliche Natur zu fördren."<sup>83</sup>

In the article on Ethics in the Britannica Williams takes the position that "the dualism of governing principles, conscience and self-love, in Bishop Butler's system, and perhaps, too, his revival of the Platonic conception of human nature as an ordered and governed community of impulses, is perhaps most nearly anticipated in Wollaston's 'Religion of Nature Delineated.' Here for the first time, we find 'moral good' and 'natural good' or 'happiness' treated separately as two essentially distinct objects of rational pursuit; the harmony between them being regarded as a matter of religious faith."<sup>84</sup> I think that this criticism can be best answered by showing the connection of the ethical philosophy of Wollaston with the entire stream of moral thought of the time, particularly its relations to the systems of Cudworth and Shaftesbury. Wollaston took the position that there is truth in both of these supposedly conflicting systems, and that a true moral philosophy must be a higher synthesis of the two. Now, Cudworth had presented the principle of social duty as abstract reason, intuition as liable to conflict

<sup>83</sup> Vorländer, *Gesch. der Philosophischen Moral*, etc., p. 386.

<sup>84</sup> Williams, *Art. Ethics in Britan.*

with the desire of happiness.<sup>85</sup> Shaftesbury, on the other hand, tried to show the naturalness of man's social affections and to prove that there is no contradiction between his social affections and his self-regarding impulses.<sup>86</sup> Wollaston looked the situation over and reached the conclusion that if reason be thought of as a faculty which is to perceive the real natures of things and, in the light of our relations to them, determine our duty, then both the emotional impulses that prompt to social duty and the a priori rational principle that demands that men's acts be consistent will be realized.<sup>87</sup>

## V

### THE ETHICS OF WOLLASTON RECONCILES RATIONALISM AND HEDONISM

In this division of my treatise I wish to defend the thesis that the *Ethics of Wollaston* is really a reconciliation of the two equally extreme positions of Rationalism and Hedonism.

Ethical Rationalism takes two forms, an extreme and a moderate. According to the extreme form of Rationalism the good life is a life of pure reason from which all sensibility has been eliminated. Moderate Rationalism, on the other hand, teaches that, while the good life contains sensibility as an element, it is fundamentally rational, a life of sensibility guided by the reason. The ancient Stoics and the modern Kant are good examples of the former and Clarke and Wollaston are good examples of the latter. Wollaston's rationalism is very far from Intuitionism for he does not believe in innate ideas of morality. He is a Rationalist in the sense that the reason is thought by him to be the guide in life, but he thinks of reason as dependent upon experience for its data. Knowledge is a rational organization of experience, according to Wollaston, and morality is determined

<sup>85</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 38-9. Cudworth, *Intel. System*, pp. 730-4.

<sup>86</sup> Shaftesbury, *Enquiry Concerning Virtue*, Part II, Sec. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 19 and 45-6.



by the nature of things, the knowledge of which is thus attained. He treats sensibility in the same way. It is necessary to the realization of life and should be treated as what it is, a true aspect of human life. The reason, however, must be given the entire emphasis in the evaluation of conduct, Wollaston thinks, in that it alone can control the life of sensibility. So far from being an ascetic he says that the good life is a life of sensibility guided by the reason.<sup>88</sup> Sidgwick considers it a characteristic difference between ancient Stoicism and modern British Ethics that the former considered only the universal reason, whereas the latter considers both the universal reason and the egoistic reason. This is true, in general, but I think that it must be said that with Wollaston the principle of happiness is as much universalized and rationalized as is the universal reason. His principle is that happiness just like anything else is to be treated as what it is.<sup>89</sup>

The relation of reason to the rest of life is stated by Professor Seth in a way that would, I think, entirely meet the approval of Wollaston: "The assertion, which is repeated again and again in the rational school, of the dignity and independence of man as a rational being, is a sublime and momentous truth. For man rises out of nature, and has to assert his infinite rational superiority to nature. Goodness means the subjugation of nature to spirit. The good life is the rational life; the life of mere nature is, in a rational being, irrational. And it may well seem, in the great crises of the struggle, as if all else but the rational self were unworthy to live, and must absolutely die. Yet nature also has its ethical function; and the moral life is not so stern and joyless as Stoic and Kantian moralists would say."<sup>90</sup> Wollaston says that "nothing can be the true happiness of a rational being, that is inconsistent with reason. . . . If anything becomes agreeable to a rational being, which is not agreeable to reason, it is plain his reason is lost, his nature deprest, and that he now lifts himself among irra-

<sup>88</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 45.

<sup>89</sup> Sidgwick, *His. of Ethics*, pp. 196-7.

<sup>90</sup> Seth, *Ethical Principles*, p. 179.

tionals, . . . a rational being can like nothing of that kind without a contradiction to itself.”<sup>91</sup>

Wright takes a position in regard to the relation of sensibility and reason that is very similar to the position of Seth and well states the attitude of Wollaston on the question. “When the rationalist recommends the life of reason as the highest human good he inevitably thinks of this intellectual activity as superior to feeling and sensation. He is bound to insist, therefore, that the demands of feeling and sense be strictly subordinated to the requirements of reason. An extreme rationalism has sometimes claimed that a free exercise of reason, in which consists the highest good, would demand the complete suppression of all natural feelings, impulses and desires. “A moderate rationalism finds the good in control rather than in the entire suppression of the life of sense and feeling.”<sup>92</sup> Wright grants that intellectualism has often fallen into several faults, namely, asceticism and individualism; but he very truly says, that the faults of the opposing systems have been far greater.

The prerogative of a human being is to be able to guide his life by the law of universal reason. This is due entirely to man’s possessing reason, and it is reason alone which differentiates man from the rest of the animal kingdom. A purely animal life is determined entirely from without by sensory stimuli; and if man were merely animal, his life, too, would be guided by instincts and sensibility. Man, of course, is both animal and human and this is the explanation of the war among his members. To be human and moral is to guide the life by reason, instead of allowing it to be determined from below by the senses and instincts. But Wollaston’s position is superior to that of Stoicism and of asceticism generally, in that it does not utterly disregard man’s lower nature, but rather seeks to realize it as well as man’s higher nature. All of life, sentient as well as rational, must have its true and proper place in the completely reali-

<sup>91</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 39.

<sup>92</sup> Wright, *Self-Realization*, p. 113. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 40.

ized life. Because it is reason which differentiates man from the rest of the animal kingdom, his life must therefore, to be human and to be moral, be guided by reason rather than by sense; but it does not follow from this that the entire animal nature must be disregarded in the realization of the moral life. Much of the life of sensibility, thinks Wollaston, is entirely rational, in the sense that a rational world requires its due and proper expression. When Wollaston says that for acts to be moral they must be rational he has reference not to their rational form but to their conformity to the real natures of things. He says, that not the motive alone but all the consequences must be considered in the determination of the character of an act. A rational being ought to act rationally, means that he must always act in such a way as tends to fulfill his rational nature. Such actions are those which are conformable to the nature of things, and the choice of actions calculated to result in human happiness is, therefore, as rational as any other when the happiness is true; but it is contrary both to the laws of universal reason and to the nature of things for a rational being to enjoy an irrational pleasure.<sup>93</sup>

The position has often been taken that there is no middle ground between extreme formal and ascetic Rationalism, on the one hand, and Hedonism on the other. I think that there is such a middle course and that Wollaston has taken it. He used the methods of logic and insisted upon the absolute preeminence of the rational aspect of human nature, but he, also, insisted that the whole of man must be taken into consideration in treating a man as what he is. Wollaston says that a man must be thought of not just as a reasoning being, but also as a person with feelings and desires that must be considered in the realization of personality. But this does not mean that he went over to Hedonism, nor that he regarded the reasoning powers of man as but means to the securing of happiness. Man's reason is also to be treated as what it is, treated as an end as well as a means. He took the position that consequences, in so far as they

<sup>93</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 39.

can be anticipated, should be considered, and certainly one cannot act rationally without the due consideration of all possible consequences, sentient and rational.

Professor Fite says: "The being who acts rationally acts consistent with principle, and his rule of conduct is: Let your conduct be constantly determined by principle."<sup>95</sup> The question is, did Wollaston think of a rational being as a mere reasoning being in the sense of purely formal logic? "The Kantian being," says Fite, "is, in fact, the personification of the syllogism. As such he is indifferent to the nature of his conclusions, provided only that they are deduced without contradiction from his premises; he is indifferent to the ends attained by his conduct, provided only that his conduct be self-consistent." Fite says that there are no such beings as this, that a being of this kind is a psychological impossibility.<sup>96</sup> Wollaston's criterion of morality is that of consistency, but this principle is not concerned with the principle alone but with consequences. The "good will," the intention, constitutes an important factor but the objective factor is of equal importance.<sup>97</sup>

Wollaston's Ethics is that of self-realization, understanding thereby "that the realization of the self is the realization of the purpose implied in the capacities of one's nature. . . . Life as a whole will be an attempt to attain a complete, perfect and harmonious expression of all his several capacities." The one who has this ideal of complete self-realization for all men, as has Wollaston, "is not," as Fite well says, "impartial with regard to his premises, nor indifferent with regard to the ends to be achieved, but on the contrary, distinctly prejudiced in favor of those ends which are implied in his fundamental tendencies and capacities. These constitute the premises of his reason and their consistent realization constitutes the rational process."<sup>98</sup> Moral ac-

<sup>95</sup> Fite, *Intro. Study of Ethics*, 170.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>97</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Pt. I, Bk. II, Ch. 2. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> Fite, *Intro. Study of Ethics*, pp. 198-9. Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 37-9.



tivity is consistent conformity to rational principles, but this is not just logical consistency, that is, consistency merely for consistency's sake. This involves the realization of concrete life desires and feelings as well as logical consistency. This simply means that the Ethics of Wollaston was objective as well as subjective. He would not admit that a life could be denominated moral on the basis of consistency, which failed to take into consideration human instincts, desires and feelings and evaluated conduct purely subjectively and formally; but he would insist that in the good life every kind of consequence that can be anticipated enters somewhat into the motivation.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 37 and 128.

## PRACTICAL RELIGION AND PRACTICAL MORALITY

Under this head I am including Wollaston's teachings of a practical nature in sections VI, VII, VIII and IX, which includes a very large part of the book, namely, from the 128th to the 214th page. The teachings of this practical part of his book may be stated summarily in these words: How to so live this life that one may realize the possibilities of life; this can be done only by living happily and well and in right relations with the world of things, with all mankind and with God.

### SECTION VI

“TRUTHS RESPECTING MANKIND IN GENERAL, ANTECEDENT  
TO ALL HUMAN LAWS”

Wollaston begins this section of his work with a discussion of the principle of individuation, which for our purposes means simply this, since the natures and circumstances are different, duty is somewhat different for each man. This does not mean that there is no universal principle, but rather that one aspect of this universal principle of morality is that individuality is a thing that must be always considered in determining duty. Wollaston, after establishing the supreme worth of the individual, proceeds to universalize this principle of individuation and to make the general good the test of morality. He says that “whatever is inconsistent with the general peace and welfare or good, is inconsistent with the laws of human nature, wrong and intolerable.” He seems to go still further towards Utilitarianism when he says that, “those maxims may be esteemed natural and true laws of any particular society, which are most proper to procure happiness to it. Because happiness is

the end of society and laws; otherwise we might suppose unhappiness to be proposed as the right end of them; that is, unhappiness to be desirable, contrary to nature and truth.”<sup>1</sup> Wollaston is not giving up the idea of conformity to nature as the moral criterion, but he is taking precisely the same attitude towards happiness that he took in the section on happiness, namely, that it should be treated as what it is. Now happiness in human society is very desirable, consequently the principle of conformity to the nature of things would say that to treat happiness as the important thing that it is would be to seek its realization. That he is using the same logic and the same criterion in this section that he used in the previous sections is evident from this statement: “It is contradictory to say that anything can be a general law of nature,” which does not make for the general happiness of men, “who partake of the same common nature. . . . The transgression of these laws, conducing to the general good of the world, is wrong and morally evil.” For if mankind be differentiated from the rest of the animal kingdom by reason, then the general welfare of mankind “must be the welfare of the rational nature and therefore that, and the laws which advance it, must be founded in reason.” The only rule by which mankind could govern itself for the general good of the world, “would be one conformable to the nature and circumstances of mankind, that is a principle founded on reason.”<sup>2</sup>

Wollaston anticipates Kant in bringing in the test of universality. He asks: “What would be the consequence, if all men should transgress this rule?” He answers that the result would be, “a general evil, or something disagreeable to our nature and the truth of our circumstances, for of contrary practices there must be contrary effects.” Who-soever should violate that rule, “would contribute his share towards the introduction of universal disorder and misery,” and would for his part deny human life to be what it is, would deny human society to be what it is, and human happiness to be what it is. Because the world is coherent, act-

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

ing rationally is both the way to rectitude and the way to happiness. Acts that are disagreeable to truth are wrong and tend to make men unhappy.<sup>3</sup> Selby-Bigge says that Wollaston constantly confuses the violation of truth, which constitutes immorality for him, with another kind of absurdity, namely, "untruthfulness." Strange to say Selby-Bigge takes the position that "untruthfulness" . . . can certainly be practiced without absurdity though it cannot be imagined a universal practice without some absurdity; lying would cease to be profitable to the liar if no one spoke the truth or expected others to speak the truth."<sup>4</sup> Selby-Bigge fails both in his understanding of Wollaston and of Kant. Wollaston does not claim that all absurdity is immoral but only that immorality is essentially absurd, for it is as self-contradictory as intellectual self-contradiction.<sup>5</sup> His understanding of Kant is not correct. He understands Kant to teach that things can only be denominated wrong from the point of view of the social chaos that would result from their universalization. It is true, both for Wollaston and for Kant, that it is the exceptional nature of the act which makes it morally wrong, but that does not mean that it would have to be practiced by everybody before it would become absurd behavior and so morally wrong. The one immoral act is absurd precisely because it could not become universal. One may, with Kant and Wollaston, consider that the consequences of the universalization of immorality would be the disruption of society, but the particular immoral act is absurd and immoral precisely because it is exceptional. So our author seeks merely to delineate the nature of morality by comparing it to truth. Morality is like truth in that it is conformable to the nature of things, but the one consists of thoughts and the other of acts. To act immorally is to treat things, as Clarke expresses it, as they are not and cannot be.<sup>6</sup> Society would go to pieces if men generally acted otherwise than in conformity with true

<sup>3</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Selby-Bigge, *English Thought in the 18th Cen.*, p. xxxii.

<sup>5</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 15 and 23.

<sup>6</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli. in British Moralists*, 489.



relations. Wollaston thinks that an immoral act denies the indissoluble unity of life and the world and practically affirms the universe to be a chaos, not a cosmos.<sup>7</sup>

## SECTION VII

“TRUTHS RESPECTING PARTICULAR SOCIETIES OF MEN AND OF GOVERNMENTS”

Wollaston takes up in this section the treatment of man as a social creature. He takes the position that man cannot live well except in the society of his fellows. He says that it would be quite impossible to live a life of the highest order, a life of the reason, a life enriched by the arts and sciences, except in society. He says a good many things of a utilitarian nature: “The end of society is the common welfare and good of the people associated,” and all the laws and customs of that society must be evaluated from that point of view.<sup>8</sup>

## SECTION VIII

“TRUTHS CONCERNING FAMILIES AND RELATIONS”

The teachings of this section are of very much the same nature as those in the previous section. They are even more concrete and practical, and consists of practical advice in regard to rearing a family. Presumably Wollaston was competent to speak on the subject since he was the father of eleven children.<sup>9</sup>

## SECTION IX

“TRUTHS RESPECTING A PRIVATE MAN, AND RESPECTING (DIRECTLY) ONLY HIMSELF”

This is the longest section in the book. Were this all that we have from Wollaston we might accuse him of individualism. The practical teachings of the section are naturally of

<sup>7</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 128 and 143.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154-66.

a prudential nature, reminding one somewhat of those manuals of wholesome advice once so common. He says that a man ought to consider "all that he is, in possibility, that he is an animal, but that he is also a rational creature." He will find from experience that his instincts, desires and passions are apt to take him in the wrong direction. If he is to be true to his real nature he must subject his animal nature to the law of reason. He will find that acting according to reason will coincide with acting according to truth, or the true nature of things.<sup>10</sup> As I have said there is a good deal of the prudential in this section. "A man must," says Wollaston, "take care not to bring upon himself want, disease, trouble; but must provide for his comfortable subsistence, as far as he can without contradicting any truth, that is deny any matter of fact."<sup>11</sup> A man must not act as if he were "a sensitive being only, but also as a sensitive-rational being." Physical satisfactions are, however, to be enjoyed, and it is irrational to despise such things. "Bodily inclinations and passions, when they observe their due subordination to reason, and only take place, where that leaves it open for them, or allows them to be, as it were, assessors to it upon the throne, are of admirable use in life, and tend many times to noble ends."<sup>12</sup>

Wollaston dwells upon the dangers of temptation and the weakness of the flesh, and gives some practical advice on meeting temptation and the duty of self-denial.<sup>13</sup> "Every man is obliged to live virtuously and piously, because to practice reason and truth is to live after that manner." The man who practices reason behaves himself both reverently and dutifully.<sup>14</sup> To live virtuously is to practice reason and act conformably to truth, and he who lives so must be ultimately happy, so both the commands of reason and the desire for happiness will oblige a man to live conformably to truth.<sup>15</sup> "The natural and usual effect of virtue is hap-

<sup>10</sup> Wollaston, *Relin. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 167-9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

piness; and if a virtuous man should in some respects be unhappy, yet still his virtue will make him less unhappy; for at least he enjoys inward tranquillity.”<sup>16</sup> Overton says that Wollaston argued for immortality on the ground that some place is demanded by reason “where the proper amends could be made.”<sup>17</sup> And Wollaston, himself, says, that “He who would act according to truth, must not only consider what he is, and how circumstanced in this present state, and provide accordingly; but, further, must consider himself also as one whose existence proceeds on into another, and provide for that too.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> Overton, *His. of the Eng. Church 1714-1800*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 218.

## THE METAPHYSICAL TEACHINGS OF WOLLASTON

Only such metaphysical teachings of Wollaston as are indissolubly bound up with his ethics are here considered. It is impossible to treat ethical problems without some consideration being given to more ultimate problems. Selby-Bigge characterizes this period of English ethics as unmetaphysical.<sup>1</sup> This is true in the sense that the Eighteenth Century British moralists gave little attention to metaphysical discussions, but this was because they took their metaphysics for granted. Professor Perry says that it is characteristic of the English to treat each case on its own merit and apparently without reference to theory.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that the Englishman, and this is especially true of the Eighteenth Century moralists, has no epistemology nor metaphysics in mind when he philosophizes about moral matters. He is not so departmental in his thinking as many have thought, nor is he destitute of ideas concerning ultimate reality. The Englishman is generally concrete in his treatment of ethics, but he has general ideas in mind and his general view of the world is always clearly implicated. Wollaston is typical in this respect and it can be clearly shown that he was aware of the metaphysical implications of his ethical philosophy.

In general, it may be said that the Enlightenment accepted the Cartesian dualistic view of the world. Most of the philosophers just took that for granted and made it the presupposition of all their practical philosophy. Wollaston was a true representative of the Enlightenment. Perhaps Blakey's statement of his position is a very fair characterization in most respects. He says that Wollaston

<sup>1</sup> Selby-Bigge, *English Thought in the 18th Cen.*, p. XIX.

<sup>2</sup> Perry, *Present Conflict of Ideals*, ch. XXXII.



belongs to the class of theoretical moralists rather than metaphysicians. But, says Blakey, his ethical speculation rested upon a system of metaphysics "that might be classified as the epistemology of common sense and as metaphysical dualism. Its fundamental principles are that man is constituted of two elements, mind and body, the former of which is thought of as a real spiritual entity; that it has innate powers of reflection, and notions of right and wrong, good and evil, irrespective of the influence of the senses, or the conventional rules of society. He believes in the stability of the laws of nature and that everything in the world is regulated by infinite wisdom. His system of ethics is grounded on a simple metaphysical principle that truth in everything is to be in conformity with the constituted order of nature." He says also that Wollaston insists that "Every act of a rational being must be the act of one capable of distinguishing and choosing by the powers of one's own will."<sup>3</sup> I agree entirely with this interpretation, with the exception of the statement in regard to man's mind possessing "notions of right and wrong, good and evil." There is a certain idealism in Wollaston's *Weltanschauung*, of that there can be no doubt, but it was of the theistic type and therefore thought to be consistent with dualism.

Morell classifies Wollaston with the idealists and, it must be admitted, has very good grounds for so doing because Wollaston teaches that truth is the moral criterion and that there is an ultimate coincidence between truth, goodness and happiness.<sup>4</sup> Idealism is involved, Morell thinks, in Wollaston's thought that there are certain fixed relations in the universe, cognizable by the human mind, and that virtue consists in acting conformably thereto. Ultimate coherency, a consistent world order, is the presupposition of a system of morality based on truth as a criterion, when truth is conceived of as Wollaston conceives it, namely, not as an innate idea but as ascertained truth involving both experience and reason.<sup>5</sup> This is true because truth in actuality is the pre-

<sup>3</sup> Blakey, *His. of Phil.*, vol. III, 1, 3, 7 and 8.

<sup>4</sup> Morell, *His. of Modern Phil.*

<sup>5</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 51 and 45-6.

condition of truth being found by empirical and rational processes. The fact that Wollaston insists upon both the rationality of morality and upon the objectivity of it demands an ultimate idealism as a metaphysics, because for morality to be both reasonable and in conformity to the nature of things both minds and things must belong to one all-comprehending world of meaning, one coherent world order.<sup>6</sup> It is in the very nature of things, as Clarke says, that is, in the very nature of reality and man, that moral distinctions are founded. The individual soul stands to the rest of nature in the relation of subject and object, the perceiving mind and the things perceived. The universe is rational, there is a certain preestablished harmony between minds and things, and the same reason which pervades the whole exists also in each individual mind. This is the metaphysical presupposition of knowledge in general and of moral knowledge in particular, when conceived objectively as Wollaston conceives it.<sup>7</sup>

As we have seen, Wollaston conceives of the world relations as grounded in theism. "If there is a supreme being, upon whom the existence of the world depends; and nothing can be in it but what He either causes, or permits to be; then to own things to be as they are is to own what He causes; and this is to take things as He gives them, to go into His constitution of the world, and to submit to His will revealed in the books of nature. . . . The owning of things, in all our conduct, to be as they are is obedience . . . to the Author of Nature. . . . Things cannot be denied to be what they are . . . without contradicting truths eternal." And since God has "constituted" things as they are the violation of the nature of things "is to act in opposition . . . to His nature."<sup>8</sup>

Wollaston's conception of the universe is involved in his conception of the relation of morality and religion. In a sense his view of the relation of morality and religion is that of Deism, namely, the practical identification of the two. It is also true, however, that he begins his work with

<sup>6</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Clarke, *Natural Reli.*, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 8.

a statement of the relation of the two that is so like Kant's conception of that relation that some thinkers are inclined to believe that Kant derived his conception from Wollaston. How like Kant are these opening words of *The Religion of Nature Delineated*: "The foundation of religion lies in that difference between the acts of men, which distinguish them into good, evil and indifferent. For if there is such a difference, there must be religion!" Like Kant, he takes the position that morality is imperative and indubitable in its demands and that the necessary implications of the moral consciousness are equally imperative and indubitable. Kant says that the postulates of the moral law are God, freedom and immortality. Wollaston says "the foundation of religion lies in the difference which men naturally and necessarily make between good and evil. But while Wollaston, like Kant, starts from the practical side, he would not like him say that the moral proof is the only proof, that the theoretical reason is inadequate. He would not say that religion is dubious when theoretically considered and that the great tenets of religion can only be established by the moral proof. Wollaston thinks that what Kant called the pure reason is really the only kind of reason; he believes, however, that there are two elements in the reason, the empirical and the rational. This reason, he thinks, is able to tell us both what is true and what we ought to do. Wollaston seeks to delineate the religion of nature, that is to both rationalize and moralize religion. Kant sought to prove God, freedom and immortality by the moral proof. Wollaston's position is rather that any kind of proof must be capable of intellectualization, for morality itself is based on an intellectual foundation or an objective basis, not an intuitional basis as Kant thought. Moral and religious convictions to be sure, are held by those who have not worked out the full metaphysical implications of those convictions, which implications constitute an essential part of those convictions.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 6, 48-9, 52 and 61. Kant, *Kritik d. Prakt. Vernunft*, Werke II, 132 ff., 149 ff. Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 2 Abschn., Werke.

## THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF WOLLASTON

### SECTION III

#### “OF REASONING, AND THE WAYS OF DISCOVERING TRUTH”

This section of Wollaston's book is really epistemological in nature, as the heading indicates, and it is not especially significant for ethics. But it is interesting and significant that Wollaston dealt with this question of knowledge because of an objection of an epistemological character that had been offered against his ethical system. He says that “an objection made oblige me in the next place to say something concerning the means of knowing, what is true; whether there are any, that are sure, and which one may safely rely upon. For if there be not, all that I have written is to no purpose.” In addition to knowledge of particulars, an intelligent being must have abstract and universal knowledge; “this must be true if there be any such thing as a rational being.” That this is the pre-condition of rationality, he thinks to be an all-sufficient proof. This is the argument from efficient cause, namely, that there must be a rational world ground or else there could be no rational creatures in the world, but there are rational creatures in the world so there must be a rational world ground.<sup>1</sup> Wollaston says that “the knowledge of a particular idea is only the particular knowledge of that idea or thing; there it ends. But reason is something universal, a kind of general instrument, applicable to particular things and cases as they occur.” We have, he says, ideas of a logical, metaphysical and mathematical nature which are not limited to particular things, but ideas which “comprehend whole classes and kinds. And it is by the help of these that we reason. . . . If a proposition be true, it is always so in all the instances and

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 41.



uses to which it is applicable, for otherwise it must be both true and false.”<sup>2</sup>

Wollaston next proceeds to show how absolutely essential correct knowledge is to a correct understanding of what man's duty is. The relation of ethics and epistemology is necessarily very close when ethics is conceived objectively, namely, when duty is determined by the real nature and relations of things. This is true because one can have no idea of one's duty without a clear knowledge of things and relations. This relation would be quite otherwise in the systems of ethics which found the moral criterion not on truth but on intuition, moral sense or feeling, because in those systems the general problem of knowledge is irrelevant since morality is based on a special kind of knowledge. But Wollaston clearly realizes that if truth is to be taken to be the criterion of morality and if truth is to be conceived as the conformity of thoughts to the real nature of things in the objective world, then is a clear understanding of the entire process of knowing important for ethics. He says that the faculty of reason is the moral faculty also, and that the knowledge of what is moral is dependent upon what is real. “That power which any intelligent being has of surveying his own ideas and of comparing them, of forming to himself out of those that are immediate and abstract such general and fundamental truths as he can be sure of, and of making such inferences and conclusions as are agreeable to them, in order to find out more truth, resolve some question or determine what is fit to be done upon occasion, is what I mean by the faculty of reason.” Most people, he says, both think and live in a hand-to-mouth fashion, because “the generality of people are so little under the dominion of reason,” guided only by conventional ideas and their own passions.<sup>3</sup>

In his epistemology Wollaston seeks to effect a reconciliation of empiricism and rationalism. I have taken the position throughout this paper that Wollaston is not to be classified as an intuitionist in morals nor as an intuitionist in knowledge. The proof of my position is established suffi-

<sup>2</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 45-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

ciently by the one fact that, from first to last, Wollaston bases morality upon the nature of things. No one, certainly, would take the position that one could have intuitional knowledge of the objective world, so if morality is to an extent determined by the nature of things it is to that extent dependent upon empirical knowledge for no other kind of knowledge can be had of the world of things. Ratiocination is also necessary in most cases to determine one's relations and one's duty in view of all the circumstances. As I have already said, Wollaston was perhaps more influenced by Locke's epistemology than by any other influence, and he agreed with Locke that there are no innate ideas of any kind. He did not, however, believe the mind to be entirely passive in knowledge, but rather took the position that knowledge is an organization of the experiences presented by the senses. "There is such a thing as right reason. . . . To prove there is no such thing as right reason by any good argument, is indeed impossible; because that would be to show there is such a thing, by the manner of proving that there is not." Wollaston says that we have immediate and abstract ideas and that the relations of these are "adequately known by the mind," but he also says that "these are notified to us by the help of our senses." He says, further, that "more truth particularly of the kind, which is most useful to us in our conduct here, is discoverable by this method."<sup>4</sup> I do not understand him to say that there are innate ideas of morality or other innate ideas, but only that there is a rational factor in knowledge, and as much in moral knowledge as in any other. He clearly believes, with Locke, that everything in the understanding came in through the senses, but he just as surely believes in a rational synthetic active mind as a factor in knowledge.<sup>5</sup> It is this that enables one to orientate himself in any life situation and to decide just what ought to be done. So Wollaston teaches that there are both sensory and rational factors in knowledge and so in morality. It may be asked, if this be true, why has Wollaston so frequently been classed with the intu-

<sup>4</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>5</sup> Locke, *Essay on the Human Understanding*, bk. I, ch. 2.

itionists? I think that a good deal of this misinterpretation is due to the fact that this section of his book is not at all well known. Many of those who characterize his system as Intuitionism show no evidence of having read this section giving his theory of knowledge, which is published only in his complete work, a very rare book. Naturally the problem of knowledge is treated only incidentally in the other sections.

Wollaston then makes the ethical application of his epistemology: "To act according to right reason, and to act according to truth are in effect the same. . . . To be governed by reason is the general law imposed by the Author of Nature upon them, whose uppermost faculty is reason; as the dictates of it in particular cases are the particular laws, to which they are subject."<sup>6</sup> Here, as plainly as anywhere, Wollaston gives his idea of what conscience is. It is a man's judgment as to just what he, in particular, ought to do, under the particular circumstances. He makes it evident that this is his view as he goes on to say: "It is plain, that reason is of a commanding nature; it enjoins this, condemns that, only allows some other things, and will be paramount if it is at all. Now a being, who has such a determining and governing power so placed in his nature, as to be essential to him, is a being certainly framed to be governed by that power. It seems to me as much designed by nature or rather the Author of Nature, that rational animals should use their reason, and steer by it; as it is by the shipwright, that the pilot should direct the vessel by the use of the rudder he has fitted to it. The rudder would not be there, if it were not to be used; nor would reason be implanted in any nature only to be not cultivated and neglected. And it is certain, it cannot be used, but it must command; such is its nature. It is not in one's power deliberately to resolve not to be governed by reason." For, he argues, it is contradictory to reason that one will not be governed by reason and equally so for a rational being not to reason why he acts. The fact that one is to steer by the reason by no means implies that experience is un-

<sup>6</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 50.

essary; in fact, no figure could better represent the function and necessity of the two factors in knowledge and in morals than that of the pilot.<sup>7</sup> Wollaston thinks that one can steer clear of all dangers by the right use of reason, so he says that, "If a rational being, as such, is under obligation to obey reason, and this obedience, or practice of reason, coincides with the observation of truth," it follows that Natural Religion is true.<sup>8</sup>

It is not true, as some critics of Wollaston accuse, that he identifies intellectual error and immorality, for he insists that immorality as truly as morality implies the truth of the relations, and it could not be immorality otherwise.<sup>9</sup> It is true that he emphasizes proper education and thinks that a good deal of the evils of the world could be remedied by education. "The generality of people," he says, "are not sufficiently prepared by a proper education, to find truth by reasoning. And of them who have liberal education, some are soon immersed and lost in pleasures, or at least in fashionable methods of living, rolling from one visit or company to another, and flying from nothing so much as from themselves and the quiet retreat proper for meditation; others become involved in business and the intricate affairs of life."<sup>10</sup>

Dugald Stewart says that Wollaston tried to reconcile Locke's theory of the origin of our ideas with the immutability of moral distinctions by taking the position that virtue consists in conduct conformable to truth. He says that Wollaston insisted that right and wrong cannot be just simple ideas, but that morality consists of actions conformable with relations perceived by the reason.<sup>11</sup> If Stewart is right, and I think that he is, Wollaston agreed with Locke that there are no innate ideas either of morality or any other kind. Right and wrong are not original notions, but are products of experience and ratiocination. There are

<sup>7</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Delin.*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> D. Stewart, *Works*, vol. VI, p. 290.



two factors in knowledge, thinks Wollaston, an empirical and a rational, and he thinks of them as having just about the same relation to each other as Kant afterwards gave them. He would not deny that all knowledge comes from experience, but he does insist upon the importance of the rational factor. In Wollaston's thought it is not just empty formal reason that constitutes the criterion of morality, and here he differs essentially from Kant who made morality to rest on an intuition due to the impingement of an infallible conscience. Kant made the moral law autonomous, resting neither upon experience, nor upon deductions of the speculative reason; but upon the revelation of immediate consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

Wollaston would not, however, go quite as far as Locke does in the empirical direction. Locke's position is that our rules of morality, so far from being innate ideas are just the practical regulations that experience has demonstrated to be best. Wollaston would not say with Locke that the truth and reasonableness of the Golden Rule need to be demonstrated but would say that intelligence would assent to it as an unquestionable truth.<sup>13</sup> I think that Wundt is right in saying that Wollaston's ethics follows logically from the epistemology of Locke. "As truth consists in the agreement of our ideas with the nature of things, so the good consists in the agreement of our acts with things."<sup>14</sup> To act according to the nature of things is to act morally and in obedience to God. So in order to act morally, according to Wundt's interpretation of Wollaston, one must first discover the nature of things and his relation thereto, then what one's duty is, begins to become evident.<sup>15</sup> When it is said that Wollaston makes reason the moral faculty, it must, then, be remembered that it is the ordinary reason that is meant and that the reason determines what is right

<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Grundlegung zur Meta. der Sitten*, Werke, III, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Locke, *Human Understanding*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>14</sup> "Wie das wahre in der Uebereinstimmung unserer Vorstellungen mit der Natur der Dinge bestehe, so das Gute in der Uebereinstimmung unserer Handlungen mit den Dingen."

<sup>15</sup> Wundt, *Ethik*, p. 323.

and wrong as it determines true and false, namely, by ascertaining the facts and passing judgment upon the situation.<sup>16</sup>

Noack says that Wollaston agreed with Locke epistemologically with regard to the matter of innate ideas. He says that Wollaston also "denies with Locke all innate practical principles (alle angeboren praktischen Grundsätze), and finds the great principle of natural religion in that every intelligent, active and free being should act so that he does not contradict any truth with his action or that he may treat everything as such as it is."<sup>17</sup> Williams goes so far as to say that this view of ethics is a more logical consequence of Locke's epistemology than is Locke's own ethics. This he says is true in spite of the fact that these moralists are generally supposed to hold the very different theory of Intuitionism.<sup>18</sup> Practically this same position is taken in the anonymous article in Francke's Dictionary of Philosophy and Science. It is stated "that Wollaston must be ranked among those philosophers who base morality on reason and not feeling . . . or on interest." This distinguishes Wollaston's position both from that of Hedonism and that of Intuitionism, with which systems he has often been erroneously connected. The article is very careful to state that his position is rationalistic but not intuitionistic. It says that "the majority of the Rationalistic School consider the idea of good as a supreme principle, absolutely simple and irreducible, divine type placed by God in our intelligence."<sup>19</sup> The article goes on to say that Wollaston takes quite a different position. He tried to state the criterion of morality in intellectual terms: "To act conformably with truth is to act well (Agir conformément á la verité, c'est bien Agir)."<sup>20</sup>

Maurice says that Wollaston wrote his book before Locke's Essay had gained any great authority, but that "he participated in many of the feelings that gave birth to it." He regarded "truth as the foundation" of man's na-

<sup>16</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Noack, *Phil. Gesch. Lexion*, p. 931.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, *Art. Ethics, Brit.*

<sup>19</sup> Francke, *Dict. Des Sciences Philosophiques*, p. 1728.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1729.

ture, Maurice says, and also took the position that "to be true is to be happy." Maurice says that Locke had been compelled by his epistemology to say that things are good or bad "only in reference to pleasure or pain."<sup>21</sup> Maurice says that: "If we must begin from the senses, if all knowledge of what man thinks and is must be derived from impressions on the senses, or from reflections on these impressions, the sensations of pleasure and pain must be regarded as the ultimate ground of good and evil."<sup>22</sup> It is possible to be empirical in method and arrive at an ethical philosophy other than Hedonism, thinks Maurice, only by giving due consideration to what is implied by "reflections on these impressions" as a factor in knowledge, but this is precisely what is meant by rationalism. Of course you cannot discover the true nature of things without actual sense data, but this data will be meaningless without organization. An objective system of ethics must start with the nature of things and this can be discovered only empirically, but moral as well as intellectual orientation necessitates a synthesis of experience.

Smale, in his critical treatment of the abstract rationalism of Cudworth, shows the way that Wollaston relates the two factors in knowledge. He says that there can be no knowledge that is purely sense knowledge because the senses give only the individual, the material and the accidental, while knowledge is occupied with the universal, the abstract and the essential. Sense, as such, "is a mere consciousness of the impression, without the slightest reference to truth or falsehood; but it is with truth and falsehood that knowledge has to do. Sense but gives to the mind the cue for action and hints to the understanding."<sup>23</sup> Sense, Smale says, can only give a never-ending flux, each part of which is individual and unconnected with any other. Knowledge is dependent upon sense, but it is equally dependent upon the rational factor. Cudworth is right, thinks Smale, in holding that "the reason is the divine governor of man's

<sup>21</sup> Maurice, *Moral and Metaphysical Phil.*, vol. II, p. 454.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>23</sup> Smale, *Sense and Reason in Cudworth, With Especial Reference to the Ethical Implications*, pp. 10-11.

life, the very voice of God," if he means by the reason "the organized activity of the intelligible ideas." In this sense, Smale says, the reason can be regarded as the basis of morality; for "as the relations of space and number have objective reality cognizable by the reason; so also have the distinctions of good and evil."<sup>24</sup> In this sense Wollaston regards the reason as the moral faculty. Cudworth had a very different conception of the reason's way of governing life. He thought that the guidance of the reason is due to certain innate ideas of good and evil which the mind has prior to all experience.

Robert Blakey thinks that Wollaston held a view like Cudworth's. He takes a rather interesting position in his interpretation of Wollaston, saying that "his ethical speculations rested upon a system of metaphysical knowledge that might be classified as the epistemology of common sense" based on a "metaphysical dualism."<sup>25</sup> I would be disposed to agree that this is, so far, a fair characterization of his philosophy. He does not stop here, nor does he interpret Wollaston's theory of moral knowledge at all realistically as he has led one to expect. Instead he says that Wollaston taught that the mind is "a real spiritual entity" and that "it has innate powers of reflection, and notions of right and wrong, good and evil, irrespective of the influence of the senses, or the conventional rules of society." While he says that "Wollaston's ethics is grounded on a simple metaphysical principle that truth in everything is to be in conformity with the constituted order of nature . . . and that everything in the world is regulated by infinite wisdom," he thinks that Wollaston's ethics is that of Intuitionism. He interprets Wollaston this way and then goes right on and says that he taught that "every act of a rational being, must be the act of one capable of distinguishing and choosing by the powers of its own will."<sup>26</sup>

Erdmann says that Wollaston's system of ethics rests upon an empirical epistemology. He characterizes his

<sup>24</sup> Smale, *Sense and Reason in Cudworth, etc.*, pp. 11-14.

<sup>25</sup> Blakey, *His. of Phil.*, vol. III, 1 and 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.



standard of morality as objective, saying that his criterion is based neither upon an innate idea of virtue nor upon an inner impulse of feeling of oughtness, but upon the real objective nature of things. Now this objective nature of things can be known only by experience, consequently objective ethics must start with experience. I do not understand Erdmann to deny that Wollaston believed in a general pre-established harmony or general rationality throughout the universe, but only to insist that the individual mind is dependent upon experience for its knowledge of the world beyond itself, and that things cannot be treated as they are unless we know what they are. It is, we may say, an a priori principle, with Wollaston, that things should be treated as they are; but what they are is something that must be ascertained by experience. "If," says Erdmann, "the essential of this doctrine is that the nature of things determines action and that the same is conditioned by the knowledge of the things, the theoretical question how we know the things and their relations is of the greatest importance for ethics from this point of view." For this reason, he says, Wollaston raises the epistemological question. "Now when he does not answer the question to the effect that knowledge comes from experience, but rather that it is based on certain abstract ideas whose relations are directly certain to us and give the contents to the universally true propositions whose application particular true propositions are; this seems to speak against the view that Wollaston is an empiricist." Nevertheless, says Erdmann, that is his epistemology.<sup>27</sup> Erdmann thinks that Wollaston failed to think himself through, so that there is no complete agreement between his attitude toward the theoretical question of knowledge and his attitude toward moral knowledge. "In the moral realm he has not arrived at a pure empiricism," but he rather "oscillates," thinks Erdmann; "Sometimes he insists on the certainty of reason, on ratiocination (*der Sicherheit der Vernunft-Erkenntniss*), and seems to greatly prefer it to sense perception or empirical knowledge; because the sense organs are defective he

<sup>27</sup> Erdmann, *Geschichte der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, p. 119.

regards knowledge that is dependent upon sense data as unreliable; then again he admits that ratiocination has as its beginning sense perception (dass die Vernunft-Erkenntniss zu ihrem Anfange allerdings die sinnliche Erkenntniss habe); but finally he speaks again entirely in the sense of empiricism when he asserts emphatically, that the mind has not so definite a conception of itself as of objects." Erdmann says that Wollaston stands on the threshold which leads to a more advanced view of ethics than that of either Intuitionism or Hedonism "which, with an empirical basis is inevitable (welche bei empirischer Grundlage nicht ausbleiben kann), namely, Eudæmonism." Erdmann very properly mentions the two sides of Wollaston's epistemology, but instead of saying that he oscillates from empiricism to rationalism, I think that it would be more correct to say, that he endeavors to synthesize the two and to show that they are both essential to knowledge. In his other work Erdmann says that Wollaston makes the essence of knowledge lie in reason, and at the same time believes that all knowledge comes through the senses.<sup>29</sup> I see no inconsistency in such a position, for it is just the belief that there is both a rational and an empirical factor in knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Erdmann, *Gesch. der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, pp. 119-120.

<sup>30</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 45-6.

## THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM

### SECTION IV

#### “OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF IMPERFECT BEINGS WITH RESPECT TO THEIR POWER OF ACTING”

In this section Wollaston meets some objections as to man's freedom: “The question was this, If a man can find out truth, may he not want the power of acting agreeably to it?” He argues at length and in a familiar way that without freedom there can be no moral obligation; “no being is capable of any obligation to do that, which it has not power or opportunity to do.” Without freedom a person, says Wollaston, is in respect to anything “a being utterly unactive, no agent at all, and therefore as to that act nothing at all.”<sup>1</sup> Wollaston's position in this section is practically the same as in his introduction to the section on the true and good, namely, that freedom is the precondition of morality. “The imputations of moral good and evil to beings capable of understanding and acting must be in proportion to their endeavor; or, their obligations reach, as far as their endeavors may.” He, in effect, says, that, we cannot say ought except where we can say can. “They who are capable of discerning truth” and of “acting conformably to it are morally obliged to do it, as far as they are able; or, it is the duty of such a being sincerely to endeavor to practice reason; not to contradict any truth, by word or deed; and in short, to treat everything as being what it is.”<sup>2</sup>

Wollaston treats the question rather more in a practical than in a theoretical way. He exhorts rational beings to live in conformity to reason: “This is the sum of their re-

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 62 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

ligion, from which no exemption or excuse lies." This does not mean, of course, that Wollaston identified religion and ordinary morality, for a life in conformity to truth implies a life in conformity to all truth, divine as well as human. The question of freedom is one which each person can answer for himself, Wollaston thinks, by trying to do what he thinks he ought to do. "I am persuaded, if men would be serious, and put forth themselves, they would find by experience, that their wills are not so universally and peremptorily determined by what occurs, nor predestination and fate so rigid but that much is left to their own conduct. Up and try."<sup>3</sup> Wollaston says that "at least a man can forbear to do that which contradicts truth, even though he may not be able always to avoid contradictions of truths because of omissions." No man, he says, is morally obliged to do the impossible, and "to oblige a man to do what he is not free to do is like commanding a man to do something with his third hand."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the main reason why Wollaston said so little on the subject of freedom was the fact that Clarke had treated the subject so extensively and from the same point of view. While Clarke emphasized the moral argument, to which Wollaston confined himself almost exclusively, he also offered other arguments of a more theoretical nature. He says that it is the very nature of man to be free. The soul is "a permanent, indivisible, immaterial substance," which has certain powers, namely, thinking, feeling and willing. Will is the power of the soul to act, and volition is the actual exercise of this power.<sup>5</sup> "Man either has within himself a principle of action, a self-moving faculty, or he has not." If he has such a principle he is free, if otherwise, he is not free but necessitated by causes without himself. A free being is "one that is endued with a power of acting, as well as of being acted upon."<sup>6</sup> The soul of man is such a free being and so every man "has entirely within himself a free

<sup>3</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Clarke, *Letters to Dodel*, 176 and 197.

<sup>6</sup> Clarke, *Remarks*, p. 15.



principle or power of determining his own action.”<sup>7</sup> “’Tis the man that freely determines himself to act.”<sup>8</sup> The soul has both passive and active powers. In perception, feeling and judgment the mind is passive; in volition the mind is active. The mind cannot avoid giving its assent to reasonable demonstrations. The passive states of the soul are necessary, says Clarke, for they belong to the great system of natural causes and effects which follow necessarily from the nature of things and the laws of the universe.<sup>9</sup> It was objected, if the soul passive with its reasons, motives and judgments be but a part of the necessary order of things, does not the soul active belong to the same chain of causes and effects? Clarke says not, because no matter what the reasons, feelings and motives, the soul has the power of acting from within itself. “Nothing that is passive can possibly be the cause of anything that is active. Understanding, or judgment, or assent, or approbation, can no more possibly be the efficient cause of action than rest can be the cause of motion.” The reason or motive, says Clarke, is not the cause but only the occasion of action.<sup>10</sup> No matter how strong the motive this power still remains. A man can act from a strong or from a weak motive, or from no motive at all, or he may act even contrary to the very strongest of motives.<sup>11</sup> There can be no moral agency without freedom, so he agrees with Wollaston that freedom is the precondition of morality. His statement is almost verbally the same as Wollaston’s; whatever acts necessarily, does not indeed act at all, but is only acted upon.”<sup>12</sup> If there be no freedom there is no such thing as morality in human lives but only an irresponsible succession of natural phenomena destitute of all moral quality whatsoever. Wollaston says, in this connection, that “that which has not the opportunity or liberty of choosing for itself, and acting accordingly, from an internal principle, acts, if it acts at

<sup>7</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, p. 121.

<sup>8</sup> Clarke, *Remarks*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Leibniz and Clarke Correspondence, p. 289. *Letters*, p. 405.

<sup>10</sup> Clarke, *Remarks*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>11</sup> Leibniz and Clarke, pp. 121 and 413.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 413-4.

all, under a necessity incumbent *ab extra*. But that, which acts thus, is in reality only an instrument in the hand of something which imposes the necessity; and cannot properly be said to act, but to be acted on. . . . A being under the above-mentioned inabilities is, as to the morality of its acts, in the state of inert and passive matter, and can be but a machine to which no language or philosophy ever ascribed more."<sup>13</sup>

Erdmann is one of the few critics of Wollaston who give evidence of having carefully considered this section. After saying that Wollaston "oscillates" in his epistemology from empiricism to rationalism, he proceeds to say that "In his view of the practical this oscillation does not show itself, action being always determined by the nature of things (*immer ist dass Handeln durch die Beschaffenheit der Dinge bestimmt*)." He says that Wollaston next grapples with the question as to whether a man is free to act according to the nature of things after he has attained an understanding of them. Erdmann says that Wollaston "recognizes that without this ability man can be under no moral obligation," but he calls attention to the fact that Wollaston gave only empirical argument. Erdmann is of the opinion that this practical belief in freedom is no proof of its truth. "The inclinations determine man and by letting himself be determined by them he acts well," this is what Erdmann believes to be the conclusion to which Wollaston's idea of treating everything as what it is really comes. He says that "such autonomy as is due a person when it has to realize an ideal set up by himself . . . Wollaston has not granted him." Erdmann thinks that "the good act has not been fully defined" by Wollaston; that "much is still left to the spontaneity of the subject. The decision, namely, to act or not to act according to the nature of things,—only that decision remains to him, the question of what to do is decided by nature." Erdmann seems to think that by bringing in the wish for happiness and by identifying truth and happiness Wollaston really rules out freedom as a factor in the moral life, because one's inclination really determines one

<sup>13</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 7.

toward a true and a happy life. The only freedom remaining to man is the freedom to act or not to act according to the nature of things. There is no freedom as to the content of morality, for that is decided by nature.<sup>14</sup>

Burnet tries to convict Wollaston of determinism for a reason very similar to that of Erdmann's. He says that Wollaston took the position that the desire of public happiness is a reasonable ethical end because it is best that all should be happy. That it is best that all should be happy is necessarily perceivable by all rational natures. But if men are so constituted by nature, asks Burnet, would that not mean that there is no such thing as morality.<sup>15</sup> Burnet's criticism fails to consider the great difference between things being necessarily perceivable, a merely intellectual matter, and morality, which is a practical matter. Wollaston does not say that one must act conformably to one's intellectual judgments.

Irons endeavors to show Wollaston to be a determinist in connection with his exposition of the passage: "Designedly to treat things as being what they are not is the greatest possible absurdity. It is to put bitter for sweet, darkness for light, crooked for straight, etc. It is to subvert all science, to renounce all sense of truth, and flatly to deny the existence. For nothing can be true, nothing does exist, if things are not what they are."<sup>16</sup> Irons says that: "In these circumstances it is somewhat comforting to learn that it is not in one's power deliberately to resolve not to be governed by reason, for if a person could do this he must either have some reason for making that resolution or none. If he has none it is a resolution that stands upon no foundation; and if he has some reason for it he is governed by reason. This demonstrates that reason must govern."<sup>17</sup> Irons draws a conclusion that Wollaston guards against, namely, that the will is as equally determined as the intellect. We give our assent to demonstrated truth, says Wol-

<sup>14</sup> Erdmann, *Geschichte der neuen Phil.*, vol. II, pp. 120-22.

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *Art. in London Journal*, p. 214.

<sup>16</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Modern Ethics*, *Phil. Review*, vol. 12, p. 138.

laston, because as rational beings we cannot possibly do otherwise. There is no choice in matters of this kind, for an intellectual being cannot possibly believe anything which he perceives to be self-contradictory.<sup>18</sup> Wollaston does not argue from this that moral actions are equally determined, but insists that man is free to act or not to act conformably with truth and the nature of things. Irons, though, argues that: "If right action and correct thinking stand on the same basis, it is clear that a wrong action is an utter impossibility." Yes, of course, but Wollaston is very careful to state that they do not stand on the same basis. He says that morality is as true as an intellectually true proposition, and that immorality is as false as an intellectually false proposition; but he does not place them on the same foundation because the one kind of relation belongs to the realm of determinism, the other to the realm of freedom.<sup>19</sup> Clarke has a very clear statement of this difference: "Assent to a plain speculative truth is not in a man's power to withhold; but to act according to the plain right and reason of things, this he may, by the natural liberty of his will forbear."<sup>20</sup> But Irons, after considering this passage, still insists that freedom cannot explain why the impossible is actual. His argument is as follows: to do wrong is the same as to believe the self-contradictory, which cannot be done. Consequently to do wrong is impossible, and not even the freedom of the will can explain it. Wollaston, in truth, says that to do wrong is to act in a self-contradictory way; that immorality is as absurd and inconsistent as the denial of self-evident truth. Irons proceeds to show that morality is impossible from this point of view, because "if reason is the motive power which lies behind right conduct, the individual who obeys the moral law acts under the compulsion of his rational nature. There is then no difference between moral obligation and rational necessity. An action is not moral, however, if it is performed under compulsion of any kind. Consequently, if the rationalistic view of con-

<sup>18</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7 and 62.

<sup>20</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, pp. 64-5.



duct be adopted, right action can have no moral value or significance."<sup>21</sup> Wollaston, however, as we have seen, insists that compulsion belongs only to existential judgments, to the reaction of the intellect to matters of fact, not to moral actions. Intellectual beings must assent to the truth of the proposition A is A, but a moral being may act as if A were not A.<sup>22</sup>

Wollaston's rationalistic theory of morals, Leslie Stephen thinks to be but an application to ethical speculation of the Cartesian metaphysics. According to this metaphysics, says Stephen, the nature of everything is as God has constituted it, consequently there can be nothing really independent or external to God. Wollaston's ethics, it is contended, really leads to the spiritual determinism of Spinoza and Calvin. God is the first and the sustaining cause of all things. Since "He moves the stars and directs the course of a bubble," all natures and relations are determined; the moral as the physical laws belong to the nature of things as He has constituted them.<sup>23</sup> It might be answered that if law means the same thing when we speak of moral as when we speak of natural laws, there can be no such thing as morality because, on that assumption, we would be forced to admit that whatever is is right, and that morality is mere conformity to nature. Wollaston does not identify the natural and the moral, but differentiates the one from the other on the ground that intellectual relations are determined, while moral relations are free.<sup>24</sup> It is true that Wollaston says that morality is like truth in one respect, namely, that coherency is the norm for both. He says that both immorality and self-contradictory intellectual propositions are absurd, but there is this difference between them, the one is possible, the other impossible.<sup>25</sup>

While assent is necessitated, it is also true that the doctrine of necessity assails the truthworthiness of knowledge. This is true, because in a world where all is necessitated one

<sup>21</sup> Irons, *Rationalism in Modern Ethics*, *Phil. Review.*, vol. 12, p. 142.

<sup>22</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Leslie Stephen, *Eng. Thought in the 18th Cen.*, vol. 2, pp. 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 8, 42 and 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec. I, Prop. II and III.

event is just as conformable to the nature of things as another. Only in a system which includes freedom is there any tenable ground for the distinction between truth and error. This is true because knowledge presupposes a unitary psychical agent capable of acting and not only of being acted upon, for whatever may come from without there is knowledge only as the mind reacts upon this sense data. The activity of the mind is involved in the relating of the sense impressions. There can be no knowledge without this relating activity and only a free unitary psychical agent could be conscious of identity in the midst of change.<sup>26</sup>

In his section relating to the Deity, Wollaston undertakes the reconciliation of human freedom and divine providence. "It is not impossible," he says, "that men, whose natures and actions are foreknown, may be introduced into the world in such times, places and other circumstances, as their acts and behavior may not only coincide with the general plan of things, but also answers many private cases too." He thinks that there may well be in the Divine mind something like a projection of the future history of mankind and also a Divine guidance of men and at the same time men be left to live their lives in freedom.<sup>27</sup> He insists that whatever Divine plans there may be for the world and for humanity, and he has a teleological conception of things, must be ultimately reconcilable with human freedom.

A significant thing in Wollaston's ethics is that he clearly realizes that morality gets its meaning from the relation of each thing to every other in the universe. Morality, for him, has its warrant and justification in the ultimate meaning of reality and every moral act has a significance for the whole of reality. If this be his metaphysics of morals then we can expect it to become involved in all the difficulties connected with every idealistic view of the world, particularly the difficulties connected with the relation of the one and the many. In a theistic view of the world, like that of Wollaston, morality must be identified with the realization

<sup>26</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 45-6 and 7. Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, 121, and *Remarks*, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 104-5.

of the supreme spiritual principle. The universe cannot be thought of as planless and purposeless but if we say that there is an all-comprehending divine plan, a cosmic purpose running through everything, what is left of the idea of freedom and individuality? The individual's moral life as a whole is apparently but a part of the supreme purpose of the universe, and each moral act but a part of the divine plan. To be sure each moral act, on this assumption, has a supreme worth; but the question Wollaston is concerned with is this: is there any morality attaching to acts when the moral life is regarded as but a part of the consummation of a divine plan. Ethical idealism must identify the moral life with the realization of the supreme spiritual principle; but this does not mean, Wollaston seems to think, that we are to treat the contribution of the moral individual towards the fulfillment of the supreme purpose as merely an expression, through him, of that principle. Wollaston thinks that there is a supreme principle and a general plan of things but that men are "left to live their lives in freedom." I think that Schiller's words:

"Nehmt die Götter auf in euren Willen"

well expresses Wollaston's position. Wollaston and Clarke both reacted rather strongly from the spiritual determinism of Calvin and Leibniz and yet they clearly saw that there must be a spiritual principle in the universe.

In every moral act there is a divine and a human aspect. The first relates it to the supreme purpose of the universe, while the second gives it its individual character. Wollaston seeks to find the truth in both, but does not quite effect a reconciliation except by faith. If the absolute identification of the finite wills with the infinite is denied, how can we believe that the supreme purpose will be realized, since its realization is dependent upon the success or failure of finite wills? We can so far as we are concerned, if freedom is true, defeat the divine purpose, for it is contingent upon our co-operation. There have been two ways of solving this difficulty of the finite and the divine will. Some seem to think that the finite moral life is but a medium through which

the divine purpose realizes itself. So conceived, the individual is just an instrument, a mere manifestation of the absolute, differing from the manifestations in nature only in self-consciousness. Freedom, in this sense, consists in doing what the divine requires of us and in acquiescence in the divine plan. The supreme principle cannot fail to realize its purpose in the world no matter what part the finite being plays or fails to play. The other extreme view is that of the freedom of indifference. Wollaston seems to have believed that there is a general plan for the world and that our duty consists in conforming our lives to this plan. He did not, I think, believe that creatures are necessary beings, but only that the way to self-realization is through free conformity to the divine plans.<sup>28</sup>

The objective method of ethics makes some very clear implications as to the relations of the divine and the human will, for if our criterion be that everything is to be treated according to its nature, then it follows necessarily that morality consists in living conformably to God's plans. Wollaston says that "the owning of things, in all our conduct, to be as they are, is direct obedience . . . to Him, who is the Author of Nature:"<sup>29</sup> Clarke says that the will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal reason of things, and that all rational creatures are obliged, if they would be rational and moral, to govern themselves in all their actions by the same eternal rules of reason that govern God. That this is not determinism but moral freedom is very evident from this quotation: "The same reason of things, with regard to which the will of God always and necessarily does determine itself to act in constant conformity to the eternal rules of justice, equity, goodness and truth; ought also constantly to determine the wills of all subordinate rational things, to govern all their actions by the same rules. It is very unreasonable and blameworthy in practice, that any intelligent creature endued with reason and will, capable of distinguishing good from evil and of

<sup>28</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 7 and 164-5. Baillie, in *Hastings Ency. of Reli. and Ethics*, vol. V, p. 410.

<sup>29</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 14.



choosing the one and refusing the other, should wilfully and perversely choose to act contrary to reason and nature." <sup>30</sup> The moral words "ought," "should" and "choose" all occur in this brief passage. And these words are found just as frequently in Wollaston's work. "By religion," he says, "I mean nothing else but an obligation to do what ought not to be omitted, and to forbear what ought not to be done." This means, according to Wollaston, "That every intelligent, active and free being should so behave himself, as by no act to contradict truth; or, that he should treat everything as being what it is." <sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Clarke, *Nat. Reli.*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>31</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 24.

## THE PROBLEMS OF EVIL AND IMMORTALITY

### SECTION V

#### “TRUTHS RELATING TO THE DEITY”

This is a long, interesting section but only a small part of it is of any particular interest to us. His discussion of the problems of evil and immortality is all that bears on our question. He takes up the problem of evil by saying that the conception of the Deity as unitary precludes the existence of an independent principle of evil. As to moral good and evil, “they seem,” he says, “to depend upon ourselves. If we do but endeavor, the most we can, to do what we ought, we shall not be guilty of not doing it; and therefore it is not our fault, and not to be charged upon any other being, if guilt and evil be introduced by our neglect, or abuse of our liberty.”<sup>1</sup> His solution of the problem of moral evil is rather more practical than theoretical. As to physical evil he suggests as an explanation our finitude or narrow point of view. “Some things seem to be evil, which would not appear to be such, if we could see through the whole contexture of things.” And if there is a future state, that which seems to be evil now may be rectified or rather shown to be good from the point of view of eternity. To ask why God permits evil, he says, is the same as asking why God created a material world inhabited by imperfect beings.<sup>2</sup> “If the virtuous man has undergone more in this life, than it would be reasonable he should suffer, if there was no other; yet those sufferings may not be unreasonable, if there is another. For they may be made up to him by such enjoyments, as it would be reasonable for him to

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-6.

prefer, even with those present mortifications, before the pleasures of this life with the loss of them. Sometimes the only way to the felicities of a better state may lie through dark and difficult passes, discipline to some men being necessary, to bring them to reflect, and to force them into such methods as may produce in them proper improvements; such, as otherwise and of themselves they would never have fallen into. On the other side, if vicious and wicked men do prosper and make a figure,—yet it is possible their sufferings hereafter may be such, as that the excess of them above their past enjoyments may be equal to the just payment of their villainies and wickedness.”<sup>3</sup> This Wollaston thinks argues for the necessity of the future state, “if good and bad men are not respectively treated according to reason in this life, they may be yet so treated, if this and another to follow be taken together into account.”<sup>4</sup>

The assumption back of all the thinking of Wollaston is that the universe in which we live is inherently rational and coherent. He thinks that this is the necessary implication of all thinking. An objective system of ethics is of course built upon this assumption. “The foundation of religion lies in that difference between the acts of men, which distinguishes them into good, evil, indifferent.”<sup>5</sup> These distinctions lie in the nature of things and so morality consists in the “owning of things, in all our conduct, to be as they are.”<sup>6</sup> Wollaston believes in immortality on the ground that “there must be a future life where proper amends may be made,” where the wrongs of this world may be made right. This belief in immortality, thinking could demand only if the world is thought to be ultimately consistent and rational. If this life be all, Wollaston says, “the general and usual state of mankind is scarce consistent with the idea of a reasonable cause.”<sup>7</sup> He thinks that one could not believe in a Supreme Being, at least in one who is rational, without believing in the hereafter, because it would be inher-

<sup>3</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

ently irrational for the good to suffer as they frequently do in this life if there were no after life of blessedness. But how can we be sure that God will reward virtue in the next world more liberally than in this? In trying to answer this question, he says, he "begins to be very sensible how much he wants a guide." He is not able to fall back on revelation for "a guide" but still he feels sure that all is well. His ground for this faith is that there must be "a reasonable cause" to explain it all.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wollaston, *Reli. of Nat. Deli.*, pp. 113-4 and 211.



## INDEX

- Albee, quoted, 175.  
 Aliotta, quoted, 110.  
 Analogy, method of, in Ethics,  
 35-51, 78-84, 56, 98, 106, 109,  
 126, 138, 144, 148, 152, 200, 224.  
 Aristotle, quoted, 110.
- Baillie, referred to, 228.  
 Balguy, quoted, 100.  
 Bentham, quoted, 173; referred to,  
 184.  
 Blakey, quoted, 33, 83, 145, 153,  
 204, 216.  
 Bott, quoted, 62, 73, 96, 180.  
 Bradley, referred to, 176.  
 Brown, quoted, 118, 144, 174.  
 Butler, Bishop, quoted, 167; re-  
 ferred to, 184, 191.
- Calvin, referred to, 25, 225, 227.  
 Carneri, quoted, 169.  
 Catherein, quoted, 94.  
 Clarke, John, 41, 50, 72, 95, 116,  
 119, 137, 157, 182.  
 Clarke, Samuel, influence on Wol-  
 laston, 25-31, 72, 105, 219;  
 quoted, 55, 79, 200, 220, 228;  
 referred to, 84, 87, 105, 108, 133,  
 139, 159, 176, 186, 206.  
 "Conformity to Nature," as moral  
 formula, 14, 25, 90, 135, 184, 198.  
 Conscience, See Intuitionism; Wol-  
 laston's notion of, 57, 59, 132,  
 145, 211.  
 Consequences, place of in motiva-  
 tion, 29, 49, 129, 151, 169, 172,  
 177, 179, 183, 195, 197, 200.  
 Consistency, as the moral criterion,  
 33-115, 122, 138, 141, 147, 156,  
 164, 180, 189, 191, 193, 196, 205,  
 220.  
 Conybeare, referred to, 4, 108.  
 Cudworth, influence on Wollaston,  
 19, 191, 215.
- Cumberland, influence on Wollas-  
 ton, 22.
- Deism, relation of Wollaston to,  
 13, 31.  
 Descartes, referred to, 19, 142, 205,  
 225.  
 Dewey, quoted, 16.  
 Drechsler, referred to, 4.
- Empiricism, 16, 21, 24, 93, 139, 151,  
 209, 216, 222.  
 Enlightenment, relation of Wol-  
 laston to, 13.  
 Epicureanism, 167, 172.  
 Epistemology, 208-218, 16, 19, 69,  
 133, 139, 192, 206.  
 Erdmann, quoted, 24, 26, 32, 59,  
 87, 90, 108, 187, 190, 216, 222.  
 Eudaemonism 22, 29, 129, 188, 218.  
 Evil, problem of, 230-32, 31, 33, 46.  
 Existential judgments, See Truth;  
 relation of to Valuational judg-  
 ments, 35-59, 71, 78, 85, 89, 105,  
 113, 120, 140, 161, 225.  
 Experience, 20, 34, 59, 69, 125, 133,  
 138, 140, 192, 208, 211, 216.
- Falckenberg, quoted, 27, 88, 131,  
 185.  
 Feeling, as a moral criterion, 14,  
 24, 128, 135, 137, 152, 159, 179;  
 place of in motivation, 57, 73,  
 151, 154, 156, 169, 179, 183, 194,  
 197.  
 Fite, quoted, 196.  
 "Fitness of Things," as moral cri-  
 terion, 26, 29, 45, 57, 71, 80, 106,  
 110, 135, 138, 149, 169.  
 Freedom, necessity of, for morals,  
 32-5, 219-229, 17, 26, 29, 39, 45,  
 47, 53, 55, 61, 80, 83, 86, 88, 97,  
 102, 107, 110, 113, 118, 124, 126,  
 142, 151, 154, 158, 205, 214.

- Garve, quoted, 4, 39, 87, 108, 130, 143.
- Gass, quoted, 93, 170.
- Gay, quoted, 149.
- God, His laws natural and the criterion of morals, 32-76, 14, 21, 23, 28, 31, 132, 142, 149, 164, 186, 206, 211, 216, 228, 231.
- Goodness, nature of, 35-92, 23, 98, 104, 108, 118, 124, 142; relation to truth, 33-115, 118, 136, 146, 164, 172, 177, 187, 200, 209.
- Gross, quoted, 38.
- Grote, quoted, 84.
- Grotius, influence on Wollaston, 18.
- Hall, quoted, 98, 185.
- Happiness, significance of, for morals, 162-199, 17, 23, 28, 58, 62, 128, 138, 144, 145, 151; relation of, to truth, 184-197.
- Hedonism, 162-197, 16, 18, 22, 27, 62, 85, 128, 132, 138, 144, 150, 215.
- Hobbes, influence on Wollaston, 18, 25, 79.
- Humanity. See Personality.
- Hume, quoted, 124, 130, 139, 151; referred to, 134, 178.
- Hursts, quoted, 163, 172.
- Hutcheson, quoted, 117, 154.
- Idealism, metaphysical, relation of Wollaston's ethics to, 204-7, 16, 66, 83, 85, 91, 102, 108, 117, 123, 132, 136, 140, 145, 161, 165, 173, 185, 226.
- Identity, logical law of, as the moral law, 17, 21, 24, 29, 31, 45, 56, 71, 79, 82, 85, 89, 95, 99, 103, 107, 110, 119, 126, 131, 169, 177, 225.
- Immortality, 230-2, 31, 170, 185, 207.
- Innate ideas, of morality, 21, 23, 90, 94, 135, 145, 187, 210, 216.
- Intellectual and moral, differentia of, 37, 42, 46, 49, 63, 71.
- Intellectualism, 14, 19, 24, 35, 70, 84, 126, 134, 138, 162, 168, 173, 178, 194.
- Intelligence, necessity of, for moral responsibility, 33, 37, 39, 47, 61, 83, 154, 158, 205, 214, 216, 229.
- Intention, 45, 47, 49, 96, 119, 129, 157.
- Intuitionism, 15, 19, 70, 133, 210, 216.
- Intuitionism, 15, 19, 24, 29, 34, 66, 69, 81, 86, 90, 92, 110, 125, 130, 132, 137, 144, 155, 168, 192, 210, 216, 218.
- Irons, quoted, 112, 123, 158, 223.
- Janet, quoted, 102, 116, 141.
- Jodl, quoted, 134.
- Jouffroy, quoted, 101, 120, 127.
- Kames, quoted, 134.
- Kant, referred to, 4, 15, 34, 66, 114, 142, 190, 196, 199, 207.
- La Rossignol, quoted, 105, 173.
- Leibniz, referred to, 221, 227.
- Locke, influence on Wollaston, 16, 21, 210; quoted, 24, 90, 212.
- Logic, relation of, to Ethics, 95-114, 21, 30, 51, 56, 81, 85, 125, 131.
- Lowman, quoted, 27.
- Mackintosh, quoted, 81, 118.
- Martineau, quoted, 110, 116, 139.
- Maurice, quoted, 214.
- Metaphysics, Wollaston's view of, 204-07, 226-32; relation to Ethics, 17, 83, 91, 102, 108, 117, 123, 136, 139, 140, 161, 165, 185, 204, 209.
- Moral Sense, 69, 117, 125, 135, 145, 152, 155, 158.
- Morell, referred to, 205.
- Nature of Things, as the moral criterion, 33-115, 14, 17, 22, 29, 127, 131, 135, 140, 146, 159, 167, 170, 177, 180, 186, 195, 202, 206, 209, 217.
- Newton, influence on Wollaston, 19; referred to, 4, 90, 108.
- Noack, quoted, 170, 214.
- Norden, quoted, 134.
- Objective method in Ethics, 85-94, 21, 26, 33, 47, 71, 129, 131, 135, 162, 168, 187, 193, 215, 231.

- Objectivity, of the good, 34-115**  
 20, 24, 27, 125, 129, 139, 147, 159,  
 163, 169, 172, 178, 188, 206, 209,  
 216.
- Ought, and is, 130-146, 26, 36, 51,**  
 56, 63, 85, 108, 120, 127, 152, 160,  
 224.
- Overton, quoted, 203.**
- Perry, referred to, 204.**
- Personality, significance of, for**  
**morals, 45, 47, 64, 73, 75, 77, 82,**  
 87, 97, 115, 119, 121, 129, 139,  
 142, 148, 152, 163, 167, 174, 177,  
 180, 190, 195, 197.
- Plato, moral system of, 71, 84,**  
 191.
- Price, referred to, 81, 99, 146.**
- Rashdall, quoted, 159.**
- Rationalism, 184-197, 16, 19, 22,**  
 30, 70, 87, 93, 112, 117, 133, 140,  
 158, 162, 169, 186, 192, 206, 209,  
 222.
- Reason, as moral faculty, 184-97,**  
 15, 154, 209, 219; competence of,  
 in the realm of Ethics, 33-115,  
 13, 20, 25, 30, 122, 131, 139, 148,  
 152, 166, 211, 223; impotence of,  
 151, 154, 158.
- Religion, Natural, 32-76, 129-142,**  
 20, 29, 80, 87, 90, 102, 108, 117,  
 161, 171, 180, 189, 206, 212, 219,  
 228.
- Revelational Theology, ethics of,**  
 13, 17, 24, 29, 132, 149.
- Right and wrong, differentia of,**  
 32, 37, 56, 68, 71, 127.
- Rogers, referred to, 19, 138.**
- Schmidt, quoted, 92.**
- Selby-Bigge, quoted, 13, 31, 79, 115,**  
 138, 177, 200, 204.
- Sensational School of Morals, 14,**  
 24, 135.
- Seth, referred to, 86, 193.**
- Shaftesbury, referred to, 191.**
- Sidgwick, quoted, 79, 176, 178, 184.**
- Simmel, referred to, 114, 159.**
- Smale, quoted, 215.**
- Spinoza, referred to, 225.**
- Stephen, L., quoted, 3, 14, 19, 55,**  
 108, 110, 132, 155, 177, 225.
- Stewart, quoted, 90, 212.**
- Truth, nature of, 208-19, 33-35,**  
 26, 43, 52, 53, 71, 80, 85, 82, 98,  
 119, 142, 168; criterion of mor-  
 als, 33-115, 130-46, 28, 124, 178,  
 181, 202, 209; relation to happi-  
 ness, 184-197, 28, 65, 149, 162,  
 164, 171, 177, 180, 202, 215.
- Truthfulness, necessity of, 51, 75,**  
 183, 190; necessary exceptions,  
 75, 168, 190.
- Ueberweg, quoted, 36.**
- Utilitarianism, 176-83, 28, 198.**
- Value, judgments of, 26, 36, 53,**  
 58, 85, 108, 120, 127, 139, 160.
- Von Gizycki, quoted, 134.**
- Von Hartmann, quoted, 87, 91,**  
 116, 130.
- Vorländer, quoted, 28, 87, 98, 190.**
- Warburton, referred to, 182.**
- Warlaw, referred to, 31, 118.**
- Welfare, 22, 29, 65, 129, 176, 180,**  
 186, 191, 198, 201.
- Will, significance of, for morality,**  
 See Freedom.
- Williams, quoted, 81, 214.**
- Windelband, quoted, 83, 108, 169.**
- Wright, quoted, 194.**
- Wundt, quoted, 25, 90, 99, 126, 212.**















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