

CORRESPONDENCE

each individual. There is still another fundamental feature in human life, but one which may be regarded as largely emergent, namely, organization or functionalism, whereby individuals, both because of genius or defects and because of the division of labour, specialize along certain lines and are in some degree excused from other lines. For instance, an especially fit married couple would rear a large family, while an unfit couple would have no children or only a few. An artist or writer, with rare gifts, might be excused from family life.

Under each class of actions, and in some cases common to several, are moral rules, or virtues. A few are: temperance in eating, truthfulness in social relations, chastity and filial love in reproductive conduct, open-mindedness in intellectual pursuits, patriotism, and public spirit in government.

Actions may be classified also with reference to the persons affected. Those in the interest of the actor are egoistic; those in the interest of other persons are altruistic; those for the benefit of society are social or functional. This plan of division is fundamental in part, but it is interwoven, needless to say, with the classes in the other outline.

There should, of course, be more definition of premises and explanation of details, but lack of space at present forbids. These outlines are not regarded as faultless, but have been devised in the absence of any light that has seemed adequate. In the main they seem to be sound, and they not only describe conduct that is completed, they reveal developing principles that point into the future.

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LUDINGTON,
MICHIGAN, U.S.A.
July, 1929.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *Journal of Philosophical Studies*.

THE RELATIVITY OF FREE WILL.

SIR,

I am writing to make a few observations regarding Sir Herbert Samuel's very interesting article in your July issue entitled "The Relativity of Free Will." Is not the essential element in the concept of free will the existence *at times* in human life of *open alternatives*? I say at times, for it would only be an impossibly extreme form of that doctrine which would regard such open alternatives as always existing. I face a given situation. How shall I act? Does the fact that I live in a given environment, and possess a given inherited character, preclude me from taking any but one pre-determined course of action? Or are there open for me at the moment of seeming choice alternatives, one of which I select? If the former is true, I do not possess free will, and to speak of its relativity seems only to confuse the issue; while in the latter case the use of the qualifying word is unnecessary. In the sense that I have used the word, free will must be—for the occasion on which it is exercised—either absolute, or an illusion.

If one turns to some of Sir Herbert Samuel's illustrations, one finds that they do not fit the case under discussion. The sun does move round the earth; it is only a question of our frame of reference. When we sit down we are at rest in the sense that the word "rest" is used. Likewise, our bodies are solid in the sense that we use the word. But at our moment of "choice" there are either alternatives open for our thought or action, or there are not. The one proposition excludes the other. If there are not such alternatives, free will is an illusion—one which is, of course, inevitable; also, possibly, one which is useful and interesting, but an illusion nevertheless.

At times Sir Herbert Samuel expresses his determinism in language which is the property of the libertarian. For this he cannot really be blamed, as, in an ultimate sense, on his own theory he has no choice in the matter, but one may point out the confusion of thought involved. Consider the following quotations, in which the italics are mine.

"... it is shown by experience that people who have received a general education, or who have had a good moral training, conduct themselves better than people who

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have not, *we set* those influences to work on the children of succeeding generations, with the expectation that they will have their effect in the actions which they will choose to do."

"We do, in fact, dimly recognize that, while we cannot trace the effect of all the vast complex of causes that determine character, we can here and there trace the effects of some of them. It is for that reason that *we try to set* on foot those agencies which will influence character, and therefore influence the choice of actions, in a way that will benefit the individual and the society."

"Since, however, emphasis is laid on the principle of causation, the doctrine, if it were generally held, should lead, not to a fatalistic apathy, but to a more intense activity, *designed to ensure* that the causes which will mould the future shall be as *beneficent as they can be made.*"

I suggest that such language is pointless and confusing, unless we have the power not "to set on foot those agencies which will influence character," etc. The determinist can speak legitimately, of course, of agencies influencing character, but he is guilty of an informal contradiction if he adds the conception of "ought" to his formula, which the author does in the quotations given. The *sense of "oughtness"* may be regarded as one of the factors which determines character, but the "oughtness" itself must be for the determinist an illusion having no ontological significance.

An idea of great importance in man's higher experience is expressed by the doctrine of free will; but formal thought, perhaps by its very nature, seems to favour determinism. The object of this letter is to contend that no light is thrown on this ancient problem by the use of the word "relativity"—a word clearly borrowed in this case from physics, which is a study of events on a lower level than that of mind.

ERNEST F. CHAMPNESS.

WALLINGTON,
July, 1929.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *Journal of Philosophical Studies*.

SCIENCE AND REALITY.

DEAR SIR,

Volume No. 37 in Benn's Library is an interesting Essay on *Science and Reality* by Professor R. A. Sampson, Astronomer Royal for Scotland.

On page 10 he divides the Sciences with which he has to deal into three distinguishable regions according as these concern Thought, Observation, and Life, and he takes as illustrations of their character and differences the sciences of Geometry, Astronomy, and Medicine.

We suggest that the place which is thus assigned to Geometry is incorrect. Geometry is not in any special sense the Science of Thought. All science is the constant product of observation and thought, but Thought is not the *object* of geometrical, any more than of astronomical, reasoning.

There is a Science of the Laws of Thought—we call it Logic or Epistemology. Its sphere is well defined, and does not include any properties of space. The metaphysician and psychologist are therefore within their rights in challenging the view that Thought is the object of geometrical reasoning. What then is that object? Geometry, we suggest, is the Science of the forms of the free mobility of our bodily organism amidst its environment.

The question is important. If the view we have expressed is sound, the propositions of Euclidean Geometry are for us necessary, and *a priori*. This does not prevent the human mind from formulating a Geometry which is independent of the bonds of the Euclidean system. That has been done; but such Geometry does not apply to *our* physical experience.

Professor Sampson, on page 11, speaking of Euclidean Geometry, tells us that "its arguments are still regarded as valid, but they are now seen to be not inevitably so."