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# PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

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*Edited by*  
Robert J. Mulvaney

Fordham University Press  
New York  
1991

*Dominican College Library*  
487 Michigan Ave., N.E.



# The Ultimate Practical Judgment

OUR INQUIRY WILL BE CENTERED on an example, and the chosen example will be complex enough to exclude the illusions that simplicity might produce. Here is a true story: two geographers, who were also men of wisdom, had just heard of an accident in which several mountain climbers had died. Having no professional interest in the exploration of mountains, I somewhat shyly remarked that it was perhaps unlawful to expose one's life to such dangers for no other purposes than those served by the climbing of a peak. To my surprise the geographers blamed as plainly unethical the recklessness of mountain climbers.

Let us imagine a dialogue on this moral issue, and follow the track of practical thought all the way down to action itself. One character in the dialogue says that the immorality of extreme risk is particularly obvious when a man is in charge of a family. This occasions the remark that even a bachelor is not master and possessor of his own life. At this point someone declares that, after all, every human action or abstention involves risks; the important thing is that the seriousness of the risk should never be out of proportion to the worthiness of the cause. Then the conversation turns to the purposes of mountain climbing.

To accept danger in the service of science is better than lawful, especially if the benefit expected for theoretical and applied knowledge is great. Thus, mountain climbers, before they decide to go on an expedition, have a duty to weigh the probability of gathering valuable information. Here it is pointed out that many times, in the history of science, discoveries resulted from inves-

tigations that looked unpromising; thus it would be good and desirable to climb mountains even without any definite expectation. But someone holds that the balance of wisdom is being disrupted, and says, with a bit of indignation, that you cannot endanger your life unless there is a strong indication that significant results are at hand. Tired of such insistence on the service of science, another person shrugs his shoulders: mountain climbers care little for the improvement of knowledge but enjoy the thrill of danger and the intoxication of accomplishment. An austere moralist stresses that such is the case indeed, and, in an impassioned tone, censures the lightheartedness that drives people to early death for the sake of what is no more than vainglory.

However, is there not something to be said in favor of the attraction that dangerous life often exerts on generous natures? For the service of society, it is all important that many persons, especially among the young, should face the supreme sacrifice with cheerful readiness. Dangers that look absurd, like those incurred by jockeys and car racers, by mountain climbers and circus performers, are socially beneficial inasmuch as they keep alive, in young people especially, a readiness to die without which society would suffer every day from softness and cowardice, and be exposed to betrayal in times of crisis. But it is replied that great inconvenience attaches to any practice suggesting that human life is little valued. Bullfights have a bad reputation in this respect; they are said to foster disregard for man as well as cruelty toward animals.

The dialogue may go on for a long time without ceasing to be reasonable. Idle talk is not yet in sight. All that has been said so far is true, and much more truth can be relevantly voiced on the ethical problem raised by the dangers of mountain climbing. The statements made conflict with one another, yet this does not mean that any of them is false. They express contrasting aspects of the issue: precisely, a wise deliberation gives keen attention to contrasts, and **the most important task of wisdom often is to preserve a multiplicity of goods in spite of their opposition.**

So far, all the rules brought in are general in character and lie at a great distance from action. But consider the problem of a sportsman who has just been invited to join a team determined

to ascend a challenging peak. For his deliberation to be faultless, all the propositions of the preceding dialogue must play a role—though, perhaps, in merely virtual and implicit fashion. And many more particular questions are of essential relevance: granted that it is lawful to take some risk for the service of science and the glory of sportsmanship, what about the particularities of this individual case? Is the moment properly chosen? Whether we are or are not in the season of avalanches makes all the difference between foolishness and reasonableness. What about the guide? Is he experienced, serious-minded, temperate? How was his reputation established? By reliable witness or by hearsay? A conclusion is reached when and only when full assent is given to a judgment which, whether by affirmation or negation, immediately touches action. Let us suppose that this judgment is affirmative. The sportsman is equipped, walks toward his companions, and says, “Everything looks fine, fellows, I’ll go with you.” And off they go.

We were already definitely within the system of practical thought when we were pondering, at a rather high level of abstraction, such general duties as those concerning the preservation of one’s life and the necessary readiness to accept death for a worthy cause. But the practical character of thought has obviously increased with the transition to more concrete subjects and to questions closer to the final decision. The ultimate degree of practicality is attained by the judgment which, except in the case of interference by some external force, cannot not be followed by action. Such is the *command* that a sportsman gives himself when he walks toward his companions and declares that he is ready to go. It is by the study of the ultimate and ultimately practical judgment that we propose to establish the fundamentals of the theory of practical wisdom.

## PRACTICAL JUDGMENT AS THE FORM OF ACTION

**This judgment, metaphorically described as touching action immediately, is, in a direct, proper, and unqualified sense, the form of action. Therefore it is as practical as action itself.<sup>1</sup>**

The notion of form, though primarily relative to the explana-

tion of physical change, retains here all its signification. Within a complex reality, the form is the component by reason of which the complex is what it is rather than anything else, by reason of which it belongs to a genus and a species rather than to any other genus and species. **The act of determinately willing to do this—e.g., of willing to go on a mountain climbing expedition, not hypothetically, but factually and here and now—is what it is, is constituted in its identity, is distinguished from whatever it is not, by the ultimate practical judgment. A practical judgment is ultimate inasmuch as, all hypothetical considerations being transcended, it has the character of a command.** Action and the judgment that commands it are no more external to each other than the marble statue and the shape by reason of which it is a statue of Hercules rather than one of Apollo. Action—I speak not of any action elicited by a human being, but of those distinctly human acts which proceed from rational apprehension, deliberation, and choice—includes the ultimate judgment by which it is determined, just as a physical thing includes the form that, by being present within it, causes it to be what it is.

There is such a significant contrast between thought and action that the notion of practical thought may seem to bear the character of a compromise; it looks like a lump made of principles that qualify each other and hold each other in check. Indeed, at a distance from the concrete, as in the case of a universal rule considered as universal, thought falls short of total practicality.<sup>2</sup> But when the distance between thought and action is nil, when thought has come down into the complex of human action to constitute its form, it is described as practical in an absolutely appropriate sense. To sum up, let it be said that the expression “the practical order” designates both action itself and practical thought. All practical judgments belong to the order of practical thought, but the ultimate one, and it alone among judgments, belongs also, intrinsically and necessarily, to the order of action. The ultimate practical judgment is the form of action and the final expression of thought in its practical function. Through it principles come to exist in the world of action. The principle that deposits ought to be returned exists in my action through the command that I give myself as I write a check in the name of my creditor. Through the efficacy of the

last practical judgment, practical principles come to possess in act the character of forms of action which, by their very constitution as practical principles, they tend to assume.

## THE SYNTHESIS OF PRACTICAL JUDGMENT

The ultimate practical judgment involves a unique synthesis, namely, the putting together of a certain “that” and the act of existing. Indeed, a theoretical judgment may express, in a diversity of ways, the synthesis of essence and “to be”; it may express it as fictitious, as possible, as actual, and as present in actual experience. What is unique in the synthesis that the last practical judgment involves is its decisive *weight*, the actuality of the tendency that it conveys, the drive by which it carries a “that” toward the action of existing, in short, **the unconditional fashion in which it unites the formal cause and the final cause, the object of cognition and the object of appetite.**<sup>3</sup> Let this synthesis be called the *synthesis of realization*, and let us remark that it determines, all the way down from the highest principles of the practical order, a synthetic behavior in sharp contrast with the ways of theoretical thought.

In order to understand what is meant by the traditional proposition that theoretical knowledge proceeds analytically and practical knowledge synthetically, we must go back to what is fundamental in the notion of analysis and in the characteristic features of theoretical thought. “Analysis” is often understood as a synonym of “decomposition” and often connotes the picture of things disjoined and scattered which offer to the mind only the dead parts of what used to be a splendid and living reality. It is analysis so understood that is scoffed at in the famous lines of Mephistopheles to the student:

Whoever wants to know and to describe  
a living thing,

First endeavors to drive the spirit  
out of it,

Then he has the parts in his hand,

But unfortunately the spiritual link  
is missing.<sup>4</sup>

These lines are an adequate motto for the many schools and trends of thought which, in the last three generations, have been reacting against the tendency toward universal resolution into elements: holism, vitalism, the Gestalt theory, intuitionism of various descriptions, pragmatism, *Charakterkunde*, the stream of consciousness of William James, the deep self of Bergson, the action of Blondel, the existentialism of Sartre, etc.<sup>5</sup> Such indefatigable, never-ending reactions bear witness to the lasting foundation of that which is reacted against. Holistic philosophies are up against a power that will never acknowledge defeat, for, in spite of all shortcomings, it certainly holds its own in vast areas of research. It is of the greatest significance to determine whether the tendency toward universal decomposition into parts, which threatens to kill the unity of things, is an essential feature of theoretical science. That it characterizes demonstrative knowledge, science in the traditional and customary sense of the term, is a major tenet of Bergsonism; according to this philosophy, whose profound intention is not pragmatic but contemplative,<sup>6</sup> real and living totalities are not apprehended, the spiritual link of things is irretrievably broken, and utilitarian bias remains in control of our approaches, as long as conceptual delineations, decompositions, distinctions, and abstractions are not transcended in intuitive insights akin and adequate to the primordial *élan* by which things come into being and are kept in motion.

Yet inasmuch as it characterizes theoretical science, analysis is primarily concerned, not with the relation of whole to part, but with the relation of effect to cause and of consequence to principle. To analyze, or to resolve, is to render a situation intelligible by tracing an effect to its cause or a consequence to its principle. But there are two reasons why analysis is often associated with a process of decomposition into parts. The first is that experience generally presents us with contingent aggregates that must be divided into their components in order to find the processes of essential causality which alone are explanatory. It commonly happens that these processes are not initially free



from contingent associations and have to be isolated by our industry, both rational and experimental. Divisions, subdivisions, distinctions often subtle are so many operations preparatory to the analysis that is characteristic of theoretical thought.

When explanation follows the line of material causality, a new relation may appear between analysis and decomposition, for the parts are the material cause of the whole. The analysis of a thing into its material causes may coincide with its decomposition into its parts. The notion of analysis will be more steadily associated with that of decomposition when material causes supply the prevalent method of explanation. Such was the case of Western culture at the time when biological, psychological, moral, and social sciences took it for granted that the best they could do was to follow, as exactly as possible, the pattern set by the physical and chemical sciences. Here the materialistic method assumes the form of mechanism, and arrangements, movements, and rearrangements of particles are expected to account for all structures and processes. The criticism that gave birth to the holistic trends predominant in contemporary psychology was particularly aimed at theories designed to explain mental life by primary components patterned after the elements, atoms, and molecules of the chemists.

When the cause to which an effect is traced has the character of a whole, when a situation is rendered intelligible by the properties of the whole rather than by the nature and arrangement of the parts, the method is just as certainly analytical as in the case of analysis into parts. In both cases what calls for explanation is treated by being resolved, or analyzed, into that which has the power of explanation. Contemporary epistemology is crowded with remarks concerning the many operations of synthetic and constructive nature that are constantly performed by theoretical science. These remarks, or most of them, certainly hold, but they do not invalidate the proposition that theoretical science is characterized by an analytical procedure, for, whether it sets things apart or puts them together, **theoretical thought remains primarily concerned with explanatory knowledge, i.e., with the analysis of effects and consequences into causes and principles.**

Even when it stays at a great distance from action, practical

thought is governed by a law of completeness that is derived from the metaphysical nature of the good. The act to be posited in existence, whatever it may be, is driven into existence by a desire. It is an end or a means to an end; in either case it has the character of a good and cannot be what it is supposed to be save by the proper operation of all its causes. **By the law of Dionysius,<sup>7</sup> "The good is brought about by a cause possessed of integrality, whereas a multitude of defects, though relative to parts, issues in evil."** In the example just described, it is clear that the act of joining a team of mountain climbers is not good, that the judgment that commands such an act is not what it is supposed to be, unless a multiplicity of conditions is put together so as to give the cause at work this character of completeness and integrality. **The wise decision, in this example, puts together, synthesizes, the worthy purpose and the not excessive danger, moderation concerning such aims as the glory of achievement and the thrill of danger (which can so easily impair the soundness of judgment), the appropriate season and the adequate state of health, the skill of the guide and his moral dependability, the family responsibilities that weigh against readiness to face danger, etc. Anything lacking in this combination of conditions suffices to render the judgment imprudent.** A slightly upset stomach by causing dizziness, or a sprained ankle, may entail disaster for an entire team of mountain climbers. No wonder that men dedicated to theoretical studies are reputed to be at a disadvantage when they have to be practical: their habits of thought are such that they have a tendency to leave out a few of the data or factors whose combination is indispensable for successful action. They are used to an order of things where what matters is the working of essential causes and their relations to their essential effects. It takes a great deal of versatility to be excellent both at the methods of abstraction, distinction, isolation, and consideration in solitude which serve explanation, and at the methods of synthesis, composition, and complex consideration, oblivious of nothing, aware of the significance of the most minute accidents, which are the ways of wisdom in the life of action. The synthesis of command and realization is characterized by decisiveness and completeness: decisiveness concerns the relations of the *that* to the act of existing; com-

pleteness, the constitution of the *that*. In phases antecedent to command, the practical synthesis is both indecisive and incomplete.

## NATURE AND USE

The notion of use is of such significance in the theory of practical knowledge that no effort should be spared to make it entirely clear. Let us, first, consider examples evidencing the relation between good and evil in physical reality and in human use. External things, whether they be things of nature or works of human industry, admit of being good or poor in a physical sense and admit of being put to a good or to a bad use. It is possible to make a good use of a good car and a bad use of a good car and a bad use of a poor car and a good use of a poor car. Turning to the powers of man himself: it is obviously possible to make a good use of good eyesight, and a poor use of it, and a poor use of poor eyesight and a good use of it. What holds for a sensorial faculty holds equally for memory, imagination, intelligence, and the will itself. It is possible to make a good use of a strong will and a poor use of a strong will and a good use of a weak will. . . . We might be tempted to say that there is no connection between good in nature and good in use, or between evil in nature and evil in use. Yet some thought-provoking cases warn us that evil in nature may constitute, in various ways, an inclination toward evil in use. Correspondingly, the danger of evil use may be removed, or at least decreased, by some perfections of nature. The proposition that it is possible to make a good use of a poor car can be challenged when what is poor about the car is the condition of its brakes. With a car whose brakes do not work safely, the only good use is, under almost all circumstances, abstaining from use, and we consider that it is improper to keep in one's garage a car whose brakes are not safe; the availability of such a thing is a temptation to indulge in improper use. Thus, even though the thing under consideration be external to man, a certain defect of nature may cause a tendency toward wrong use. This assumes extreme seriousness when the thing suffering from a defect of nature is the human appetite itself,

whose act is an inclination. Consider emotional aberrations. They may be totally traceable to accidents of nature and in no degree to bad use. But because they are of such nature as to admit of no good use, and because their dynamic character constitutes an urge, and perhaps a violent one, toward use and bad use, the law of good use is greatly concerned with their being silenced or uprooted.

So far, we have been considering use in its *human* sense; we have spoken of good and bad use in relation to man, that is, in relation to the ends that are those of man considered precisely as man. Let it be noticed that use may be relative not to man as man but to the particular quality of some power or expertness, and that good and evil in use may be relative not to the ends of man but to this particular quality. A grammarian is excellently qualified to make grammatical mistakes if he pleases to, and a highly skilled chemical engineer is the logical man for sabotaging a chemical factory. **Whereas virtue involves an essential tendency toward good human use, the neutrality of expertness is twofold: of any art or technique (a) it is possible to make a humanly good use, or a bad use, or no use at all, and (b) it is also possible to make a use that is right or wrong from the very point of view of art or technique.**<sup>8</sup>

It is entirely clear that the judgment concerning use is closer to action than any judgment about nature, and that, within the limits of voluntariness, the judgment concerning *human* use is closer to action than the judgment concerning *particular* use. The ultimate practical judgment involves the consideration of human use, and the disposition that makes for excellence in ultimate practical judgment is not a mere skill, expertness, art, or technique, but a virtue in the full sense of the term. The mastery of an art makes it possible to perform excellently the operations of this art, if and only if this is what the craftsman pleases to do. But, once more, an art can be used against man and even against its own purposes. **On the contrary, a virtue properly so called is, in the words of St. Augustine, "a quality . . . of which no one makes a wrong use."**<sup>9</sup> It is impossible to make a wrong use of a virtue because a virtue procures the right use as well as the right quality of whatever is subject to its control. And not to make use of virtue when circumstances

demand that use be made of it is contrary to the essential inclination of virtue. **Of all the intellectual habitus, prudence alone is a virtue properly so called—which indeed implies that it is not purely intellectual.**

## THE TRUTH OF PRACTICAL JUDGMENT

The problem of truth in the practical judgment is best approached by asking in what sense a judgment immediately relative to action, a command, can attain certainty. Suppose that the heir to a considerable estate hears disquieting reports on the methods used by his grandfather in the making of his fortune. If the reports are true, he is not the legitimate owner of this estate which he has treated as his, in good faith, for some time. Although the doubt is slight, the honest fellow feels obligated to inquire. After patient and conscientious research, the doubt has not become more serious, but it has not been completely removed. It proved impossible to find the only document that could establish finally whether he or someone else is the legitimate owner of the estate. A time comes when it would be wrong to spend more time and energy on an inquiry that seems bound never to give any decisive result. All will agree that after such conscientious endeavors the factual possessor ought to conclude "I am entitled to keep this estate." Justice is fully satisfied provided he is determined to accept the consequences, no matter how unpleasant, of a possible discovery of the lost document. **How shall we interpret the proposition "I am entitled to keep this estate" in terms of truth and certitude? By hypothesis this proposition is not in certain agreement with the facts, for these have not been established certainly.** The lost document may turn up, and reveal that the doubt was well-grounded, that the estate actually belongs to someone else. Then the honest man will confess that he is not entitled to keep this estate. The proposition that terminated his inconclusive inquiry, "I am entitled to keep this estate," proves to be at variance with facts. In a way it was false, but not in every way, for no one would declare that a man erred when, after a conscientious inquiry, he concluded, in accordance with all available evidence, that he

was entitled to retain an estate. In view of the evidence available, his decision was what it was supposed to be. It was good. It fully agreed with the requirements of justice. It was the decision that any honest man had to make in such a case. **It was the proper rule of action under the circumstances; for action cannot be ruled according to unavailable evidence.**

And thus we are led to understand that a practical judgment admits of being true or false in more than one sense. It may be true by conformity to the factual state of affairs: this is the primary, the theoretical, the unqualified meaning of truth. In that sense a practical judgment always falls short of certainty inasmuch as any practical situation involves contingencies that defeat the most earnest endeavor to establish the conformity of our judgments to the factual state of things contingent, i.e., of things that can be otherwise than they are. In ordinary life we forget about this uncertainty of our prudence because we are busy, because we are sensible, and because we are willing to take chances. Yet the possibility of disastrous discrepancies between our decisions and the real state of affairs is threatening at all times, with death as a common effect of undetectable error. It would be unreasonable to eat food prepared by people notoriously eager to cause my death, but most of the time the sensible and virtuous thing, when mealtime has come, is to take food without thought of poison. True, once in a while you hear of whole families having died as a result of an accident in the preparation of food. The probability is extremely small, say, one in many million, but between such a small probability and the elimination of all adverse chance, the distance is no smaller than between the yes and the no. Adjustment of life, good sense, good judgment consists, to a large extent, in an ability to know where to stop in the indispensable quest for a certainty that indeed cannot be attained in the world of contingency in which our actions take place. Whether or not our food contains poison is worth ascertaining. But if we really mean to establish with certainty the conformity of the proposition "This food contains no poison" to reality, death by starvation is our certain destiny. The same considerations hold for all aspects of human life. We have to fight our way between careless action without appropri-

ate inquiry and a neurotic search for certainty in uncertain matters.

Yet our eagerness for certainty finds satisfaction in the world of action inasmuch as the practical judgment, over and above an inevitably weak quality of theoretical truth, is capable of another type of truth, of a practical truth, of a truth that becomes it properly as a practical judgment, of a truth that is one not of cognition but of direction, of a truth that consists, not in conformity to a real state of affairs, but in conformity to the demands of an honest will, in conformity to the inclination of a right desire.<sup>10</sup> The man who doubted his ownership, having done his best to clear up the case, was judging in accordance with the requirements of honesty when he decided that he was entitled to retain the estate—with a firm determination, however, to return it in the event new evidence should invalidate his reasonable conclusion. For a judgment that is unqualifiedly practical, the proper way to be true is to be true in a practical sense; that is, to be true as a rule of action. The genuineness of a rule of action is its conformity to intention, provided, of course, that intention itself is genuine, that is, relative to the proper end. Posit the intention of the proper end and posit, in relation to the means, a judgment in unqualified agreement with the genuine intention. This judgment is the true rule of action; it is true as a rule of action, it possesses truth of direction, with absolute certainty—no matter how badly it may remain affected by doubt when considered in relation to the real state of affairs—in other words, when considered in its theoretical truth.<sup>11</sup>

Again, the rightness of desire is in no case compatible with indifference to the real condition of the factors involved in the bringing about of the intended good. The practical judgment that asserts that such and such a course of action will lead to the end cannot be established with complete certainty so far as its relation to facts is concerned. But the probable agreement of the practical conclusion with what does exist and with what is going to happen in reality is something that right desire necessarily demands. Sometimes this probable agreement is sought through slow and leisurely research, which may spread over years, and sometimes it is sought in an extremely short space of time. At

the wheel of a car a decision upon which the lives of several persons depend may have to be made in a split second.

When the desire is right, when the genuine end is properly intended, which implies that there is conscientious inquiry into the real state of affairs, practical judgment can be reasonably expected to be followed by successful action. A decision made in full agreement with right desire may turn out to be disastrous. But constant agreement with right desire—in other words, constant certainty in practical truth—normally implies a high ratio of agreement with facts and consequently entails a high ratio of success in the discharge of our duties. A statesman may well meet failure as a result of a decision in full agreement with right desire, but if his decisions steadily agree with the virtues that make up statesmanship, they will, in many cases, actually preserve and promote the good of the community. Notice, however, that the normal expectation of success, whether in politics or in any other domain of practical wisdom, can be upset by more than one kind of accident. Thus, in the management of a family, the wisdom of a decision can be invalidated by an unpredictable outbreak of disease; there is no guarantee that a succession of equally conscientious decisions will not be invalidated by a succession of equally unpredictable outbreaks. Once in a while we notice that the prudence of the wisest is defeated by a bewildering series of such misfortunes as diseases, transportation accidents, betrayals, etc. In these cases the cause of failure is external to the agent; such dark series can be likened to long successions of identical occurrences in games of chance: they are improbable and happen rarely. More significant are the factors of failure which lie in the agent himself without impairing the rightness of his desire and the agreement of his decisions with his right desire. Let us consider typical examples of these factors.

First comes involuntary ignorance. Without any fault of his, without anything that would impair the rightness of his desire, a man may not know what should be known in order for his decisions to be possessed of highly probable agreement with reality. This often happens in individual conduct, and it more often happens in the government of communities. There may and there may not be awareness of ignorance. If the person is



not aware that he is short of indispensable information, he has no means to correct his limitations, and if he is aware of his harmful ignorance, he still may be unable to do much about it, at least for some time. By reason of his good will, he is eager to procure the help of better-informed advisers, but it often happens that no advice can substitute for personal acquaintance with the data of a problem and with the possible answers. In the case of a leader, honest awareness of harmful ignorance sometimes demands that he resign his duties. But a leader is not always free to resign. Thus, in leadership as well as in the government of oneself, frequent failure may follow judgments that fully agree with right desire and are possessed of certainty in practical truth.

The uncertainty of our prudences appears frightful as we consider the great variety of factors that can adversely affect the relation of practical judgment to reality. Involuntary ignorance in a leader does not result only from failure to get information that, next time, can be procured by consulting the proper memorandum or the proper man. On a deeper level, it may result from such deficiencies as lack of memory for names, faces, or traits of individual character; slow associations and slow processes of thought; inadequacy in the complex of abilities that we confusedly but meaningfully call instinct, knack, intuitive craft, practical sense; cold temperament, entailing privation of the warnings and suggestions that emotional intuition alone can procure; exposure to disturbance by irrational inclinations and aversions.

Concerning this last factor, one might be tempted to say that right desire should procure immunity to such disturbances, but in order for this remark to hold, the rightness that is spoken of should pertain not only to desire but also to all the conditions and instruments involved in its operation. In fact, one may be a man of good will and right desire and yet suffer from significant imperfection with respect to these conditions and instruments. Likewise, a violin player may be a great artist and yet give a poor performance because of defects in the material conditions and in the instrument of his art. This famous virtuoso may not do so well as expected just because he has been tired by a long trip, or because the only available violin is a relatively poor

thing, or because the physical circumstances of the auditorium adversely affect the working of his instrument. A man of right desire will strive to protect his judgment against all emotional disturbances, but to expect that he will be entirely successful is as illusory as to hope that both the virtuoso and his instrument will always be in perfect shape. In fact, it is much easier to keep a virtuoso in shape and a violin in tune than to keep a man of excellent will free from deceitful emotions, and free from the blind spots that may result from a lack of emotions.

Let attention be called, in particular, to emotional disturbances that are social in origin. These are the more difficult to avoid since they proceed from energies whose uninhibited operation matters primordially for the soundness of practical judgment, most of all when the welfare of communities is involved. We would not trust a leader who would appear to us as a fine individual disconnected from the social factors of inclination and aversion, judgment and action. Always supposing that his will is good, we would feel less confident if we realized that neither family traditions, nor historical trends, nor collective representations and drives are of much weight in his deliberations and decisions. We consider that the springs of a personality are inevitably weak unless they derive power from what is most vital in a community, or in several communities. Accordingly, we want a statesman to be a man of traditions, a man rooted in the history of a variety of groups, a man inspired by the needs, the ambitions, the regrets, the defeats, the great memories, and even the myths of the groups to which he belongs. We know that without all this social and historical substance his personality would be shallow and his leadership petty. But a discipline that would submit to a perfectly rational order all the forces of society and history existent in an ample soul without crushing any of them would be an almost superhuman marvel of balance and harmony. And unless such an improbable marvel is realized, the agreement of the practical judgment with the actual state of things is not immune to disturbance secretly originating in perhaps remote parts of the space and duration of social existence.

JUDGMENT BY INCLINATION

The practical judgment, whose proper perfection is truth by agreement with right desire, is ultimately determined not by cognition but by inclination, and its determination is certain if the inclination that ultimately determines it is right. Any decision of great consequence, if it is made in the midst of particularly obscure circumstances, is accompanied by the realization that all the reasons adduced are insufficient. It has been prepared by arguments of our own and by arguments proposed by advisers, by arguments that agreed with our spontaneous dispositions and by arguments that were eagerly considered, out of a sense of duty, in spite of their being sharply at variance with our spontaneity. Arguments filled much space in our consciousness; they were active and restless, perhaps noisy and furious, yet they did not entail any conclusion by logical necessity. After they had displayed their impressive power, it was still possible for objections to silence them and to develop a fury of their own. But a time came when we realized that the thing to do was to dismiss passions and prejudices, to rank as nothing our pride, our covetousness, our laziness and our anger, to transcend our subjectivity, to overcome the weight of our own selves and, in a great act of good will, to seek identification with the movement of justice toward what is right, to lose ourselves in an unrestricted desire that the movement of our resolution be one with the movement of justice. The antecedent consideration of arguments did not, then, seem to have been irrelevant or unnecessary: clearly, it was demanded by, and presupposed to, the generous act of good will which procures the final determination. It was necessary and good that arguments be thoroughly considered, but they had to be transcended if certain conclusions were to emerge. The strongest arguments were inconclusive, and it was not by an argument that the conclusion was brought about. Answer to the ultimate question was obtained by listening to an inclination. The intellect, here, is the disciple of love. The object of the practical judgment is one that cannot be grasped by looking at it. It is delivered by love to the docile intellect. As John of St. Thomas says in words of Augustinian beauty, *Amor*

*transit in conditionem objecti*, "Love takes over the role of object."<sup>12</sup>

The practical judgment is, within our familiar experience, the most certain as well as the clearest case of affective knowledge. Let it be remarked that affective dispositions may play a very important part in the genesis of knowledge without concerning knowledge in any intrinsic way. Extrinsic does not mean unimportant. To be sure, in all departments of knowledge, industry, honesty, docility, ambition, perseverance, resiliency, interest in and love for the subject are major conditions of success; these conditions remain entirely extrinsic. They are needed in algebra as well as in geography, and yet none would hold that the conclusions of the algebraist are determined by his virtuous inclinations. Some fields of knowledge are reputed to require, besides general qualities of application, a certain loftiness of character, a particular freedom from passions, a generous readiness to accept the sacrifices that the acknowledgment of truth may require. Let us assume, in accordance with common belief, that such is generally the condition of philosophy: it does not follow that philosophic knowledge is in any sense or degree an affective knowledge. The part played by affective dispositions in philosophy remains entirely extrinsic. These dispositions do not concern the philosophic assent. To take a simple example, moral debasement may cause an atheistic attitude, and an atheistic attitude may occasion a panpsychistic interpretation of nature. But the moral soundness which procures freedom from such interferences does not in any way determine assent to the propositions that make up the philosophy of natural finality.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of the practical judgment, there is affective knowledge in the intrinsic and most appropriate sense of this expression. Between the yes and the no, it is the right inclination which dictates the answer, "yes" in the case of positive inclination, "no" in the case of aversion. Haste, rationalistic illusions and ambitions, and unfamiliarity with mysteries that are indeed hidden in their very familiarity make it somewhat difficult to achieve complete awareness of the overwhelming fact that in all phases of our moral life we run into issues that inclinations alone can decide. We cannot question that in some cases the light comes from an affective movement, but we are tempted to

believe that these are more or less exceptional. It would be helpful to analyze some of the cases in which the deciding power of the heart is plain and then to examine, in the light of the plainer case, the situations that are not so plain.

The following story will bring to mind familiar experiences of affective knowledge: An honest businessman is visited by a fellow who obviously masters the rules of his game. His proposals seem to be financially safe as well as profitable and, in spite of the suspicions generally attaching to financial plans that look so good, perfectly honest. So, when the honest and experienced businessman is asked why he rejected the proposal without further inquiry, the ways of rational argumentation will not silence his critics. Yet his “no” is resolute and definitive. It seems that he did not even hesitate to dismiss the proposal and the would-be partner. Instead of explanations, he uses metaphors expressing aversion. “Yes, it is not easy to see what is wrong with his plan but sometimes you can smell things that you cannot see.”<sup>14</sup> But it is not every day that one has to do with gentlemen whose craft routs arguments and can be defeated only by a sensitiveness that words cannot express. It seems that in daily life argument takes care of our problems. Let us see what becomes of this impression when facts are examined closely. Today I got up at seven. This is trivial indeed, yet I remember that when it was time to set my alarm clock I hesitated between longer hours of work and badly needed rest. I thought of getting up very early in order to have plenty of work done before noon. Fatigue made me change my mind. But how did I know that I should not arise early in spite of my fatigue? How did I know that I should not make a greater concession to my need for rest and get up still later? To be sure, it is not in the power of any argument to establish a necessary connection between the judgment that I should get up at seven and any necessary principle. **The trivial decision to get up at seven is made by inclination as certainly, though not so noticeably, as that of doing no business with a man who causes repugnance in the heart of the just.**

Let us now consider the condition that must be satisfied for the determination of the judgment to be safely entrusted to affective inclinations. The expression “wishful thinking” con-

veys the suggestion that whenever thought is influenced by wish it ceases to be reliable. Thinking according to one's wishes is reputed to be a casual way of conducting our thoughts, and one that is probably at variance with reality. Is it possible for our wishes, and our aversions as well, to achieve such steady agreement with the objects of right intention that an objective demand for assent be expressed by a positive inclination, and an objective demand for a negation by an aversion and a feeling of repugnance? Is it possible for our heart, i.e., our will and our sense appetite, to be in such steady agreement with the object of virtue that our inclinations and aversions no longer be exposed to the arbitrariness of subjectivity but assume the reliable power of an object?

We answer this question whenever we declare, or imply, that a judgment determined by a virtuous inclination is necessarily in agreement with virtue. If a person is known for unflinching dedication to justice, we think that his example can be safely followed, in difficult problems of justice, provided all the relevant circumstances are the same in his case and ours. We trust that the instincts of people whom we know to be really virtuous cannot be at variance with what virtue demands. **Clearly, there exists a harmony, a sympathy, a dynamic unity, a community of nature, in short, a *connaturality*, between the virtuous heart and the requirements of virtue.** When justice demands that a proposal be answered by "no," how could the heart of the just fail to elicit an act of aversion? **The nature of the just heart, *qua* just, is the essence of justice.** The practical judgment, in order to be true and certain, ought to proceed not by logical connection with axioms (such a connection is impossible in contingent matters), but by way of virtuous inclination. This judgment is an act of knowledge through affective connaturality.

At the end of our remarks on use, it was pointed out that the disposition in charge of the ultimate practical judgment cannot be a mere habitus: it is a virtue, i.e., a habitus that procures excellence in exercise as well as in quality. Again, the last practical judgment is the form of human action and involves, over and above all excellence of nature and of particular use, the requirement of excellence in *human* use. Prudence, the intellectual habitus that alone can guarantee the truth of the last

practical judgment and the soundness of action, is a virtue in the most proper sense of this term.

Let us elaborate on the character of prudence as a virtue. (a) A quality of the practical understanding, prudence presupposes a system of virtuous inclinations inasmuch as these alone can steadily cause a judgment possessed of practical truth. Briefly, moral virtues are needed to procure the good *quality* of the practical judgment. (b) Since the practical judgment determines the actual use of man's free choice, the habitus which makes for its steady excellence must cause the right exercise of the judgment as well as its truth. Whereas the habitus of art is not impaired by one's failure to make use of it at the proper time, it is clear that it would be imprudent, i.e., contrary to prudence, to refrain from judging when the circumstances demand that there be judgment. And whereas it is possible to make a wrong use of art, the notion of an immoral use of prudence is as obviously self-contradictory as that of an immoral use of justice or temperance. (c) The system of good inclinations required for the virtuous steadiness of the prudent judgment is a *complete* one. This implies, first, that nothing short of virtue properly so called can procure the needed rightness of the desire; good dispositions which have not yet attained the status of virtue do not suffice. It implies, second, that all moral virtues are needed to guarantee prudent judgment in any domain of morality. It would be pleasant to imagine that in order to judge prudently in matters of justice it suffices to be just. But assuming—fictitiously—that it is possible to possess justice without possessing the other moral virtues, let us see what would be the condition of judgment about problems of justice in a soul deprived of courage and temperance. So long as the benefit to be derived from unjust choice is not very great, the weight of covetousness and cowardice is not too badly felt and lucid judgment is not impossible. A man temperamentally inclined toward the just, but afflicted with disorderly passions, can be expected to distinguish the just from the unjust when the matter does not arouse his greed and his fear, in other words, when the matter is of insignificant weight. But when the right choice entails heavy sacrifice, lust and fear cause the confusion of judgment and color the unjust with an appearance of justice. This is how moral

virtues are interconnected in prudence. Their interdependence has its center in the *judgment* which constitutes the form of their acts, for this is a judgment by inclination whose soundness, in any domain of morality, is impaired by any significant defect in the system of our inclinations. Another reason why moral virtues are interconnected is that each of them needs modes procured by the others. To resist the temptation of injustice often takes much courage and a steady practice of moderation. It is not possible to be just without being courageous and temperate. A cowardly person can be trusted in matters of justice so long as the pressure is not too strong, but we know that under high pressure he will, say, break his word. Such restricted, precarious, and hypothetical justice is not a virtue. Justice, in the state of virtue, possesses a character of strength procured by fortitude as well as a character of moderation procured by temperance.<sup>15</sup>

The theory of the interconnection of virtues entails the conclusion that the cost of prudence is frightfully high. No wonder that much ingenuity is spent finding ways out of such a predicament, albeit with the complicity of the most improbable illusions. Socratic theories indentifying science and virtue, casuistic extensions of moral science into the domain of contingency, the calculus of probabilities replacing good judgment in magistrates and rulers,<sup>16</sup> a social science that would say what we need to know in order to make our societies rational—these products of rationalistic optimism, no matter how fantastic, are easier to accept than the prospect of having to acquire all virtues.

Notice, however, that prudence can be genuine without all moral virtues being possessed in an equal degree of excellence. There is no justice without fortitude, but a man may be excellently just without having more fortitude than is needed to avoid grave acts of cowardice; his justice can be distinguished in spite of his fortitude's being merely sufficient.

Contrary to the stiff attitude which found expression in Stoicism and in several modern systems of morality—Calvinism, Jansenism, Kantism . . . —a good quality that does not possess the firmness of virtue, a good moral quality by way of mere disposition, can be a thing of great value. It is mostly against the background of an optimistic vision of nature and mankind that



the attitude conveyed by the words “all or nothing” succeeds in making itself acceptable. If we realized that nature is a tragedy rather than an opera and that no being in nature is so badly exposed to failure as man, we would be more willing to understand that incomplete failure, partial success, precarious accomplishment, uncertain achievement are very much better than the state of utter failure which would have been hardly evitable, in the overwhelming majority of cases, without the helpful circumstances procured by religion and by civilization. A coward cannot be an honest man in the full sense of the term, for an honest man does not break his word, even under high pressure, whereas a coward breaks his when the pressure is too strong. However, if he yields only to very strong pressure, if his insufficient fortitude suffices under ordinary circumstances and proves inadequate only when the pressure is exceptional, many transactions go on according to the rule of honesty. Under the better circumstances, such imperfect honesty, not a virtue indeed, acts as a preparation to virtue. Altogether, the good moral quality which does not have the firmness of virtue is valuable in three respects. (1) Considered in itself, such a disposition procures a frequency of good actions under average circumstances, and this is much better than complete casualness. (2) A frequency of good action is of immense importance for society. Inasmuch as it contributes to the stable good of the community, the unstable good of these dispositions is, so to speak, lifted above its own capacity. (3) With regard to the individual agent, the imperfection of these dispositions is normally a way to virtue. It is only by accident that complete moral debasement favors conversion to ethical excellence more than dispositions to virtue would.

### THE INCOMMUNICABILITY OF THE ULTIMATE PRACTICAL JUDGMENT

**Inasmuch as the ultimate practical judgment admits of no logical connection with any rational premises, it is, strictly speaking, incommunicable.** For the proper understanding of this proposition, we must bear in mind the difference between the cognitions whose communicability is restricted, no matter how narrowly,

in a purely factual way, and those that are incommunicable by nature. Demonstration entails communicability. This is so clear that whenever we observe persistent failure in communication, we are tempted to think that demonstration has not been achieved, and is perhaps impossible. The inference certainly holds with regard to the connection between demonstration and essential communicability. But if communicability and its opposite are taken in a *factual* sense, we can readily understand that demonstration does not always imply a promise of communication. To say the least, it does not promise that the assent of many will be obtained. Actual failure to win consensus does not necessarily evidence failure to demonstrate. Scientists, as opposed to philosophers, are famous for their ability to agree. True, the sciences become every day less communicable to the layman, but he is completely reassured by the agreement that conspicuously holds among the experts. According to Descartes, the disagreements of the philosophers merely meant that the right method had not yet been recognized; fortunately, the time had come when it could be promulgated in four simple rules. Today, it is almost universally held that the lack of consensus among philosophers evidences philosophy's inability to attain the condition of demonstrative knowledge. But the uncertainty of this opinion is brought out by the simple remark that **if philosophic propositions were all demonstrated in the most rigorous way, many factors that are common and lasting, though completely accidental, would still account for the philosophers' failure to agree.**

The incommunicability of the last practical judgment results from the affective and non-logical character of the act that determines this judgment. I may be completely unable to convince my neighbor that my decision is sound, even though it be certainly such. As a matter of fact, it is only at rare moments that the man of practical wisdom has to fight his way in solitude, amidst puzzled companions who say that they cannot understand him. Why this does not happen more frequently is a significant question.<sup>17</sup> Let us try to see what causes men often to agree quite readily in matters of action even though the last practical judgment never can be logically connected with principles that would necessitate the assent of all.

(a) For one thing, it often happens that the individual conditions of our acts comprise no particular feature of relevance. This can be easily shown by comparing normal with extraordinary circumstances. When a catastrophe has upset social relations, people may argue as to whether uncommon ways in the use of food and shelter have become legitimate, or still are what they would be if all were normal, viz., sheer injustice. Under normal circumstances the principle that stealing is wrong leads all of us, without further ado, to the conclusion that we should not take groceries without paying for them or break into our neighbor's home. In such matters, we call normal, or ordinary, the circumstances that comprise no particular feature of relevance. All the relevant features are general. We are unaware of the part played by the affective determination of our judgment because the absence of any particular difficulty makes it possible for us to recognize at once the right essences and the wrong ones in the concrete situations. But a big fire, an earthquake, a tornado, a flood, a riot, or a war may cause new difficulties and particular features of relevance to arise, and then only those whose inclinations are thoroughly dependable distinguish certainly what is lawful use from what is plundering, and what is dutiful defense from what is murder.

(b) Turning to situations that do comprise particular features of relevance: consensus may obtain among us because the data are common to all of us and because our inclinations, being alike, determine the same judgment when confronted by the same situation. This is what happens when a friend says to a friend, with no arguing and no attempt at logical connections, "I would have reacted as you did if I had been in the same situation." Here, consensus is obtained not by rational communication but by affective communion. Such consensus accounts for much friendly agreement among men. Notice, however, that if the problem is one of individual action, the emergence of a relevant particularity always may cause the closest friends no longer to see eye to eye. In a number of instances, the unique traits of my personality and of my history are decisively significant. Then my best friend would prove unreasonable if he told me "Under the same circumstances I would act differently." The relevant circumstances are not the same when they include

individual variations—whether these pertain to innate constitution or to personal history.

(c) The problem is essentially different when the good to be achieved is common to all of us and calls for common action. But two cases must be carefully distinguished: either the good desired in common can be attained in a variety of ways, that is, through various forms of common action, or there is only one way to the common good. In the latter case, all members of the community, provided they are rightly inclined toward the common good and sufficiently aware of the data, react in the same way, and unanimity is ensured by affective communion—more precisely, by the common power of right inclination toward a good that is common to all. This is the most profound of the methods designed to ensure united action, and, no doubt, a community is in a weak condition when affective communion among its members no longer procures an approximation of unanimity in the hours of danger. But, again, it happens that several ways lead to the common good. It should even be said that when the acts of a community are considered with all their concrete modalities the common good always admits of being pursued in a variety of ways. Insofar as there is no unique determination of the way to the common good, affective communion, even under ideal conditions of good will and enlightenment, supplies no steady ground of unanimity. It is one of the essential functions of authority to procure the unity of common action when this cannot be guaranteed by affective communion—much less by rational communication.<sup>18</sup>

## FULFILLMENT AND EXPLANATION

We frequently experience the contrast between knowing enough to *do* what we have to do and knowing enough to *understand* why this is what we should do. This contrast is particularly noticeable when there is a question of acting in conformity to the orders of a superior. Orders may be so unclear as not to admit of certain fulfillment. But assuming that they are clear and complete enough to be carried out exactly, they may still fail to give the slightest hint of what their grounds may be. Having to

fulfill orders without having a chance to achieve any degree or appearance of understanding is a condition that makes military life particularly uncongenial to some and congenial to others. Actually, in all phases of human existence fulfillment takes place under circumstances that do not make for unqualified understanding.

From the foregoing, it results, indeed, that the last practical judgment gives no explanation of what it commands. For instance, it is impossible to express intelligibly, that is, to explain, either to oneself or to someone else, with rigor and appropriateness, the ground of the decision to join a team of mountain climbers, here and now and under unique circumstances. Insofar as this discrepancy between what suffices for fulfillment and what is required for understanding is caused by contingency, we have to deal with an entirely normal state of affairs and we pay little attention to it. The plausible considerations involved in our deliberation seem to us perfectly sufficient, and we are willing to treat them as good explanations of our conduct; to be sure, they are satisfactory substitutes for explanations in a domain where explanation properly so called is unnecessary and impossible, just as by the preceding exposition (pp. 11–16) the probable ascertainment of the facts is a satisfactory substitute for theoretical certainty where such certainty is both unnecessary and impossible. Whether we obey the orders of a superior or act according to our own initiative, we are perfectly satisfied with a judgment that is determinate enough to be the right form of action and a final rule of fulfillment, even though it does not convey the final explanation of what has to be fulfilled.

Difficulties, perplexities, and the most harmful kind of revolt arise from the fact that the discrepancy between knowing enough to fulfill and knowing enough to understand is felt not only in the domain of contingency, where it is entirely normal, but also in an order of things where, if all were normal, intelligible clarity should obtain. Here, for the first time, we are moving away from this immediate form of action, this ultimate judgment, as practical as action itself, which has been the constant subject of our inquiry. But it is not possible to raise the issue of fulfillment versus explanation without reflecting somewhat on how this issue behaves in the field of moral essences, a field of