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Morality and Society Today

My title immediately raises a whole host of problems. In contemporary discussion the relation of the two terms gives rise to a complex group of related questions. What is morality? In what sense has any society of morality? If we can choose a sense (or senses) in which a society may be said to have a morality, how do we ascertain what that morality is? And what measuring rod might enable us to determine what morality (if any) a society *ought* to have in contrast to the morality it actually possesses? What means have been, are being and might be adopted to achieve desired changes in the morality of society? And so on.

Because the field is so vast I shall at the outset make clear the precise ground I intend to cover. I shall be concerned mainly to show how man's increasing control over his environment is now facing him with greater responsibility. We shall be increasingly forced to make decisions on matters concerned not simply with the natural inanimate world around us but with the moral future, the values, of our fellow men. At the very moment when the possibility of such vastly increased control is being put within our grasp, society (by which I mean our British society; I shall not for the most part be concerned with matters outside the United Kingdom, though I believe the main features of the problem are the same for many, if not all developed societies today) – society shows grave signs of ill-health, despite great strides made towards a physically healthier community. Earlier optimism has waned. In the very domain where we are in most need of enlightenment, guidance and strength – the sphere of moral insight and moral energy – we seem most confused. After documenting some spheres of our national life in which these symptoms seem most evident, I shall discuss (all too briefly) certain aspects of moral experience and the light which Christian faith has traditionally shed on this domain, and which it is still competent to shed, if men will but listen.

The history of mankind is the story of increasing control. From the very dawn of civilization we watch the developing mastery of his environment by *homo sapiens*. The flint knife, the fire, the irrigation channel and the wheel were the first painful tools; by contrast today's achievements through dynamite, bulldozer, drill and reinforced concrete leave us devoid of adequate adjectives as we survey the dam, the nuclear power station and the sky-scraper. Distance disappears with rail, motor and then air transport, with telephone, radio and then television. The saving of time involved is so startling that the whole quality of human life has been decisively changed; in a very real sense we have begun to master time.

This growing mastery has not been confined to the material world. It has in our century been extended to human society. Men now begin to take control of the shape of the communities which they form. In European countries, and increasingly in the emergent countries of Africa and Asia, government action affecting the whole population regulates wage levels, taxation, pensions and other factors such as schooling, housing and medical facilities. We have realized that we are all in some sense responsible for the lives led by the members of our own community, and it is right that communal provision should be made against misfortune. Problems in society are better understood, economic and social pressures producing distress such as poverty or ill-health can be identified and, it is hoped, avoided. This is the age of planning, and of planning by the state for the whole of society, government planning. Noble as the efforts of voluntary bodies have been, no other agency could now tackle what is demanded. Government resources alone are adequate.

The results of this are all around us. New industries are carefully sited, estates mushroom, new towns are decreed after consultation, whole neighbourhoods are re-housed, schools reorganized, national parks officially scheduled for preservation. We can increase the provision of schools, hospitals, prisons and art galleries by legislation. The only limit is the national purse. Planning becomes not only a practical possibility over wide areas of human relations; it is demanded as the most economic way of approaching national expenditure. We can calculate, for example, the size of the school population for the next 20 years,

and hence the number of teachers needed[1]. At first glance it seems clear that we are not only in control of our material environment, but also of our society as a human group, and of the sub-groups that are found within it.

Yet this mastery extends only to the formal aspects of human associations – where we get together, in what numbers, for what purpose and with what terms of reference. The quality of relationships is a very different matter. Psychology and psychiatry have made great advances, undoubtedly, yet the practical results are disappointing. The springs of human behaviour itself are elusive. In an age when we have vastly increased our control of the natural environment and understand far more about the motives and incentives in human development, we are still searching for the prescription for a happy community. At a time when such advances in living conditions and knowledge can be recorded, it might be expected that human behaviour would show a corresponding turn for the better. Pleasanter living conditions should produce pleasanter men and women – such was the belief of the pioneers of socialism in this country in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Poverty and ignorance were said to be the sources of human misery and vice; affluence and education would give us a happier and more moral world. The roots of this belief lie far back in the history of thought. The Greek philosophers practically equated virtue with knowledge, evil with ignorance. When the triumphs of Victorian science and technology put large-scale social engineering within man's grasp for the first time, and disease and poverty were no longer viewed as inevitable, the dream of the beautiful and the good society seemed close to realization.

The vision of the Socialist reformers of the early twentieth century was spread by many gifted authors. The delightful children's writer E. Nesbit married Hubert Bland, who was in the chair at the memorable meeting of *The Fellowship of the New Life* in January 1884 when the Fabian Society was born. Edith Nesbit paints an attractive picture of the sort of world that the

[1] See *The Demand for and Supply of Teachers* 1963–1986, H.M.S.O., 1965.

early Fabians felt was within their grasp in chapter 12 of *The Story of the Amulet*[2], when four children use their magic charm to visit the London of the future. The first thing that strikes them is the light, airy cleanliness of the capital, the beauty of everyone's clothing (from schoolchildren to British Museum attendants) and of the city scene. Then they realize that nobody looks worried; all are kind, calm and unhurried. When the children take a lady from the future back to their own London of 1906 she is appalled at the street scene, the beggar and the matchseller and the people hurrying home through the fog.

"Oh, look at their faces, their horrible faces!" she cried.

"What's the matter with them all?"

"They're poor people, that's all", said Robert.

"But it's not all! They're ill, they're unhappy, they're wicked . . . . . Oh! their poor, tired, miserable, wicked faces!"

Earlier the lady from the future had explained to them how the great change had come about. Her son was named after 'the great reformer' H. G. Wells. "He lived in the dark ages, and he saw that what you ought to do is to find out what you want and then to try to get it. Up to then people had always tried to tinker up what they'd got." The simplicity and faith in human goodness of the early Fabian vision has never been more sensitively expressed than in this chapter. E. Nesbit does not give a date to her age when 'London is clean and beautiful, and the Thames runs clear and bright, and the green trees grow, and no one is anxious or afraid or in a hurry'. But we can feel the early Wellsian optimism. This was the Fabian vision. We are almost able to do this – we *could* make this true within our time, such was their hope. We know enough, or very nearly enough, to eradicate the conditions which produce misshapen men and unhappy communities.

Little more than forty years later another Socialist writer gave the public a vision of the future. In one way it represented the logical end of the development of human control. In the world he pictured the complete control of man had been achieved. But it was not the control which produced happiness and a richer humanity. The Oceania of George Orwell's

[2] First published by Benn, London, 1906.

Nineteen Eighty-four[3] is the embodiment of ugliness and inhumanity in social terms. Society is controlled by the Party, using the mythical master-image of Big Brother, the complete domination of the means of communication and a ruthless police force. There is little talk of goodness in the book, but the last bastion of resistance to the Party had already fallen – objective truth. For by this time truth and goodness themselves have been mastered; news, facts, statistics and history are quite literally created by the Ministry of Truth. As often as need be the past is erased or altered in the records. Control of all records plus control of minds equals control of the past. As O'Brien tortures Winston Smith into mental and moral submission, he explains the philosophy behind the Party's cruelty:

> "You are here because you have failed in humility, in self-discipline. You would not make the act of submission which is the price of sanity. You preferred to be a lunatic, a minority of one. Only the disciplined mind can see reality. You believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right. You also believe that the nature of reality is self-evident. When you delude yourself into thinking that you see something, you assume that everyone else sees the same thing as you. But I tell you, Winston, that reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes: only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the Party holds to be truth *is* truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party. That is the fact that you have got to relearn, Winston. It needs an act of self-destruction, an effort of the will. You must humble yourself before you can become sane."[4]

The ghastly treatment that Winston receives destroys even the mathematical certainty of $2+2=4$. But the Party is not merely content with negative obedience or the most abject submission. O'Brien explains the end-product of the brain-washing thus to Winston:

[3] First published 1949; Penguin edition, 1954.
[4] *Nineteen Eighty-four* (Penguin) pp. 199–200.

"When you finally surrender to us it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us: so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance but genuinely, heart and soul. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him. It is intolerable to us that an erroneous thought should exist anywhere in the world, however secret and powerless it may be. Even in the instant of death we cannot permit any deviation. In the old days the heretic walked to the stake still a heretic, proclaiming his heresy, exulting in it . . . . . But we make the brain perfect before we blow it out."[5]

This, then, is another vision of what power, final and ultimate control of many by man, might produce, given the fact that man is (in O'Brien's words) infinitely malleable. And it is a prospect from which we all recoil. We do not want a world like this; we hate it with every fibre of our being. It is not that it is an impossible achievement; the techniques for control of society as a whole and of individuals already exist. In Orwell's world their use has been perfected. The means are there. Nor is it enough to say that such a world is unlikely to materialize for a number of quite sound reasons. Things may not be going to turn out precisely like that, but our deeper conviction is that *they ought not to be allowed to.* We do not want this world for ourselves or our children, for there is something inherently wrong, morally degraded about. Wherever control of man by man may lead, we must not allow it to go in that direction.

Yet the need for control of human society is more pressing now than it has ever been. At the international level, after two devastating world wars we seem no nearer to settling differences without resort to arms. The rule of international law emanating from the United Nations Organization seems destined to become as ineffective as the League of Nations before it. Despite its impressive achievements at lower levels, when conflicts between great powers are in question, the moral force of U.N.O. (and it has no other force) is easily swept aside. The 'war to end wars' is

[5] *ibid.* pp. 204–205.

now seen as a ridiculous concept, and no one will seriously consider an international police force strong enough to be effective.

Within our own country, the national life is scarred by a number of ugly features, all of which underline the grave mistake made by so many social reformers when they imagined better conditions would inevitably produce happier people, more contented, unselfish, idealistic citizens. Not only have we schemes and organizations of social welfare on a scale and over a range of needs unparalleled in past history, and in most other countries of the world today, but we have also lowered our standards of behaviour somewhat in order to be less demanding and more accommodating. C. H. and Winifred Whitely in a recent study of standards in society today[6] examined five spheres of conduct – sexual relations, relations between parents and children, economic responsibility, the decline in decorum and ceremony and attitudes to crime and criminals. In all spheres they detect a more relaxed and less exacting attitude to life. They find 'a general relaxation of standards, a greater permissiveness, a raising of the demands a man may make on life and a lowering of the demands life may make on him'. The writers attempt to assess the gains and losses in the change towards a more accommodating morality. Communal provision against misfortune has helped to avoid a vast deal of human misery. Prisons, families and personal relations are all more humane. But they add: 'It is still possible to doubt whether people are any happier than under the old dispensation. It was hoped that with the relaxation of demands, with a gentler attitude to human imperfections, strain and tension would be reduced, far fewer people would be troubled by neurosis, *joie de vivre* would be more in evidence .... Unfortunately the evidence does not support this claim[7].' People now have inflated expectations of what life should offer and what society should undertake on their behalf. Relaxation of the rules leads to insecurity, since where there are no conventions I have no clear idea of what I can rely on others to do, or what they expect of me.

[6] *The Permissive Morality*, Methuen, 1964.
[7] *ibid.* p. 21.

But we can today be quite precise about these disquieting features of contemporary human behaviour in Britain. Statistics relevant to public morality – in the sense of behaviour almost universally adjudged to be harmful to the individual, or to the community, or to both – are more readily available than ever before[8]. Our standards are less demanding, but our behaviour appears to deteriorate in quality even more rapidly. We shall spend some time looking at these figures.

The most obvious place to begin is with the criminal statistics of recent years. Over the ten-year period 1954–1964 the total population of England and Wales increased by a fraction over 7 per cent, (from 44.27 million to 47.4 million). In the same period, indictable offences known to the police in England and Wales increased by 145 per cent, that is, there were very nearly two-and-a-half times as many offences in 1964 as in 1954. The number of those found guilty of such offences showed an increase of 92.9 per cent. Within these broad categories it must be noted that the number of those found guilty of violence or sexual offences went up more steeply than the general increase, since it more than doubled (102.86 per cent increase, to be exact). The number of juveniles in this category showed an even greater increase; in 1954 they represented 14 per cent of all such offenders; in 1964 nearer 15 per cent. (In absolute terms, of course, the number was more than doubled – from 1,381 to 2,872.) If we were not so used to such figures from the reports of magistrates, Chief Constables and the Home Secretary, they would fill us with alarm and concern.

The only way we may qualify this picture is to say that it represents only offences known to the police. Over a vast range of criminal offences there lies a blanket of ignorance, since there are many reasons why certain offences never reach the light of day. Ignorance of the real total of crime could conceivably mean that the actual amount of crime has declined, and we were in fact catching a greater proportion of criminals, or at least hearing of a larger proportion of their offences. But we know that there are today fewer police rather than more (London alone is more

[8] Most of the figures in the ensuing paragraphs are taken from the *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, H.M.S.O., 1965.

than 2,000 short) and that the chances of the criminal's getting away were never better. Year by year with apparent inevitability the amount of crime in our society increases.

From crime we turn to look briefly at various other features of life in the community. In particular we must examine areas of social irresponsibility. Psychologically speaking this indicates the attitude expressed in such phrases as 'So what?', 'Why should I worry?', 'Let them look after themselves – it's no concern of mine'. When this attitude lies behind an action or set of actions which is known to be likely to be harmful, not merely or primarily to the agent but also to other members of the society I shall use the term 'socially irresponsible behaviour.' Now there are specific actions and habits which are known to be harmful, and which may be encouraged or discouraged by teaching and example.

Probably the clearest case is that of cigarette smoking, about which there has been no reasonable doubt since the Royal College of Physicians Report *Smoking and Health*[9]. It stated: 'Cigarette smoking is a cause of lung cancer and bronchitis, and probably contributes to the development of coronary heart disease and various less common diseases'. The report received wide publicity. It advised more public education, and especially of school children, concerning the hazards of smoking. Much of what the report had to say was already common knowledge, especially amongst the medical profession. Among British doctors, the 24 per cent of non-smokers in 1951 had risen to 50 per cent in 1961. But there are few signs that this knowledge is having much effect, apart from the cessation of cigarette advertising on commercial television networks. There seems to have been little falling off in the smoking habits of public exemplars; parsons, pop singers and school teachers, for instance. Some education authorities arranged for the excellent colour films available to be shown to all schoolchildren, and invited doctors to visit the schools to speak. Other local authorities did none of these things, and after a duplicated letter had been sent to head teachers, expressing the hope that the teachers would set a good example, the matter was left to sink quietly into obscurity.

[9] March, 1962.

The figures are bleak and not encouraging. In 1961 30 million people in Britain consumed 12,000 million cigarettes. Three out of four men, one out of two women and one out of every four boys of school-leaving age smoke cigarettes, the average consumption being 15 a day, we were told in 1964. In the same year it was calculated that £27,000 was being spent *each day* on advertising tobacco in this country. The Central Statistical Office's Annual Abstracts show that of all natural causes of death, cancer comes only second to heart diseases. And cancer of the respiratory system is by far the most common type of cancer. The toll in lives is not precisely known, but as cigarette smoking is one of the main causes of lung cancer, it is pertinent to know that though the death rate between 1955 and 1964 only rose by 2.55 per cent, the death rate from lung cancer increased by more than 48 per cent; nearly 5 out of every 100 deaths are now due to this condition. More vividly, perhaps, 77 people die of it every day of the year.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that this position could be altered. After all, if the nicotine content of three cigarettes injected direct into the bloodstream would kill a man within minutes, then a 'Nicotine is Poison!' campaign would seem both possible and desirable. Yet little is done, and the nonchalance with which the topic is treated by the community as a whole suggests a disturbing degree of moral irresponsibility. If we do care, few of us show it, and no one feels able to give an official lead with much confidence that it would be widely supported.

I turn now to another problem which is in many respects similar. The physiological effects of alcohol have been closely studied and the results have been widely known amongst the educated sections of the community for many years[10]. There has been no sudden dramatic documentation, as in the case of cigarette smoking, with a research report giving conclusive proof. Instead we have witnessed the gradual dissemination of the information concerning the effects of alcohol upon the nervous system. Most physical activities are significantly less efficient after only small doses of alcohol. Muscular output is lowered,

[10] See, for example, *Clinical Neurology* (2nd edition, 1962) Harper Bros., New York, Ed. A. B. Baker, ch. 22.

liability to reasoning error increases, speed of reaction to sudden change of circumstances drops. With all this goes a *feeling* of relief, cheerfulness and increased competence in general, a combination which makes the total effect of alcoholic drink so dangerous. Mental and physical tension is in fact relieved by alcohol, hence the cheery 'mateyness' so often observed when men drink together. But the higher levels of consciousness in the brain are being deadened, there is less reflective thought. Mental and moral discrimination is impaired. What seems at first sight to be a masculine, daring, devil-may-care attitude and a welcome increase of sociability is obtained at the expense of a temporary impairing of those parts of the personality which are distinctive of man. We are less human when we are under the influence of alcohol.

Our society as a whole does not seem fully alive to these dangers. Few organizations and few individuals take seriously the suggestion that restraint in public could be a part of their moral responsibility. Over £70,000 per day is spent on advertising alcoholic drinks in Britain. Over the ten-year period 1954–1964 consumer expenditure on food went up by almost exactly 50 per cent; on alcoholic drinks by over 60 per cent. Closer investigation of the figures shows that in recent years consumption of spirits has risen more rapidly than that of beer, and consumption of imported wines faster than either. The only figure that has shown signs of dropping is the annual rate of *increase* in the amount drunk; and even here spirits seem to be an exception. The B.M.A. Conference of July 1965 once more drew the nation's attention to the problem and called for immediate Government action.

There is a further aspect of this habit which makes the situation even more pressing. Britain is now a car-owning democracy. And the car is a lethal weapon. In a morally responsible community as the amount and the speed of traffic increased, so would the care and attention of its drivers. Not so in Britain today. Road deaths increased by more than one third between 1954 and 1964. Very nearly 9,000 people are killed annually on the roads of Britain. On average now more than one person per hour, day and night, is killed in a road accident. Now there are various types of irresponsible driving, some of which still

need investigation. Some are known to any driver of a few years' experience. But one is known beyond all doubt. At least 18 per cent of all road accidents are due to drivers who have been drinking. At Christmas this figure rises to over half. It is in the light of such figures as these that the alcohol problem stands out as an urgent matter, a social problem which devolves ultimately upon individuals who are required to make responsible decisions. At the moment we can scarcely be said to be making much progress here.

The affluence of present-day Britain and the increase of leisure makes the task of assessing the moral climate of the community somewhat easier. Given leisure, a certain amount of personal income remaining after obtaining the necessities of life, and a choice of a wide range of possible activities, then priorities and personal attitudes of the members of that society are more readily detectable. And one activity which is clearly of paramount importance on any showing in indicating our attitudes is gambling. In 1965 we spent more than £1,000 million on gambling in Britain, more than half the defence budget (£1,909 million). The Churches' Council on Gambling Annual Review for 1965 (*Gambling, A Nation's Responsibility*) puts the total turnover at £915 million without taking into account gaming in clubs and gaming machines, and with a conservative estimate of the amount involved in horse-racing and commercial Bingo clubs. But it is not the 60 per cent increase over the 1958 figure to which I wish to draw attention here, nor to the strange case of Premium Bonds (so frankly alluded to in the Council's Review), nor to the effect of legislation designed to curb but in fact encouraging these increases. It is rather the attitude of mind which makes such rapid growth possible.

There is a whole group of issues here, and each of them is a moral issue. There is no doubt that some people are liable to become gambling addicts; they cannot stop. The Review states 'It is morally indefensible to ignore this fact or its consequences'. If this be so, we are on similar ground to that involved in the case of cigarette smoking. Gambling, in fact, is the most clearly irresponsible activity of all, for it involves the surrender of one's money to the caprice of the unpredictable. Except in the case of Premium Bonds, the vast majority lose their money. Many

forms of gambling, the Review demonstrates, represent a shift of wealth from the already poor to the already rich. It is an irrational means of distributing wealth, and it works with often dramatic inequality. The money involved has neither been given for services rendered (outside the gambling industry, that is), nor invested to increase the nation's productive resources in any way. From the point of view of the material benefit of the community, it is a complete loss.

To these considerations we must add the fact that as a nation we are in economic difficulties, and that knowledge about the undernourishment of more than half the world's population is now widely publicized. The opportunities for organizations like *Oxfam*, *War on Want*, *Save the Children* etc, etc, are endless, if only they had the financial means. The irresponsible element in gambling is surely crystal clear in this light. It indicates lack of concern for fellow human beings and the community as a whole. 'Sales promotion foments a naturally acquisitive response to the increasing opportunities there are in life. No matter what the income may be it is easy for it to appear inadequate . . . to secure all that is desirable or even necessary for the enjoyment of life. It can easily be argued that what does not come by work may come by chance. This attitude would hinder progress with those social and economic policies which true morality demands we pursue.' It would be difficult to dissent from these comments, from the Council's Review.

The morality of our society may also be approached from the standpoint of human relations. The quality of relationships within a society is always difficult to evaluate, and here, though it must be said at the outset that statistics do not tell the whole story, nevertheless what we *do* know about marriage and the family gives cause for some concern. Since 1958 the marriage rate per 1,000 in the United Kingdom has remained almost constant between 14.9 and 15.1. Marriage, we might say, is remaining as popular as it was 7 years ago. But divorces granted in England and Wales rose from just over 22,000 in 1958 to more than 34,400 in 1964, an increase of more than 50 per cent in five years. Over 7 per cent of all marriages now end in divorce. The traditional ideal of marriage as an attachment meant to be binding for life is being rejected or found unworkable by an

increasing number. Though nearly every civilized culture we know has regarded marriage as a bond only dissoluble by death and always attempted to formalize with public ritual the ceremoney in which the marriage obligations were shouldered, marriages in Britain today are increasingly often contracted and dissolved quietly and privately. From a sociological point of view this is one more aspect of the individual's isolation and the 'marooning' of the family which results from rapid urbanization and a shattering of the tighter, communal neighbourhood allegiances of earlier centuries.

In one way marriage as an institution has had to bear an increasing burden in our vast and complex contemporary society. It is in warm personal relations that the individual finds a bulwark against loneliness. Marriage must now provide the emotional security formerly found in family, kinship group and wider community relations such as those of the village. Hence the increase in teenage marriages. A glance at the national and international scene understandably fills young people with perplexity and fear. They are in general cynical about politics and politicians at home; internationally, the whole landscape is dominated by the threat of the mushroom cloud. Most writers on young people today stress the deep-seated anxiety which drives young people into groups of their own age, where they may enjoy brief bouts of intense nervous entertainment of various types. Some are driven to seek security in reciprocal personal affection, and from there to marriage. Walker and Whitney[11] tell us that 'in 1930 only 10 per cent of spinster brides were under 20, but by 1959 a quarter of the spinster brides were still in their teens. During the same period the average age of all brides fell from 25 to 23.4'. But the same writers also note that nearly one third of all girls marrying under 20 were expecting babies when they married.

This raises the other issue involved with family ideals and personal relations in our society – the problem of sex relations outside marriage. Here again there seems to be enough evidence to cause much disquiet. The illegitimacy rate in the United

[11] *The Family and Marriage in a Changing World*, Gollancz, 1965, p. 82.

Kingdom has risen steadily since 1958, (after remaining fairly constant between 1951 and 1958) thus:

Percentage of illegitimate births in total live births

1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
4·7	4·9	5·2	5·5	6.3	6.6	6.9

The 1964 figure is only exceeded by the exceptionally high illegitimacy rate in the two years 1944–1945. Quite apart from all moral and religious convictions, this is clearly a most serious trend. It indicates that more children are being born each year without the stability, balance and love of two parents. These children will lack the double and complementary foci of affection and authority – all that is implied by the words 'father and mother'. No child can ever grow up to be a well-adjusted and happy individual if he or she has been emotionally starved during the early years of life, and no one can ever act as a complete substitute for blood or adoptive parents[12]. All this must be added to the anguish and confusion in the experience of the unmarried mother and, very often, her parents and relatives.

This topic brings us to the final set of figures which seem to bear very clearly on the moral climate of our age, and again indicate a disturbing degree of moral irresponsibility. These are the statistics of the incidence of veneral diseases. (We shall use the term in its more popular sense to cover all sexually transmitted diseases.) The number of *new* cases of veneral diseases at clinics increased between 1958 and 1962 by about 31 per cent. The British Medical Association Report on *Veneral Disease and Young People* (March 1964) provides many other disturbing facts besides this. Between 1952 and 1962 the incidence of these diseases went up by 73.5 per cent[13], and this figure does not include those treated by general practitioners, or outside the National Health Service or in the forces. The actual increase may well be 15–20 per cent higher. This important report also contains the results of questionnaires and interviews on a number of related topics. Their first and main conclusion was 'Promiscuity

[12] *ibid.* p. 23. See also ch. 15 on the effects of family breakdown on children.

[13] It should be noted, however, that half of this figure represents the cases of immigrants, not indigenous population, *ibid.* p. 79f.

is a serious problem among young people today'[14]. Those who are deeply concerned about standards of behaviour in our society and fear that they are deteriorating find their fears grounded once more in hard fact in this report. Here is yet another sphere of social irresponsibility.

Figures have their place, and evidence must be produced before it can be asserted that our society is threatened, or decadent, or improving, or no worse than it was 50 years ago. I have tried to show that on the evidence at present available there are clear grounds for asserting that we live in an age of uncertainty and increasing moral irresponsibility. And of course statistics do not lead us to the real heart of the matter. We have justified certain statements about trends in society as a whole[15]. We have for this purpose regarded people as numbers, identical counters. But we know they are more than this. It is fathers and mothers, children, friends, shopkeepers, doctors and dustmen – *persons* – who are victims of the social irresponsibility which increasingly characterizes our age.

We are faced then with a society that needs changing. And for the first time we are a generation which can glimpse the way it could be changed, for the techniques are known. In some directions we press ahead with tremendous confidence. The unwilling revolution being forced upon the schools at the present time is a deliberate piece of social engineering calculated to eliminate certain undesirable attitudes and to implant others – to change men, and thus, society. But it is difficult to decide in which direction we should move and what means we ought to employ.

This is our dilemma. The conquest of matter has been followed by the conquest of man himself. We now possess the knowledge and the techniques so to organize the environment of any individual that he will tend to become more or less the kind of person we desire to produce. Evidence is increasing on all sides

[14] p. 32. The inadequacy of the B.B.C. coverage of this highly significant report is disturbing; the matter is documented in Lunn and Lean, *The Cult of Softness*, Blandford, 1965, p. 83f.

[15] Nearly all the figures in this section have been taken either from the *Annual Abstract of Statistics* or *The Christian Citizen* for October, 1962, 1963 and 1964, produced by the Methodist Church.

indicating the predominant influence of upbringing and social background on the development of personality, intellectual performance and values. There seems little difference in principle between tampering with a man's environment to induce certain expectations, desires and beliefs and tampering with the man himself to produce their readier acceptance. If we are so sure that a certain type of person is the only kind worth producing, why do we not – having found out what we want – simply 'try to get it'? The formula was simple enough at the time when E. Nesbit wrote of young Wells; today it fills us with horror, for the atmosphere has become charged with uncertainty, and in many places with pessimism. Violence and meaninglessness characterize modern art and modern drama, and the triumph of man over man is seen as putting the final most deadly tool into the hands of all the dark and irrational forces that lie within human nature. The result of a gloomy view of human nature added to a realization of the extent to which any individual could be changed by deliberate 'treatment' produces the tragic vision of *Nineteen Eight-four*. Orwell's 'Inner Party' is intoxicated with the spectacle and experience of power, power for its own sake, power over men which finds its most tangible and undeniable expression in making other men suffer, as O'Brien finally explains[16].

But might not such power be exercised for the good of all men? Is there no possibility of a benevolent totalitarian society? Some such possibility is clearly in the mind of Julian Huxley, whose essays on evolution stress the emergence of modern man into the 'psycho-social' stage of his development in which he can fully control his future. Huxley's picture is probably the only one in which we can still detect the positive chords of humanist optimism. A wonderful time is coming, he predicts, if we will but purposefully grasp our opportunities. There would seem to be two objections to this kind of suggestion. The one is founded in what we have learned of human nature since E. Nesbit; the pessimism of the modern intellectual is a valid and inescapable insight into human nature. Power does corrupt, and there is no evidence to suggest that absolute power would long resist

[16] p. 84.

absolute corruption. The development of Marxist and Nazi societies shows that only external pressures and compromises due to unforeseen practical difficulties can halt the progress of despotism towards inhuman tyranny. We cannot trust ourselves with the exercise of complete control.

The second difficulty is inherent in the conception of a benevolent totalitarianism permitted to shape every part of every individual's life in a given society. It is a matter of pure logic, the baffling dilemma of the meaning of 'good' in such a situation. If the benevolent O'Briens of some future society were able by brain surgery, infant conditioning and various means of indoctrination to produce precisely the kind of citizens they wished to have, men and women whose very morality they were able to determine, whose behaviour could never be anti-social and whose concepts of 'good' and 'evil' were already laid down, how would the content of these concepts be found? How would those who programmed the national morality proceed? The content of these terms could not be the old meanings, since 'good' has always traditionally been that which I *ought* to choose, but need not; 'evil' that which I am free to follow but which I ought not. However the citizens of this future state would not be free. Choice is the very thing which would *not* be open to them, since the benevolent governors had already chosen for them in determining what sort of persons they should be. The new meaning of 'good' would *have to be* something like 'What the leaders (or party, or experts or governors) tell me'. Neither could the leaders themselves get the vision of what is good from the old sources and then use the new means to transmit the vision. For values cease to be the same values if they are propagated without a built-in freedom to reject. 'I ought not to steal' ceases to be a moral choice or a genuine ethical experience if a man is watching me with a gun to shoot me the moment I take someone else's property, or if brain surgery has ensured that such an idea would never enter my head, or be regarded with the utmost horror if it did. The old vision, morality as we know it, simply could not be transmitted that way. The means would destroy the end. We reach the conclusion then that a benevolent totalitarianism using all possible modern means of control over the characters and beliefs of individuals is an impossibility. If

benevolent (in any of the hitherto agreed uses of the word) it could not use these means; if it did use them it would cease to be benevolent. Truly moral actions would disappear, except from the experience of the leaders, and they, by their use of total control, would have committed themselves to an unmistakably evil course. The annihilation of choice is the destruction of humanity[17].

We reach the conclusion, then, that man must not regulate morality. He may proclaim it, enshrine it in legislation, discuss it and apply it. But he does not control it. If he does, it will disappear. Like the goose that laid the golden eggs, it comes to us on its own terms. If we interfere we are lost. In a very real sense the great principles of morality stand over against us, claiming our obedience. They have authority. Man may apprehend them imperfectly, forget them or refuse to respond to them. We may sometimes have to search for them, we discover (or fail to discover) them. But we do not create them. And we cannot tamper with human beings on their behalf, for in doing so we bring down a great darkness upon them and upon ourselves.

The claim which the most general rules of human morality have upon us is remarkably akin to that with which the material world confronts us. It is there and we cannot ignore it. We discover more about it and how it works, but we neither produce it nor can we alter the broad rules of behaviour it proclaims. But while there is no limit (in principle) to the experiments we may carry out on the material world to verify hypotheses or to check earlier observations, we have seen that when we come to human behaviour in its moral aspect, to tamper with the works is disastrous. We have in fact to draw a line between medical care for man's physical body on the one hand, a type of interference which few would dispute to be right and proper, and psychological or neurological treatment on the other, which only seems justified in cases of agreed and proven mental illness.

It may be objected here that although we must not tamper with morality itself, which is 'given', nor attempt directly to determine a man's moral convictions by brain-washing, surgery or torture, yet what we are doing in teaching moral principles

[17] p. 214.

to our children is nothing but a weaker (and hence perhaps a more insidious) way of doing the same thing, a process belonging essentially to the same category of action.

There are, however, at least two fundamental differences. The first is that the traditional approach to the understanding and teaching of moral principles depends, at least, as much on inspecting actual situations as it does upon bare deduction and the reiterating of general rules. We examine the problem – our own or someone else's – and we ask 'What would I – or he – be right to do there'? We invite the person we are attempting to teach to look at the situation from all aspects, to see what is involved, the various loyalties, the principles that might be invoked, and so on. We may help our pupil in this inspection, but his response is only a truly moral one if he decides that he would do this or that because he *sees* what is involved. We may help him with the background or the analysis, but he must decide which features are most important and which course of action is the right one, or the best possible in the circumstances. By watching, thinking and discussing the moral problems of others, and by deciding his own courses of action and seeing their consequences, an individual grows and develops as a truly moral being. Whether or not we think that a moral education consisting only of questions, such as Socrates offered, was too frugal a diet for the moral education of most men, the fact remains that this kind of dialogue has characterized our approach to moral education for the past four hundred years at least. 'You must decide', says the parent, pastor, teacher or older advisor, 'I can only point out the following factors which seem to me to be relevant . . . . . .' The study of literature, Classical, Biblical and later, formed the staple diet of European education for so long for just this reason – it informed the mind, stimulated the conscience and provided the material for just such discussion. This is certainly not to regulate or determine human morality in the totalitarian sense. If moral principles are truths in any real sense, they have to be seen, grasped by the individual as coherent, meaningful and convincing. The learner must perceive them for himself, not accept them by parrot-fashion learning or unreflectively on the authority of one particular person or group.

This brings us to our second difference between moral teaching

as traditionally practised and that put within our grasp by modern techniques of 'treatment'. The teacher is always *under* the moral principles he enunciates as well as the learner. He may say '*You* ought not to . . . ' but what he usually means is '*We* ought not to . . . '. The most powerful moral rules which the human race has discovered are the most general ones, stating that 'Every man ought to . . . ' or 'No one should ever . . . '. A man aspiring to be a moral teacher who excepts himself from the rules he is propounding will have little influence. (There are of course lesser rules and duties applying only to certain people by reason of their particular status or function such as parents, policemen and so on. We are thinking here however of the more basic and general rules of human morality upon which there has been more or less universal agreement.) The corollary is even more evident. Only the teachers of the good life who have practised what they preached have stirred men in all ages. This was part of the attraction of Socrates; he lived out the morality he so diffidently tried to elicit in his conversations with men. But the totalitarian treatment of men is very different. There, the victim's question 'Have you had this done to you?' is out of place. The relation is that of potter and clay – 'This is what we're going to make you'. In genuine moral teaching, teacher and pupil are on the same road, one a little further on than the other. But the obligations which bind them make their paths one. If any man possesses moral authority, he is always willing to confess that it is not his own. It is derived, he has been given the vision of the good life which he has. He may share it but can never claim to be its creator.

Things are not right and good solely because one particular man or group says they are. This is neither what the words 'right' and 'good' mean, nor is it what any of the great moral teachers have intended to teach when they have enunciated rules and defined duties. There is a kind of authority in the rules themselves which is strangely similar to the kind of obligation felt between people, but the authority is manifestly not derived from the men who have framed the great moral principles for any particular age or culture. These principles belong to that category of hard, bed-rock ultimates which contain mathematical and logical truths and the 'common-sense' apprehensions

of the material world as our senses (with adequate safeguards) perceive them[18].

The uneasy state of our contemporary society with its rising crime rate and its disturbing increase in moral irresponsibility, apathy and hardness calls us to probe somewhat deeper. If we were to leave our consideration of morality here we should be leaving it very much where the eighteenth century thinkers left it. The French *philosophes*, following the lead of Locke and Hume in England, and fashioning their thought upon the system of 'the incomparable Mr Newton', believed that if only men would rid themselves of prejudices, superstitions and unjustified appeals to authority and look calmly and coolly at Nature around them and human nature within themselves, they would in the end reach clear, definite and distinct truths about every realm of human thought, investigation and experience. To all questions there were answers, so long as they were real questions asking for truth about the Universe. To each question there would be found one right, true and eternally valid answer. Only the laziness, muddle-headedness or perversity of men would stand in the way of complete enlightenment. With the admirable clarity of the French language, the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* expresses the united conviction of the French National Assembly of 1791 that the morality of human social behaviour is of this luminously obvious nature. The natural, inalienable, sacred rights of man are simple and incontestable principles on which the law will henceforth be founded, thus ensuring the happiness of all. To the men of the Enlightenment, science, philosophy, morals and politics would all soon yield up their basic truths, the structure of Reality.

From the depths of our twentieth century pessimism we are tempted to give a hollow laugh. We know the era of Romantic individualism which swallowed up the Enlightenment vision. If the earlier current of thought was too dryly intellectual, the other was a torrent of undifferentiated emotion in which the

[18] The argument of the preceding section is substantially that of C. S. Lewis in the latter part of his penetrating Riddell Lecture *The Abolition of Man* (Bles, 1943). The work has been undeservedly eclipsed by some of Professor Lewis's other writings.

voice of reason was silenced. We do not wish to defend Romanticism, but we can now see that the Enlightenment vision failed because it left matters concerned with men and women at the level of principles and propositions. It lacked the personal note which Romanticism supplied so freely. Nowhere is this more evident than in morality. The fact that the stress on personal commitment has now run to seed in the blind self-affirmation of modern existentialism does not alter this judgement of the Enlightenment.

It may well be true that I ought never to murder, or tell a lie, or break a promise. But somehow the feeling of obligation and the authority which such rules seem to possess is not adequately explained by someone telling me that these are self-evident truths. In moral obligation we feel we are being *spoken to*. And here the Christian steps in to say that this is precisely what is happening. The 'voice' of duty, the categorical imperative, the authority of the good is a voice in more than a figurative sense, for it is man's apprehension of the commands of the God who made him. This explains the constant tendency to refer to moral truths or rules as 'laws' and also the feeling of responsibility that goes with moral perception – man feels answerable to someone for his choices. The Christian maintains that it is precisely the solemnity and the binding quality of morality that was lost, or drastically weakened, by the rejection of theism on the part of the French thinkers of the eighteenth century. Most were atheists, some were deists retaining a vague supreme being as a kind of proto-engineer to explain the existence of the world, but denying revelation and all characteristic Christian doctrines.

The Christian is not concerned to deny that man is able to discover moral truth for himself without appealing to God, and without any knowledge of revelation. Nor do Christians wish to assert that all men are immoral without God, or can never do good deeds unless they have faith. What he is concerned to assert is that final and authoritative justification of moral rules will always elude man if he regards morality as in essence a matter of human expediency or convenience, a set of rules we can change at will or a series of arbitrary productions of a particular environment. Morality has a kind of lordship over us, and such a feeling of authority and responsibility can only be

adequately explained by our relation to a person. There is, that is, 'a Being who knows what we are, what we do, and what we ought to be and do; who approves of the right and disapproves of the wrong; and who has the power and the purpose to reward and punish us according to our character and conduct'[19]. Nothing else accords so well, the Christian maintains, with the facts of our experience of moral obligation and responsibility.

The weakness of the position which stops short at abstract moral principles as final authority is seen in another way, which highlights the contemporary bewilderment in morals that we so frequently meet. Young people who are told that certain things are wrong, even by sympathetic relatives or friends, still ask 'Who says so?', 'Why shouldn't we if we're not caught?', 'That's only your idea, isn't it?' and so on. Though it may sometimes be possible on grounds of prudence or social expediency to suggest some valid reasons against a particular wrong act, this is not always the case, neither do our explanations carry conviction in the sense that we can adequately convey the *obligatoriness* of acting rightly. We are dissatisfied with the effect, and social irresponsibility increases. Is this not perhaps because we have been propounding the law as if there were no Law-giver, responsibility as if there were nobody to whom we were finally answerable for every deed done in the body?

Once we have admitted that it is the voice of God who speaks in our moral experience, we have taken an important step towards seeing how morality might be regulated. The way the Christian faith approaches this is to explain that as men are not morally perfect, and their moral apprehensions are often conflicting, or wavering, or uncertain, God in His goodness has chosen to repromulgate the main items of His law. This He did in the first place to one nation, the Jews, but through the Bible and the Christian Church this knowledge is now world-wide. The picture of the good life was not only painted in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount; it was also lived out by Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God who was made man. To those who are willing to receive more light than that offered by their own consciences, the Bible offers all that is

[19] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 238, Nelson, 1875.

necessary to regulate and check our understanding of the fundamental constituents of morality. There is in fact no other way to measure the correctness and perspective of our moral view. All other ways involve the assertion of one human group against another, which only gives a stalemate. Men may however regulate their moral standards by reference to the law of God in Scripture.

It is important to note here that speaking plainly in this strain is no matter for which Christians need to apologize. One essential ingredient in responsible moral living is a sense of guilt when a wrong choice has been made. It has recently been maintained by the Rt. Hon. Lord Devlin[20] 'that a sense of guilt is a necessary factor for the maintenance of order, and indeed that it plays a much more important part in the preservation of order than any punishment that the state can impose'. It is his conviction that 'the most potent source of a sense of guilt is Christian morality'. Though this paper has not in the main concerned itself with the criminal law, it is worth while quoting Lord Devlin's concluding words on this matter: 'It is not necessary to be a Christian to say that in the Western world at the moment there is not even a discernible sign of anything that in the minds of the populace – and it is in the minds of the populace that law and order has to be kept, not among the enlightened thinkers – is capable of replacing Christianity as the provider of the moral force that is vital for the maintenance of good order'.

In an age of hesitancy and doubt over the very nature of morality and how it should be regulated, the Christian maintains that our hope lies in recognizing afresh the danger of our present situation, the recurrence of moral problems at all levels, national and local despite the lowering of public standards and the great advantages in living conditions which this age has over earlier times. Our control has increased, but things are becoming worse not better. Indeed, we now admit that the use to which man's control of man might well be put is more likely to be evil than good. In the realm of morality any attempt to 'treat' men and women to 'make them good' is self-defeating – improvement

[20] 'The Sense of Guilt as an instrument of law and order' *The Listener*, April 1st, 1965.

does not lie that way. In that sense man cannot regulate his own morality, or he would destroy it. Yet the traditional teaching of morality has left man free, by its use of dialogue and discussion. And this traditional view also contained the view of morality as something *given*, under whose authority all men stood. It preserved responsibility and created a healthy sense of guilt.

This view of moral experience leads to questions about the ultimate authority behind moral experience; once we acknowledge God, sovereign Creator and Judge behind the moral law, our experience of moral obligation becomes comprehensible. But each man still left with the problem of how he may check his partial and fluctuating vision of the good life with what is the will of God, and then how he may obey and acceptably serve God. Christians maintain that both these needs have been met; knowledge of what God is like and how He wishes men to live is adequately given in the Bible, and the problem of our relationship to God, our restoration and strengthening to follow that will are given in the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

I cannot but conclude that though I believe this Gospel must be proclaimed primarily because it is *true*, yet there is also ample evidence that it provides the best explanation of moral experience, and that it alone can safeguard and strengthen the moral fabric of a nation as confused as ours seems to be today.