

*THOMAS HILL GREEN*  
*AND*  
*THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF*  
*POLITICS:*  
*An Internal Critique.*

*By*  
*Mr. Colin Tyler*  
*B.A. (Hons.), M.A. (Ebor)*

*Submitted as a Requirement of the DPhil in Politics*

*University of York*  
*Department of Politics*

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## ***Abstract.***

This thesis presents an internal critique of the philosophical system of Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882) emphasizing his ethical and political thought. The *Introduction* questions recent allegations that Green's assumptions make his thought irrelevant in modern circumstances. His methodology is sketched and shown to be separable from his Christianity. *Chapter one* examines the role of consciousness in knowing. The specifically religious aspects of "the eternal consciousness" are shown to be dispensable. *Chapter two* examines his theory of the will. That he runs two mutually exclusive theories simultaneously undermines the system's coherence. Neo-Aristotelianism entails voluntarism whereas spiritual determinism rejects it, raising serious questions about the status of Green's ethical thought. The chapter concludes by noting that Green follows the neo-Aristotelian line fairly consistently in his moral and political writings. *Chapter three* sets out Green's "relational organicist" social theory, committing him to conceive the true good as a common good. Several objections are defeated, before the issue of social fragmentation is introduced. *Chapter four* examines conscientious agency and social criticism, defending Green from charges of vagueness. His belief in progress is shown to be unwarranted. *Chapter five* examines his political philosophy, beginning with the links between recognition, rights and the exclusion of certain entities from the sphere of rights. His theory of "the state" is shown to be compatible with cultural pluralism. Democracy, state intervention and civil disobedience are considered. Doubts are raised about how far Green's theory of the state actually allows him to avoid authoritarianism. The implications for his political philosophy of the spiritual determinist theory of the will are sketched. *Chapter six* examines Green's conception of the natural right to private property, emphasizing its contextual preconditions. His principles are shown to be compatible with radical reforms of the economic system. The *Conclusion* argues that, for all its faults, Green's system remains valuable when developing ethical and political philosophy.

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Immature minds delight in argumentation and fault-finding, because it is easy enough to find fault, though hard to see the good and its inner necessity. The learner always begins by finding fault, but the scholar sees the positive merit in everything.

(Georg W F Hegel, 1967, *The Philosophy of Right*, translated by T M Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, paragraph 268A.)

*This thesis is dedicated to Jack  
for having to suffer the work for so long  
and to Ray Solly,  
who got me through my O Levels  
and stopped me from giving up on academia.*

## ***Preface.***

It is very strange to think that this thesis is finally finished. It has taken a great deal of work and a great deal of my life and attention for the past three years. I apologise to everyone who has had to suffer a boring conversation or two over that time because of my obsession with writing it.

Over this time, I have gained a great deal of respect for those individuals who manage to retain their standards of scholarship in the face of increasing pressures to become a “learner” again. Unfortunately, the community of scholars continues to be in danger of becoming merely a collection of career academics.

## ***Disclaimer***

In the course of this thesis, I use the male pronoun to refer to the generic moral agent. I do this because Green does so. It should not be taken to imply that his thought applies only or even mainly to men. Green worked hard for women’s rights and his philosophy logically entails equal recognition and treatment, irrespective of gender (see Anderson, 1991). Green’s use of ‘he’ and ‘his’ is an expression of the academic conventions of his day rather than any sexism inherent in his writings.

## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Peter P Nicholson for supervising this research. He has been very challenging, very encouraging and always very willing to share his knowledge, expertise and resources.

Next, thanks are due to the Department of Politics at the University of York for employing me as a Teaching Assistant during the first year of my research. In particular, my gratitude goes to Prof. Rod Rhodes, Mrs. Susan Mendus, Mr. Peter Nicholson and Mr. John Horton for helping with the assistantship in various ways. Also, my thanks go to the British Academy for funding the rest of my research. Finally, Prof. Alex Callinicos and Mr. Philip Simison and Mr. John Curry helped to get that grant extended, for which obviously I am very grateful.

In relation to Green's unpublished material, thanks go to Mr. Peter Nicholson for providing me with copies of Green's speeches which he has collated. Also, I would like to thank the Master and Fellows of Balliol College, Oxford for their permission to consult and quote from Green's papers. In particular, thanks go to Dr. Alan Tadiello for all of his help during my stay in Oxford between 9th and 13th January 1995, inclusive.

I have benefitted from discussions with Matt Carter and Maria Dimova regarding British Idealism over the past couple of years for which I am grateful. I wish to thank all other members of the Political Theory Workshop (with a special mention for Susan Mendus) for the same reason.

On a more personal level, I would like to thank Diane Adams, Steven Benson, Frank Brogan, Natalie Humphreys, Bernadette and Stewart Kirk, Andy McLellan, Michele Marin-Dogan, Andrea Miccoci, Jeremy Nolan, Giuseppe Tassone, Andrew Tesseyman and Angie Wilson. Jenny Bradford, Linda Lofthouse, Caroline Moore and Gill Pulpher have all borne the interruptions of their work with good humour for which I am have often been very grateful.

My gratitude to my parents and my brother, Will, is great, just as it is to Dave Britten, Steve Cinderby and Massimo Paradiso who have kept me sane over the past few years.

Ultimately, my greatest debt is owed to Jacqueline and Lydia Lester who have had to endure this obsession on a daily basis.

***Declaration.***

1) A very early draft of chapter one appeared as

“From Green’s Epistemology to his Ethics”, *Morrell Studies in Toleration Discussion Paper Series*, 1993, no. 94.

2) Early drafts of parts of chapters three and four appeared as

“Green’s View of the Individual in Society”, *Morrell Studies in Toleration Discussion Paper Series*, 1995, no. 108.

3) Parts of chapter five and six appeared as

“Context, Capitalism and the Natural Right to Private Property in the Thought of Thomas Hill Green”, in I Hampsher-Monk and J Stanyer (eds.), *Contemporary Political Studies 1996*, Volume III, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, pp. 1406-1414.

## *INTRODUCTION.*

### **1. Introduction.**

If his principles are true, each age can progressively interpret their meaning to suit its own needs. (Barker, 1915: 58)

Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882) produced a largely coherent and detailed analysis of the metaphysical structure of human consciousness and, on the basis of this structure, he developed powerful ethical and political philosophies with radical implications for the existing structure of society and politics. The present thesis defends all of these claims through a close analysis of Green's published and unpublished writings and speeches. My primary task is to undertake an internal critique of Green's philosophical system beginning with his epistemology (chapter one) moving to his theory of the will (chapter two), his theory of relational organicism and the common good (chapter three), conscientious action and progress (chapter four), his theories of rights, the state and civil disobedience (chapter five) and finally his qualified justification of private property and capitalism (chapter six).

It must be emphasized at the very start that this thesis undertakes a philosophical and not (primarily) a historical examination of Green's thought. Similarly, Green's philosophical provenance is not the central focus of this thesis. The writings of Rousseau, Kant and Hegel are mentioned where this is helpful to developing the critique of Green's system. Aristotle and Locke are important sources of Green's theories of community and politics, and his theories of property and civil disobedience, respectively, but these particular debts are not examined to any significant extent in the course of this thesis. Only the material necessary for the internal critique is introduced.

In the course of this thesis, I will reconstruct Green's system and consider all of the most famous and potentially damaging criticisms which have been made against it in the literature as well as noting many of the places where similar points have been made either for or against Green. In this way, it aim to discover to what extent Green's principles are "true" (Barker, 1915: 58).

Testing Green's assumptions is particularly important at the moment because several recent studies by well-respected scholars have raised serious doubts about the degree to which it is still reasonable to accept these assumptions. For example, Melvin Richter

concludes his classic study, *The Politics of Conscience: T H Green and his age*, with the claim that by the 1920s and 1930s, the ideal of self-realisation championed by Green and his followers which had been “accepted by the fathers as bold and progressive”

... appeared to their sons as a set of priggish *clichés*. ... The Liberal epoch had come to an end, and with it the tenure of Green’s influence. (Richter, 1964: 376)

Similarly, Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant agree with Stefan Collini’s claim that the Idealists’ “mode of thought ‘was embedded in a set of assumptions which no longer demands our allegiance’” but not to his claim that it was ““addressed to a range of problems which no longer command our attention.”” (Vincent et al, 1984: 183, quoting Collini, 1979: 253) Finally, Richard Bellamy argues that

a return to Victorian values in modern circumstances would be seriously misguided. For much of liberalism has been shaped by aspirations and beliefs which have ceased to command our allegiance and addressed social and political conditions which no longer exist. (Bellamy, 1990a: 12)<sup>1</sup>

This line of attack has been used for many years (e.g. Prichard, 1949) and indicates Green’s transformation from a figure of philosophical interest into little more than a character in the history of philosophy. Stuart Hampshire took this characterisation to its extreme when he wrote:

T H Green, who died in 1882, is a minor figure in the history of philosophy. He left no legacy of convincing argument or insight. He was an earnest, slow, rather muddled thinker, without technical brilliance or any exceptional powers of expression. (Hampshire, 1964: 184)

Certainly, there have been some scholarly philosophical defences of various aspects

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<sup>1</sup> Also, see Bellamy, 1984 *passim* ; Bellamy, 1990b: 147-8 ; Bellamy, 1992a: 40.

of Green's system over the years.<sup>2</sup> However, they are in the minority. I hope that this thesis will indicate that this situation is not justified.

Indeed, the line of criticism referred to above is very weak (although frequently employed). In many (but not all) cases, there is something very dubious about the claim that 'our' time no longer finds argument X plausible - that 'we' cannot accept *that* anymore. Often, in fact the 'we' refers to a rather restricted group of people who are portrayed as nearly the only reasonable people in the world on this matter (by virtue of operating upon 'our' assumptions). Frequently, there are just as many people who do accept the 'rejected' assumptions. For instance, the idea of fostering a self-reliant citizenry retains its appeal for many groups and individuals in Britain. In its various forms, it is supported by groups as diverse as the New Right, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. It forms the bedrock ideal for the work of John Bird, founder of *The Big Issue*. This is a not insignificant collection of people. A more profitable approach is to test the internal consistency of the philosophical system in question. This is just what the present thesis will do.

Now it is time to begin the analysis of Green's philosophical system.

## 2. An Outline of Green's 'Question' and Method.

When we understand what the questions exactly were that a philosopher put to himself, and how he came to put them as he did, we are more than half-way to understanding the answer (Green, 1889f: 134-5)

Green argues that "about every ... philosopher, the essential questions are, What are his problems, and what was his method?" (Green, 1885a: 6) It is necessary to ask these questions of his own thought.

It is a commonplace that Green wrote in response to the spiritual crisis of the mid-to late-Victorian era. Natural science was displacing orthodox Christianity as the basis of most Western societies. The need to avert the dangers of this situation comes out clearly in the majority of Green's writings (e.g. Green, 1906: especially 1-8 ; Green, 1885a-g

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Cacoullos, 1974 ; Morrow, 1981, 1984 ; Harris, 1986, 1988-9 ; Thomas, 1987 ; Nicholson, 1990 ; Simhony, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c.



*passim* ; Green, 1889a-p *passim* ; Green, 1986d *passim*). In his well-known early essay *Popular Philosophy in its Relation to Life* (Green, 1889e), Green characterises his society as one “that mistakes sophistication for thought” (Green, 1889e: 120). In philosophical terms, the enemy is essentially the same one faced by Kant (Green, 1889e: 97). It is a metaphysic based on realism, particularly as expressed in the philosophical underpinnings of natural science and the writings of John Locke, David Hume and Herbert Spencer (Green, 1885b: 64 ; Green, 1906: 1-8). What it brings in practice is human self-alienation.

The root of the problem lies in the fact that empiricism as the popular philosophy does not attempt to analyse experience with sufficient depth and consistency and really just tries (unsuccessfully) to hide any gaps and incoherencies within the common-place, prereflective view of the world:

It [popular philosophy] is the uncritical expression of the claim to be free, to enjoy and to understand. It is an abstract or result of the various methods, poetic, religious, metaphysical, by which man has sought to account to himself for the world of his experience, as they apply directly to human life. Inconsistent with all the inconsistencies of these methods, which it takes not as criticism would reconstruct but as rhetoric has overlaid them, it brings its contradictions home to the average man at the most vital points, and is the natural parent of the modern ‘unsettlement.’ (Green, 1889e: 97)

Similarly, in his unpublished papers, Green argues that:

the claim of the modern spirit to understand its own life (and enjoy it), results in the conviction ‘I always do w[ha]t pleases me, and it is unprofitable [that] I sh[oul]d do otherwise’. Unfortunately this result is [*insert: turns out [to be]*] incompatible with its other claim to be free. (MS 15)

The poverty of this metaphysic expresses itself most significantly in its inability to give a consistent and convincing account of the process of human moral agency (Green, 1889e: 96-7). In particular, it cannot give an adequate account of the self-consciousness inherent in human agency and does not recognise the active nature of human consciousness

(Green, 1889e: 95).

In this way, realist empiricism cannot satisfy the innate human desire for a coherent understanding of the world (Green, 1889e: 121). This failure is dangerous for man's moral life and development because it encourages a particularly popular misconception of human experience and moral life. If phenomena are conceived as purely the result of essentially arbitrary encounters of a passive consciousness with an otherwise mind-independent world, then a man's place in the world is reduced to that of a mere 'creation' rather than a 'creator'. As a consequence of this, the binding force of his moral views becomes highly questionable to him. This problem is dealt with more fully in chapters one and two. For the moment, the important point is that popular philosophy impairs the individual's capacity to act well - "man, above all modern man, must theorise his practice, and the failure adequately to do so, must cripple the practice itself." (Green, 1889e: 124) The necessary incoherence of the prevalent groundwork of contemporary thought is not a purely theoretical problem for Green, then. It is not even of the first importance for Green that it is a theoretical problem. Popular philosophy must be changed primarily because it harms the daily lives of real people.

Green is an idealist. In an important sense, he believes that the world in which we live exists only in our minds. This places an important emphasis on analysing these minds as they are expressed in practice:

For the ascertainment, in short, of what human thought and feelings are we have nothing to resort to but the analysis of what we ourselves are doing and have done. There are such things as knowledge, art, and morality, which somehow are our work. By considering what we must have done in order to [produce] their existence, and in no other way, can we learn the ultimate nature of the thought and feeling realised in them. We have to ask, for instance, what our consciousness must have done, and been in order to do, that there should be for it what we call facts, and these connected in a single world. (Green, 1885f: 96)

More succinctly, he states that philosophy (and, in particular, metaphysics) proceeds by the "disentanglement of that which is implicit in the language, knowledge, and acts of men" (Green, 1889d: 64). He believes that - to varying degrees - this process of enquiry finds

veiled expression in philosophy, art, science and all other branches of human academic study and practical life.

He proceeds on the assumption that our world is ultimately unified then, in the sense that the phenomena which constitute it are capable of being completely harmonised and systematised when properly conceived (Green, 1889e: 93). The philosopher must attempt to discover what is logically required if the known world is to exist in accordance with a coherent body of uniform laws. This goes some way to explaining the philosophical significance of the search for knowledge, and hence of epistemology in Green's thought. He arrives at the answer that what is discovered is the unifying power of human consciousness, which he labels 'the eternal subject or consciousness' and which he equates to God:

It is in a sense mysterious that there should be such a thing as a world at all. The old question, why God made the world, has never been answered, nor will be. We know not why the world should be ; we only know that there it is. In like manner we know not why the eternal subject of that world should reproduce itself, through certain processes of the world, as the spirit of mankind, or as the particular self of this or that man in whom the spirit of man operates. We can only say that, upon the best analysis we can make of our experience, it seems that so it does. (Green, 1906: 100)

The first chapter of this thesis explores many aspects of this passage. However, two points are of special significance for Green's methodology. On the one hand, he does not claim to have definitely found "the Truth". He is trying to produce the "best analysis" of the facts which constitute his world. On the other hand, he takes certain facts as given, such as our partial knowledge of the world. The most significant of these facts must be detailed here briefly. Green had great religious faith. His beliefs inform his philosophical thought - most notably in the shape of "the eternal subject" or "eternal consciousness". Green believed in what he characterised as the Christian God and it is to this thought that the discussion must turn next.

### 3. The Religious Basis of Green's Philosophy.

It has been established that Green requires a philosophy which emphasizes man's place at the centre of his own world (Green, 1889e: 117-8). Such a philosophy must set out the necessary union, the necessary coherence, of the outward world and the inward being of men. This goes some way to explaining Green's love for the writings of William Wordsworth (Green, 1889e: 118-120):

It [Wordsworth's philosophy] led man up to the recognition of his own greatness, as universalised by communion with nature and intercourse with his kind. It was conversant, not with subtleties of the imagination, but with the great, the obvious, the habitual, with the common earth, the universal sky, the waters rolling evermore, the abiding social powers that lift man out of his animal self, and render him 'magnanimous to correspond with heaven.'

(Green, 1889e: 120)

Only such a view can go any way to satisfying man's need for unity because only such a view approaches a successful reconciliation of the different and presently disjointed aspects of human self-understanding. Crucially, only such a view captures the religious impulses which Green takes all truly self-comprehending people to recognise within themselves. For example, Green asks "how does the individual interpret himself? As a succession of pains and pleasures gathered into a unity, or as the dwelling-place of a spirit that filleth and searcheth all things?" (Green, 1889e: 122) He sides with the latter.

For Green then, "the moral man ... [is] the many-sided development of a single spiritual principle" with this "single spiritual principle" being called alternatively "the eternal consciousness" or "God" (Green, 1889e: 100). This has caused a great deal of comment. For example, Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant argue that

[t]he importance of Green's theological and philosophical thought on religion cannot be overstated. ... This philosophical interpretation of ordinary religious consciousness enabled Green ... to claim that ... [his] philosophy, though metaphysical, was a reconstruction of ordinary consciousness. As such philosophy itself was part of the divine service. (Vincent et al, 1984: 16-7)

The particular values and conceptions of 'true' Christianity constitute the eternal truths which harmonise within one perfect universe. This comes out most clearly in the *Essay on Christian Dogma*, when Green writes:

Christian dogma, then, must be retained in its completeness, but it must be transformed into a philosophy. Its first characteristic, as an intuition become abstract, must vanish, that it may be assimilated by the reason as an idea. The progress of thought in general consists in its struggle to work itself free from the mere individuality and outwardness of the object of intuition. The thing as sensible, *i.e.* as presented in an individual moment in time and space, must become the thing as known, *i.e.* as constituted by general attributes. Again, from being supposed to be known only so far as it exists, it must be understood also to exist only so far as it is known. ... To the modern philosopher ... Christ is the necessary determination of the eternal subject, the objectification by this subject of himself in the world of nature and humanity ... If the idea of the philosopher is the truth, it may be said the intuition of the philosopher must be delusion. On examination, however, it will be found that there is a sense in which the idea is at once the complement of the intuition and its justification. (Green, 1889j: 182-3)

The role of philosophy is to articulate this universe in its completeness and full depth in rational terms rather than in the figurative and hence inadequate terms of religion. Green wishes to establish that true religious beliefs fully harmonise with each other. However, he does this by translating these beliefs into the constituents of his philosophical system. This system must stand apart from religious faith. It cannot rely upon biblical evidence or any such transcendent 'grounding'. Certainly, it must rest upon assumptions, but every presupposition must avoid being an "intuition become abstract" and instead "be assimilated by reason as an idea". Geoffrey Thomas claims that "There was a religious motivation to Green's thought, although only a slight religious content to his philosophy." (Thomas, 1987: 12). In truth, it is more accurate to amend the second claim into 'although only a slight *exclusively* religious content to his philosophy'. The only prominent and exclusively religious aspect is found within his treatment of "the eternal consciousness". Green's philosophical method and substantive claims are, therefore, available to atheists. This

contention is defended in greater depth in the course of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER ONE:

## *KNOWLEDGE AS SELF-REALISATION*

Human freedom must be understood in some different sense from that with which our anthropologists are familiar, if it is to stand in the way of the scientific impulse to naturalise the moral man. (Green, 1906: 6)

### 1. Introduction.

Green founds his ethical and political thought upon the contention that human activity and social institutions are manifestations of the self-realising impulse of the human mind. To establish the veracity of this contention, he examines the most basic form of human activity - knowing. Consequently, an internal critique must begin with an examination of this stage of his system. Unfortunately, Green's epistemology is generally regarded as the weakest aspect of his thought. Many commentators have ridiculed it (Fullerton, 1897: 9-11 ; Hudson, 1980: 48-9), and described it as mystical (Nettleship, 1889: cv ; Brett, 1913: 439), vague (Benn, 1962: 407-10 *passim* ; Copelston, 1966: 171), confused (Laurie, 1897: 113-31 *passim* ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 20-31), and "an assemblage of dusty old Kantian arguments about the relation between sensation and judgement, combined with intense moral earnestness" (Rorty, 1982: 147). Nonetheless, Dewey and Bentley have suggested (in 1949) that theories such as Green's retain some interest although they are "almost wholly discarded" (Dewey et al, 1949: 139).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this reaction is becoming more common, as recent assessments of Green's epistemology have generally been more favourable than in the past.<sup>2</sup>

The present chapter performs two main tasks. Firstly, it establishes that Green's epistemology is far more coherent and plausible than has commonly been supposed. Certainly in the religious terms which Green presents it in the *Prolegomena to Ethics* - with his use of the concept of "the eternal consciousness" - it does constitute the least plausible aspect of his theory. However, in reality the eternal consciousness is not the logical foundation of his epistemology. Indeed, it is not even a necessary part of his theory when

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<sup>1</sup> For Dewey's reaction to Green's epistemology, see Dewey, 1886a: 122-3 ; Dewey, 1886b: 153 ; Dewey, 1896: 25n2 ; Kloppenberg, 1986: 46-55 *passim*, 76.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Hylton, 1985 ; Crossley, 1990 ; Hylton, 1993 ; Skorupski, 1993 ; Gaus, 1994.

understood in theistic terms. Consequently, it can and will be established that one should not reject the whole theory simply because of rejecting the religious aspects of the eternal consciousness. Instead, it will be demonstrated that the eternal consciousness can be understood as equating with human nature, or the human essence - rather than God - without doing significant violence to Green's epistemology.

To establish this, a great deal of emphasis is placed on Green's epistemological writings which are not contained in the *Prolegomena*. All of the available resources are used in order to establish the actual importance of the eternal consciousness within Green's theory of knowledge.

Secondly, the present chapter seeks to pave the way for a detailed examination of Green's claim that the human capacity for knowledge demonstrates that man has free will and so is a moral (as opposed to an amoral) being (Green, 1906: 1-8 ; see Caird, 1883: 36). As the introduction established, developing a powerful justification of such a position was especially important for Green because he perceived the intellectual and cultural trend of his time to be towards a naturalised view of human epistemic and moral agency (Richter, 1964: 167 ; Skorupski, 1993: 75-83). He perceived the danger to be that if human action is determined by nature in the manner which, for example, Herbert Spencer argues (Green, 1885c & 1885d : *passim*), then "[t]he notion that thought can originate, or that we can freely will, is at once set down as a transcendental illusion." (Green, 1906: 65)<sup>3</sup> If Green's response is plausible, it will provide a valuable reason for believing that man's vision of the world, including his ideas of right and wrong, cannot be created by the natural world and, therefore, that his capacity for agency cannot be determined in its essence by the natural world in the way that some of Green's contemporaries claimed (Green, 1885c-g ; Green, 1890b: 34-144 ; but see Randall, 1966: 236-7). As this is crucial for Green's project, it must be crucial for this thesis as well. The question of free will is introduced at the end of this chapter with a full consideration being reserved for chapter two.

The discussion of Green's theory of knowledge is very brief in at least two senses. Firstly, in terms of pages roughly forty-five percent of Green's published writings deal with epistemological questions, whereas only approximately ten percent of this thesis is directly devoted to them. Secondly, I sketch merely those parts of Green's theory of knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> For a selection of assessments of Green's success, see Selsam, 1930 ; Knox, 1900 ; Lemos, 1968 ; Walsh, 1986.



which are especially relevant to his moral and political thought. I do not attempt to examine all of the intricacies of the theory nor to consider all of the possible criticisms and replies in any great depth. Unfortunately, such a treatment has been the norm in Green scholarship for many years.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Green's Starting-Point.

The starting-point of Green's epistemology is the question "How is knowledge possible?" (e.g. Green, 1906: 8, 38 ; Green, 1885c: 2 ; Green, 1889d: 47 ; Green, 1889e: 96). First of all, notice his acceptance of the claim that knowledge is, in fact, possible. Also, as Thomas points out, Green is concerned to present an analysis of our knowledge of perceptions, as opposed to, for example, of God (Thomas, 1987: 130). Furthermore, Green believes that knowledge is not a mere possibility, but that people do actually know things, and that it is a waste of time to raise the more sceptical doubt (Green, 1885c: 2). Hence, "[p]hilosophy does not precede but follows, that actual knowledge of things, which it is its office to analyze and reduce to its primitive elements." (Green, 1889d: 48) More specifically, it means that the true task for philosophy "is simply the consideration of what is implied in the fact of our knowing or coming to know a world, or, conversely, in the fact of there being a world for us to know." (Green, 1885c: 2)<sup>5</sup> In all of this, Green follows Kant (Green, 1885c: 1 ; see Lemos, 1968: xiii).

This approach is in contradistinction to one such as is adopted by Cartesian philosophers. For someone like Descartes, the initial question is whether or not anyone can know anything at all. Whereas Descartes seeks to reject as false any belief which - after reflection - he has reason to doubt (Descartes, 1986: 12-5 ; Descartes, 1970: 5-57), Green seeks to produce the most coherent explanation for "commonly held" views about the world (Passmore, 1966: 57).

His question can be further specified by asking what humans actually can possess knowledge of. He argues that knowledge is always of experience and of strictly logical deductions from that experience (Green, 1906: 10). Here Green is following Kant once

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Calderwood, 1885: 76 ; Richter, 1964 ; Cacoullous, 1974 ; Greengarten, 1981 ; Thomas, 1987. For an excellent expository summary of Green's epistemology, see Nettleship, 1889: lxxv-lxxxv *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> John Dewey mistakes Green's method very badly (he reverses it) by forgetting that this is Green's starting point (Dewey, 1886b: 153-4).

more. For example, Kant writes that “[i]n the order of time, therefore, we have no knowledge antecedent to experience, and with experience our knowledge begins.” (Kant, 1929: 41) But what does Green mean by “experience”? In the *Prolegomena*, he distinguishes between two possible uses (Green, 1906: 15-6). In the first, non-conscious entities can “experience” the world in the sense of being affected by it without actually being aware that they are so affected. For example, a plant can “experience” changes in its physical make-up because of changes in its environment, but it is not conscious of doing so. Similarly, humans experience changes “in respect of the numberless events which affect us but of which we are not aware.” (Green, 1906: 15) This is the sense in which, for example, Spencer and Lewes use the term “experience” in their epistemological theories (Green, 1885c: 14; Green, 1885e: esp. 65 ; see also Hylton, 1985: 91-8). It is in this way that for them, “knowledge of nature ... [is] itself the result of natural processes.” (Green, 1906: 15)

For Green, such a meaning of “experience” is inadequate when it comes to explaining how “knowledge can only be of experiences” and what they logically imply. Although it is a not uncontroversial classification, it can be said that the “affective” consideration of knowledge falls within the province of psychology rather than philosophy. It is not concerned with the conditions of knowledge, whereas (Green’s) philosophy is (see Haldar, 1894: 168-9 ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 30-1).<sup>6</sup> In short, the changes referred to when “experience” equates in this way to “affected” cannot explain the fact of our knowing.

The usage of “experience” which *is* relevant here “must be experience of matters of fact *recognised as such*.” (Green, 1906: 16, emphasis in original). Experience in this second - and to Green far more fruitful - sense equates to “consciousness of events as related or as a series of changes.” (Green, 1906: 16) He writes elsewhere that “[o]ur experience consists of related phenomena, i.e. related feelings.” (Green, 1890a: 10 ; see Ewing, 1969: 21) A mind-independent world may affect us in the same sense that the plant is affected by its environment, but the important question remains - how do we come to recognise that it does so, and furthermore that it does so in a uniform manner (as subject to general and permanent laws) (Green, 1906: 9)? This is a more detailed expression of Green’s initial question - “How is knowledge possible?”

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<sup>6</sup> It is probably Fullerton’s failure to appreciate this division which leads him to his excessively negative treatment of most philosophers of mind (Fullerton, 1897; 1-26). This holds true despite 25n1.

### 3. Green's Idealism, and the Problem of Sensations.

Green's is an idealist position and he argues that "the only valid idealism ... [is] that which trusts, not to a guess about what is beyond experience, but to analysis of what is within it." (Green, 1885f: 72). Even so, he does not adopt the extreme position which holds that everything in the world is simply a creation of the mind. He is emphatic that his claim about what constitutes "valid idealism" does not entail a denial of the existence (in the common usage of that word) of a world which is independent of consciousness - a world in which the action of a mind is absent. This presents Green with his biggest problem - how to justify his contention that sensations form the raw materials of human experiences. In his vitriolic attack on Herbert Spencer,<sup>7</sup> Green is at pains to distance himself from what he sees as an immature position:

what Mr. Spencer understands by 'idealism' is what a raw undergraduate understands by it. It means to him a doctrine that 'there is no such thing as matter,' or that 'the external world is merely the creation of our own minds' - a doctrine expressly rejected by Kant, and which has had no place since his time in any idealism that knows what it is about. (Green, 1885c: 12)

It was noted above that at many points in his writings, Green distinguishes between a feeling (or sensation) and a *perceived feeling* (or perceived sensation)<sup>8</sup> (e.g. Green, 1885e: 73, 77, 87-9 ; Green, 1885a: 173). He argues that it is one thing to feel pain, and another to be *conscious* that one is doing so (Randall, 1966: 236-9)<sup>9</sup> and that it is only when feelings enter consciousness that they exist for humans as objects (see Eastwood, 1891: 246). For example, whilst absently staring into space, and thinking about something other than what is in front of you, light (probably) affects your retina, and the retina still sends impulses to your brain to become (unperceived) sensations. However, these as yet unperceived sensations cannot form part of your experience of the world. Only when you pay attention

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<sup>7</sup> Green regretted his vitriol (Green, 1885g: 541), which also angered Spencer himself (Spencer, 1891: *passim*). Also, see Nettleship, 1889: lxix-lxx.

<sup>8</sup> Normally, Green uses 'a feeling' and 'a sensation' interchangeably. Laurie is very confused about this (Laurie, 1897, 121-8). Green, 1890b; 7 is exceptional.

<sup>9</sup> Hobhouse does not fully appreciate this distinction in Hobhouse, 1896; 23n3.

to them do they become possible objects of experience and knowledge. Green criticises Kant for not being consistent on this point. Simultaneously, Kant maintains that - i) things exist independently of consciousness and ii) things only exist through perception (Green, 1890a: 5 ; Green, 1906: 38-41 ; Hylton, 1985: 100-1 ; Hylton, 1990: 37-9; Hylton, 1993: 457).<sup>10</sup> However, Green faces the problem which Andrew Seth (Seth, 1887: 74-8) states as follows:

In fact, though the Neo-Kantians dismiss Kant's explanation of sensation as unphilosophical and irrelevant, they seldom volunteer an explanation of their own ; and it is evident that, to Green at least, the facts of sense - the sense-qualities of things - constitute a serious embarrassment. He constantly assumes a stream of sensations as the material upon which the pause-giving and rationally constitutive activity of thought is exercised ... [H]is very mode of stating the question [of how one can know anything] seems to involve the existence of mere feeling in some fashion as that which thought transforms into a system of stable facts. He sees this himself and endeavours ('Prolegomena,' 46 *et seq.*) to treat it as an illusion necessarily incident to our point of view. (Seth, 1887: 74-5, emphasis in original)

Seth is essentially correct in his assessment. Green vacillates constantly between treating the external world (and therefore unperceived sensations), on the one hand, as "blank nothing" (Green, 1885f: 103) and, on the other, as the source of our perceived sensations. Given his insistence that we should not attempt to guess about what we cannot experience, the second option is not legitimately open to him.

On one view, this is overstating the problem. Reading him sympathetically, the theory only requires him to explain how we can come to organise our otherwise random experiences into the unified whole which constitutes the world in which we live. Ultimately, Green's theory does not rely on the existence of unperceived sensations for its internal coherence. In short, all that Green's theory demands is that what we may call either 'perceived feelings' or 'perceived sensations' do exist and do form the 'basic materials' of our knowledge.

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<sup>10</sup> For Green on Kant, see Lamont, 1934: 179-90 *passim* ; Randall, 1966: 232-6.

Even so, this is based on a very kind reading. If one is less sympathetic (as I am inclined to be), doubt remains as to how far Green does actually manage to avoid making “a guess about what is beyond experience” (Green, 1885f: 72). For example, what does he mean by the phrase “external to consciousness” which he makes at crucial points in his analysis? To produce a coherent conception of “externality”, he must also posit a world the existence of which is totally independent of any human consciousness of it. If he does not do so, he cannot escape the “raw undergraduate[’s]” position (Green, 1885c: 12). Chubb supports Green here (Chubb, 1888: 11), yet both he and Green must still make a “guess beyond experience”. Despite all of his efforts, Green seems to have no way out of this difficulty. Apart from guessing that the world exists “in itself” rather than, for example, as a pure creation of the mind of a God (Berkeley, 1937: p.1, s.72), or a malicious demon (Descartes, 1986: 15), or an Experience Machine (Nozick, 1974: 42-5), he has no reason for using the term “external” in the manner that he does. This is one manifestation of the problem highlighted by Seth which has been commented upon also at many other places in the literature.<sup>11</sup>

This problem recurs throughout Green’s epistemological writings. Unfortunately, it is simply irresolvable given his ‘question’, assumptions and method with all of their attendant limitations. In large part, his question is, how do we produce an increasingly coherent system of general laws with which to comprehend the mass of different perceptions we have but do not chose to receive? He assumes that our perceptions are constructs of consciousness. The difficulty is that he must then explain what the mind uses as the raw materials of these perceptions. However, his assumptions and ‘question’ mean that he is precluded from doing so by the presence of several possible alternatives to sensations, such as God, a malicious demon, and an Experience Machine.

Nevertheless, recognising this difficulty does not invalidate Green’s fundamental point that the world in which we live is “in and fundamentally dependent on our minds” in important senses (see Joachim, 1906: p. 118n).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For examples, Balfour, 1884: 77-8 ; Calderwood, 1885: 76-8 ; Haldar, 1894: 172-3 ; Hobhouse, 1896, 25-6 ; Laurie, 1897: 116-21, 124-5 ; Cunningham, 1933: 353-63 ; Lamont, 1934: 186-90, 197-203 ; Randall, 1966: 230-1 Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 22-4 ; Hylton, 1985: 102-3.

<sup>12</sup> Anyone denying the creative power of consciousness must attempt to explain how we come to understand chaotic sensations as parts of an ordered world. Forsyth, for one, fails to do this (Forsyth, 1910: 147-55).

#### 4. Experience and Relations.

the reality of an individual object consists in that system of its relations which only exists for a conceiving, as distinct from a feeling, subject, even as the unreal has no meaning except as a confused or inadequate conception of such relations; and that thus the 'present impression' is neither real nor unreal in itself, but may be equally one or the other according as the relations, under which it is conceived by the subject of it, correspond to those by which it is determined for a perfect intelligence. (Green, 1885a: 328)

The human mind creates order in our world. Consider what happens when one is simply looking at a table - "Here is this table now before me. The sensation it excites in me is in time; I turn my head and it is gone" (Green, 1890b: 11). Such sensations are continually "in flux" (Green, 1890b: 19) and sensations which are constantly in a state of flux cannot form a related series.<sup>13</sup> Yet, for Green "experience in the most elementary form in which it can be the beginning of knowledge" is "a consciousness of events as a related series" (Green, 1906: 16). As he puts it elsewhere, "This ... is a judgement in terms, expressing not what is sensible, *but what is intelligible.*" (Green, 1889d: 54, emphasis added). It is only as sensations are held together in the consciousness of a perceiving mind that they can form such an intelligible series. Such a consciousness must stand apart from the changes of the world which it experiences and assess them from a viewpoint which does not similarly change.

Green denies Kant's separation of the act of constituting relations between sensations and the conception of that relation (Green, 1890a: 18). The act of positing the relation is identical with the act of being aware of the relation. In short, "relations [are] constituted in and by the act of conception or knowing" (Green, 1890b: 49) He gives a clear and succinct presentation of this point in *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (Green, 1889d: 52-4). He begins as follows:

If we take as the germ of intelligent experience the simple consciousness of

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<sup>13</sup> Sidgwick fails to appreciate this (Sidgwick, 1905: 223).

a sensation, this can only be expressed as the judgement, 'something is here.'

The 'here,' however, is the next moment a 'there'; the one sensation is superseded by another. (Green, 1889d: 52)

Next, he points out that there must be a subject which distinguishes itself from the sensations in such a way that it can hold them together as discrete but still related objects. This entails that there exists a perceiving subject which is aware of each initial sensation as similarly existing. Thus, Green argues that "[thought's] first assertion is that 'something is,' its earliest predicate is 'pure being.'" (Green, 1889d: 52)<sup>14</sup> The barest knowledge of the presence to consciousness of a sensation requires the perceiving subject to be aware of the conceptual relationship between existence and non-existence. Furthermore, it is logically entailed in the conception of the object as "existing" that the perceived sensations must be understood by the perceiving subject as constituting something different from each other and the perceiving subject itself.<sup>15</sup> If the subject does not make such discriminations, then it cannot conceive of the sensations as constituting discrete objects of perception, which they must be understood to do in order to be known.

Two points should be drawn out of all this. Firstly, knowledge necessarily implies that the knowing subject (the epistemic self) is self-conscious (Green, 1890a: 11). Secondly, relations are central within Green's theory of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Green, unlike Plato (Green, 1889d: 55-9), conceives of the growth of our knowledge as a movement from the most abstract understanding of the object (that is, the bare fact of its existence) to the more determinate (that is, as related to other objects) (Green, 1885a: 40):

By a succession of judgements, each manifesting in the copula the presence of the same unifying and distinguishing agent as the most primary, the chaos

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<sup>14</sup> Here, Green is echoing Hegel (e.g. Hegel, 1986; 76-81). There is a partial translation of this work amongst Green's papers in Balliol. Also, Green would have read pertinent sections of Hegel's *Complete Logic* as they were translated in James Stirling's *The Secret of Hegel* (Sterling, 1898: 218-320). This work impressed Green greatly, according to Muirhead (Muirhead, 1931: 170).

<sup>15</sup> Hobhouse fails to appreciate this (Hobhouse, 1896: 22-31).

<sup>16</sup> As is widely recognised, see e.g. Eastwood, 1891 ; Sidgwick, 1905: 9-22 ; Quinton, 1982: 204-6 ; Crossley, 1990: 5-7 ; Randall, 1966: 225-8.

of sense is resolved into definite elements. One indeterminate sensation after another is determined by comparison and contrast with others, and as determinate is referred as a property to a thing, to become in its turn the subject of other predicates, the substratum of other properties, as the range of knowledge increases. (Green, 1889d: 52-3)

Elsewhere, he writes:

In truth attributes mean relations; conception = the thought of objects under relations, and under relations every object must be thought in order to be an individual object at all. (Green, 1890b: 10)

When considering any one fact about the world, consciousness must differentiate it from other facts and understand how this fact relates to others. He gives the example of knowledge of the qualities of an acid (see also Joachim, 1906: 33). “The unscientific man,” he writes, “if asked what an acid is, will say, perhaps, that it is that which sets his teeth on edge.” (Green, 1889d: 53) This man will understand the concept of “acid” in relation to other qualities as well, such as matter (/non-matter)<sup>17</sup>, liquid (/solid), and taste (/tasteless). The scientific man can extend this knowledge still further, for example, through the discovery of the chemical formula of the particular acid. Yet, this scientific discovery presupposes knowledge of other relations and concepts. In the example just given, this substratum is formed, for instance, by concepts and relations inherent in the “language games” of chemistry. This new understanding of “the complex of attributes” (Green, 1889d: 71) which we conceive as “acid” forms a further aspect of the substratum which then conditions our understandings of our other experiences. If the laws of relations which underlie these judgements are to exist in a world which can be known, then they must be mutually consistent and unchanging. Therefore, something is misunderstood only if we conceive it in different relations to those which it occupies in the totally coherent system of relations which constitutes the uniformity of nature (Green, 1906: 23). This is clearly shown in his discussions of hallucinations (for example, Green, 1906: 14 ; Green, 1890a: 17 ; Green 1890b: 15 ; Green, 1885a: 187-8). As Dewey succinctly puts it, for Green “[w]hat is mere

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<sup>17</sup> I.e. “matter” and “non-matter” simply as concepts.



seeming or unreal is not capable of becoming a member of this unified world.” (Dewey, 1889: 22)

[o]ur crude notion of the antithesis between what is real and what is thought gives way before the consideration that all reality lies in relations, and that only for a thinking consciousness do relations exist. (Green, 1890b: 16)

Given that “permanent and uniform” relations (Green, 1885f: 116) can only exist for a conceiving mind (Green, 1885f: 116, 118-9, 120-1, 124-7, 134-5 ; Cunningham, 1933: 48-57), Green concludes that

[i]t is not the work of the mind, as such, that we instinctively oppose to the real, but the work of the mind as assumed to be arbitrary and irregularly changeable. (Green, 1906: 21)

Although it has not always been clearly recognised by the commentators (e.g. Taylor, 1901: 73-82 ; Randall, 1966: 223), the necessary interconnection of sensations and the activity of consciousness which Green’s analysis uncovers, entails the collapse of the distinction between (perceiving) subject and (perceived) object. The nature of the object must be inseparable from the nature of the subject. Also, the role of relations contains within itself the idea of one in the many, many in one (Green, 1906: 28). In understanding one object one must also understand its relationships to many others. Objects only exist (again, for us) in relation to other objects. As Green famously states, “[a]bstract the many relations from the one thing, and there is nothing. They, being many, determine or constitute its definite unity.” (Green, 1906: 28)

This does *not* mean that Green believes knowledge is made up of relations alone, as some have argued he did (Balfour, 1884: 76-7 ; Balfour, 1893: 429-30).<sup>18</sup> Relations are necessary, but not sufficient, components of knowledge (Green, 1906: 42). There must also be “things” (as Green rather vaguely labels them), or sensations, related, as well as the

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<sup>18</sup> Mukhopadhyay examines the problem of explaining how there can be any ‘thing’ which is then related in Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 21-2.

relations between them (see Haldar, 1927: 30-2 ; Bradley, 1897: 25-6).<sup>19</sup>

For clarity, one should recognise that Green's theory of 'the one in the many' is not holistic in the manner Hylton, for one, alleges (Hylton, 1990: 39-42). As Avital Simhony puts it, the holistic perspective holds that, the whole "is somehow more real than" the parts (Simhony, 1991: 515). This does not apply to Green's form of organicism where the relationship between the parts and whole is "non-reductive" (Simhony, 1991: 520). The whole does not have ultimate priority over the parts nor *vice versa*. The nature of each part is determined by the relationships in which it stands to all other parts as well as by its place in relation to the whole. Similarly, the nature of the whole is determined by the arrangement of the parts. In this way, Green's is a relational rather than a holistic form of organicism.

It was noted earlier that the process of establishing relations must entail the "discerning, comparing, and compounding," (Green, 1885a: 51) of sensations according to universal laws. Green argues that there are at least two reasons why universal laws must govern the association of predicates which constitutes consciousness' experiences. Firstly, only in this way can the mind satisfy its inherent desire for an ordered experience and understanding of the world (Green, 1885c: 2). Secondly, it is only on the presupposition of there being such a possible coherent ordering to our experiences that we are justified in assuming that we can have knowledge at all (Green, 1906: 14). In regard to the last matter, Green argues that consciousness must be a "unifying" as well as a "distinguishing" entity for "the chaos of sense" to be made intelligible (Green, 1889d: 52). Hence, the idea of knowledge presupposes the existence of general laws governing consciousness' perception and association of sensations (Green, 1906: 12-5). Furthermore, the inherent logic of the concept of knowledge requires that ultimately all laws of association of predicates can be perfectly systematized. This presupposition must be made if knowledge is held to be possible, whether or not particular epistemic selves ever succeed in being fully conscious of doing so, and whether or not they ever succeed in conceiving of this system clearly and in its completeness. For example, one cannot coherently justify ideas of cause and effect without presupposing that nature operates according to such universal laws (Green, 1885a: 313).

Does the move from the idea that consciousness must unify sensations to the idea

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<sup>19</sup> There is not enough space to discuss in depth Bradley's criticisms of relational theories of knowledge such as Green's. All that should be noted is that ultimately his argument seems to rest on a category mistake. See also Hylton, 1985, 106-8.

of a “uniformity of nature” entail a logical jump? It is one thing to believe that the concept of knowledge logically requires the presupposition of a unified world of general laws of the type just outlined. However, it has been argued<sup>20</sup> that this does not mean only *one* such system is possible. In short, it is alleged that the first claim which Green makes does not logically entail the existence of “a [single] world of experience, one, real, abiding” (Green, 1885a: 324). There may be many ways of constructing a system of such general laws which all possess the same degree of internal coherence. Consequently, it may be perfectly coherent to accept that all agents must work on the assumption of the ultimate unity of their (possible) knowledge, and yet simultaneously to reject the claim that this necessarily requires them to hold that they all share the same system. This problem is extenuated by Green’s claim that no human will ever possess full knowledge - no one will ever fully comprehend the world as a unified system - due to their imperfect natures (Green, 1906: 72 ; Green, 1889g: 145). Such imperfection brings into question the status of any assumption that ultimately the world is unified by appearing to make the claim into an (unprovable) working hypothesis. Like all working hypotheses it is a pragmatic guess and, in the manner which Green portrays it, it is not a strictly logical deduction from the fact that people know things.<sup>21</sup>

However, this objection fails by its very structure. There is an inherent incoherence in challenging the presupposition that at some level there can be only one coherent system of relations. The challenger is making a claim which, if it is itself to be coherent, must be making a universal claim about the nature of knowledge. In other words, an assertion that there is no such thing as “Truth” is itself a “Truth-claim” and, because of that, the attack is internally inconsistent. (I am doubting, therefore, I unify.) Green recognises this (Green, 1906: 26). Properly, it lacks meaning to ask whether or not there is merely one coherent system of relations and it is in this manner that the objection must fail because of its very structure (Green, 1906: 27).

The ultimate unity of experience is pivotal in the present context because it underlies Green’s discussion of the categories. Application of these categories to sensation by consciousness makes experience possible. Hence, it is the concept of “categories” that we

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<sup>20</sup> For example, see Schiller, 1903: 46-54 and Rorty, 1989: 3-22 ; but see Rorty, 1982: 82.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it may be argued that this is more a reflection of the spirit of his time (see Richter, 1964: 165-7).

reach the heart of Green's contention that the world which humans can know (and in which they live and act) is a creation of their minds. Consequently, it is vital to understand this particular argument in order to properly grasp the sense in which that capacity for knowledge implies the fact of being 'free'.

The action of a distinguishing and, importantly, a unifying consciousness necessarily entails the application of categories to individual sensations, or "things". At his most Hegelian (e.g. Hegel, 1986: 67, 105-7, 134), Green writes, "[t]hus we may not say either that the real thing is individual, not universal (for its individuality is a universal particularised), or that its individuality distinguishes it from such a work of thought as conception (for its individuality is the work of thought)." (Green, 1890b: 28) In this way, one discovers Green's theory of the concrete universal (Quinton, 1982: 205 ; Hylton, 1985: 105-6). Individual objects are constituted by consciousness' application of universal categories in particular instances. Accordingly:

feelings which are conceived as facts are already conceived as constituents of a nature. The same presence of the thinking subject to, and distinction of itself from, the feelings, which renders them knowable *facts*, renders them members of a world which is one throughout its changes. In other words, the presence of facts from which the uniformity of nature, as an abstract rule, is to be inferred, is already the consciousness of that uniformity *in concreto*. (Green, 1885a: 321, emphasis in original)

The categories, or "universals", which interrelate in accordance with these universal laws develop out of human beings' attempts to understand their world as a world which is in some way intelligible - that is, to understand the general laws which must underlie the changes of phenomena in any world which is capable of being known. Knowledge becomes more determinate and coherent essentially through a process of trial and error. Human knowledge develops in that our understanding of the world in which we live becomes more determinate, more coherent and more complex (Green, 1889d: 56). As both Wempe and Green himself note (Wempe, 1986:93 ; MS6a), the hypothetico-deductive method of the modern natural sciences is simply a more sophisticated version of what Green has in mind (assuming that the former can be separated from scientific realism). Yet, on the analysis just given - an analysis which seems to follow logically from the possibility of knowing anything

at all - there is no way that experience can impart these categories to consciousness from “outside”. This means that, somehow, these universals must already be present in consciousness before they are experienced (Green, 1889d: 55-61). For instance, Green argues that the categories of “time” and “space” cannot be derived from experience because they are necessary preconditions of the possibility of experiencing anything at all (Green, 1890a: 41-8, 61-9).<sup>22</sup> They must be logically prior to the act of experiencing and so cannot be “implanted within” consciousness by experience. The same applies to all categories, as it is only through their application to the chaos of sensation that we can experience anything.

This does not mean that consciousness must be aware of them temporally before experience. Indeed, as noted at the outset of this chapter, Green asserts that knowledge only begins with experience (Green, 1906: 15-6). In some way, experiences must bring these universals to mind (Green, 1889d: 73). This assumption underlies the following:

Facts related to those of which the percipient is aware in the object, but [which are] not yet known to him, can only be held to belong to the perceived object potentially or in some anticipatory sense, in so far as upon a certain development of intelligence, in a direction which it does not rest with the will of the individual to follow or no, they will become incorporated with it. But they become so incorporated with it only through the same continued action of a combining self-consciousness upon data of sensation, through which this object, as the percipient already perceives it, has come to be there for him. (Green, 1906: 63)

How plausible is the idea that knowledge “brings out” universals in this way? How plausible is it “that all truth partakes of the nature of revelation” (Green, 1889b: 15)? In Green’s favour it should be recognised, firstly, that he is *not* arguing that we are never mistaken about the nature and interrelationships of these universals. If he was committed to holding that position, then he could not explain the all too obvious existence of error in many of our (previous<sup>23</sup>) judgements. Indeed, his main reason for concerning himself with

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<sup>22</sup> Clearly, Green is following Kant here, although with a change of terminology because “time” and “space” are “a priori forms of intuition” and not “categories” for Kant.

<sup>23</sup> I assume that if we recognise we are in error, we cease to hold these beliefs.

epistemology in the first place is precisely his belief that the popular empiricist tradition was fundamentally in error in many of its most important categories (Green, 1906: 1-8 ; Green, 1885a: 1-5 ; Green, 1885c: 1 ; Green, 1889e: *passim* ; but see Balfour, 1893: 437-40). The second attractive thing to notice about Green's position is that he criticises Plato for arguing that single universals apply to single fully determinate objects (Green, 1889d: 56-7). As has been established already, Green is emphatic that any one object is made up of many different universals and that the progress of knowledge is, in many ways, the gradual growth in the coherent interrelation of these universals and the objects which they interrelate to form in the minds of particular human beings.

Despite these qualifications, this aspect of Green's theory may still seem a little "mystical", echoing as it does Plato's conception of knowledge as recollection (Green, 1964: 275), and Hegel's conception of the categories.<sup>24</sup> Against this charge, one can note Green's identification of this aspect of his system with Kant's synthetic unity of apperception (Green, 1906: 32-3). Given everything else that he has demonstrated about the logic of being capable of possessing knowledge, the explanation offered by Green does seem to be a very plausible one. Therefore, Green appears to have given very good reasons for believing that the existence of these basic categories, or universals, is a necessary presupposition of the experiences most people take themselves to have.

The foregoing analysis has outlined Green argument that the existence of knowledge establishes the necessarily constructive role of consciousness in the perceived world inhabited by humans. As the introduction to both this chapter and to the thesis as whole indicated, this idea is fundamental to Green's ethical and political thought. However, it may be thought that this proof is gained at too high a price in a different way. Some commentators claim that Green's epistemology necessarily entails a commitment to believing in the existence of God. It is to this objection that the discussion must now turn.

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For example, Plato, 1945: 72e-76e ; Plato, 1954: 34a-c ; Hegel, 1986: 67, 105-7, 134; see Haldar, 1894: 173-5 ; Ewing, 1969: 399-401 ; Thomas, 1987: 143-4.

## 5. Knowledge and the Eternal Consciousness.

It was noted in the introduction to the thesis that Green was a devout if unorthodox Christian. He understood his philosophy to be in essence a rationalisation of his faith (Green, 1889j: 182-3) and many allege that this has created problems for his epistemology. Often, it seems that his faith infects rather than strengthens his position, particularly in the form of his concept of “the eternal consciousness”.<sup>25</sup> On one level “the Neo-Hegelian fetish of the ‘eternal self’” (Taylor, 1901: 429n2) is not a minor problem, and must be addressed.

Frequently, Green implies that, at least in part, the eternal consciousness’ existence “divinely” transcends human existence. He writes of “an eternally complete consciousness”, “the world-consciousness of which ours is a limited mode” (Green, 1906: 51), and “the intellectual principle [which] realises itself under special conditions” in man (Green, 1906: 43). Moreover, he asserts that :

[t]he true account of it [knowledge] is held to be that the concrete whole, which may be described indifferently as an eternal intelligence realised in the related facts of the world, or as a system of related facts rendered possible by such an intelligence, partially and gradually reproduces itself in us (Green, 1906: 36)<sup>26</sup>

By referring to the eternal consciousness in these terms, Green implies that it exists in some “supernatural” realm. This assertion would be a problem for his epistemology, given the latter’s emphasis on the necessity of human experience in relation to existence (see Eastwood, 1891: 248-50). On his own terms, Green cannot know whether or not the eternal consciousness has such a self-subsisting nature and so cannot justifiably mention it

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<sup>25</sup> This has been widely commented upon from many different philosophical and religious perspectives, e.g. by Balfour, 1884: 79-82, 88-92 ; Seth, 1887: 74-81 *passim*, 214-30 *passim* ; Eastwood, 1891: 247 ; Balfour, 1893: 431-7 ; Fullerton, 1897: 9-11 ; Laurie, 1897: 124-5, 129-31 ; Fairbrother, 1900: 156-72 ; McGilvary, 1901 ; Taylor, 1901: 59-83 *passim* ; Sidgwick, 1905: 230-2, 239-55 *passim*, 258-66 ; Sturt, 1906: 76-9 *passim*, 211-59 ; Brett, 1913: 439 ; Rogers, 1922: 231-4 ; Lamont, 1934: 179-90 ; Lewis, 1948: 15-7 ; Benn, 1962: 401-10 ; Metz, 1938: 277-8 ; Richter, 1964: 182-7 ; Copelston, 1966: 169-71 Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 22-31 ; Cacoullous, 1974: 54-5, 107 ; Robbins, 1982: 92 ; Kloppenborg, 1986: 73-5 *passim* ; O’Sullivan, 1987: 55-68 *passim* ; Crossley, 1990: 11-4 ; Hylton, 1990: 21-47 *passim* ; Skorupski, 1993: 92-3.

<sup>26</sup> For an interesting view of such passages, see Ewing, 1969: 387 & n.

in his epistemological writings. Yet, at times, he seems to think that he can.

This apparent transcendence has frequently been attacked as unsupported (and, indeed, philosophically unsupportable) and fanciful. For example, F C S Schiller writes of “T H Green[’s] ... fearful and wonderful leap from the fact that all phenomena appear to some individual self to the conclusion that they are, *therefore*, appearances to a universal self” (Schiller, 1903: 112, emphasis in original). Similarly, Henry Sturt argues that “an intensely religious consciousness like T H Green’s glides absent-mindedly over chasms hopelessly impassable to mere logic.” (Sturt, 1906: 79) Also, it is entailed by W D Lamont’s assertion that “[t]he theistic and the pantheistic ideas which struggled together in his (Green’s) mind never quite fought it out to a finish.” (Lamont, 1934: 190; see also Hirst, 1935: 110) However, such criticisms ignore the main thrust of Green’s theory.

Hopefully, the analysis of the previous sections has gone some way to establishing that Green’s theory of knowledge is viable without God. His epistemology has progressed a long way without any reference being made to a transcendent eternal consciousness. In case this is not clear, I will assess the most important of these attacks in this section so as to demonstrate that one can indeed reject the implausible aspects of the eternal consciousness and yet retain all of the necessary aspects of Green’s epistemology.

Firstly, the difficulty which some commentators - most notably Arthur Balfour (Balfour, 1884: 89), Francis Bradley (Bradley, 1897: 41-5) and Henry Sidgwick (Sidgwick, 1902a: 51-4, 100-2, 116 ; Sidgwick, 1905: 260-1) - find with Green’s name for this principle (that is, “the eternal consciousness”) can be removed easily.<sup>27</sup> Green’s reasons for using “consciousness” should be self-evident given his belief in the ultimately mental nature of our reality. Consciousness’ being “eternal” for Green stems from his argument that it is a precondition of time. From this, it is a short step (for Green at least) to the characterisation of it as “eternal”. Furthermore, his use of the label “eternal consciousness” lends his theory to a religious reading more easily which is one of his goals. The criticism is merely a terminological quibble and so is of no real interest here (see Cunningham, 1933: 46n, 57-60).

Secondly, it must be admitted that Green does seem to envisage the eternal consciousness, as existing, in some sense, logically prior to human life, as was indicated by

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<sup>27</sup> See Knox, 1900: 72-4 ; McGilvary, 1901: 489-92, 495-7 ; Rashdall, 1924: II. 246-9 ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 27-30 ; Crossley, 1990: 17-8.



the passages quoted earlier. Furthermore, the eternal consciousness does equate with God in Green's mind. However, focusing upon that fact will probably lead one astray from the main thrust of his epistemological writings. It must be remembered what Green's conception of Christian knowledge of God - and hence what the latter's existence for man - actually is. Green believes that God exists in two senses. Firstly, He exists separately from human existence (Green, 1906: 187 ; Green, 1986d: 21). Yet, secondly, God is found also within each individual - that is, within his conscience, or, more generally, his consciousness. God's role in Green's epistemological theory (as a being which exists independently of man's existence) is very questionable (Richter, 1964: 186-7 ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 24-5). Green himself argues that it is very dangerous to describe the eternal consciousness as "supernatural". By doing so:

we suggest a relation between it and nature of a kind which has really no place except *within* nature, as a relation of phenomenon to phenomenon. ... [Therefore, i]f we employ language about it in which, strictly taken, they [relations between phenomena] are implied, it must only be on a clear understanding of its metaphorical character. (Green, 1906: 54, emphasis in original).

In other words, when using terms such as "supernatural" in relation to the eternal consciousness, one runs the risk of implying that it is an entity which exists as a phenomenon in the same way that, for example, a rock can do. This would mean that the principle by virtue of which there can be such a thing as a knowable world (that is, the eternal consciousness) is itself part of that world. The existence of the eternal consciousness would have to be created by the world before the eternal consciousness could create anything, including the world.

When Green describes the eternal consciousness as being "immaterial and immovable, eternally one with itself, ... [and] necessary to the possibility of a world of phenomena" (Green, 1906: 54), he is echoing some of Hegel's assertions concerning the non-actualized "concept". This "concept" is, metaphorically, the "soul" which gives life to the "body" (Hegel, 1967: 1A). That is, the concept underlies human consciousness in the sense of being the mould into which sensations must fit in order to be intelligible. A mind which did not possess the implicit concept, if such an idea is in any way meaningful, would

be a jumble of unrelated facts. As has been demonstrated, an unrelated fact is not understandable by a human consciousness. Facts only exist in relation to other facts. For this reason, without a perfectly coherent set of categories and relations potentially to be actualised in the human consciousness, there could be no possibility of human knowledge. Consequently, God cannot be studied except in so far as it is determined, and so does not exist in itself - that is, as a being which is separable from a human consciousness. For each man, God exists only as the individual's power of constructing and knowing a coherent world of phenomena and, in Berkeleyian terms, "general ideas". Hence, Green argues that:

we [must not] imagine it [the eternal consciousness], as the doctrine of innate ideas might lead us to do, antecedent in time to the processes of learning through which it realises itself, and which, in so doing, it makes what they are. ... It is inconsistent with the essential notion that the consciousness of a related whole, *so far as it is ours*, is an end realising itself in and determining the growth of intelligence. (Green, 1906: 73, emphasis in original)

Despite Green's extensive use of this term and thus his extensive personification of this potential state, there is no philosophical need for the eternal consciousness to be understood in theistic terms.<sup>28</sup> Even without God, it remains plausible to argue that only when a particular agent's determinate consciousness accords perfectly with the underlying structure of his mind will he feel satisfied with his knowledge, because only then will his knowledge be complete and coherent. In this way, Green's analysis does not necessarily entail the presence of personified divine mind existing apart from particular human minds. It is simply that ultimately each human mind has the same underlying structure.

This is not an implausible or incoherent view of mental processes. Indeed, the idea of a unifying and underlying structure of consciousness emerges in modern psychology as a necessary premise for at least one non-theistic model of human mental development. For example, Antony Storr writes, "I postulated a preformed organization independent of consciousness ... Some such working hypothesis seems inescapable" (Storr, 1960: 171). In

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<sup>28</sup> See Hobhouse, 1896: 537n2 ; Balfour, 1884: 88 ; McGilvary, 1901: 487-8 ; Milne, 1986: 94-7.

large part, it is inescapable because there is no other way to explain how the mind can come to organise its knowledge into a gradually more coherent whole. It is “inescapable” that there is “an unalterable order of relations” (Green, 1906: 26) because the idea of the unifying action of consciousness is a formal conception of knowledge. Green indicates this in his manuscripts:

An idea is formal when there is no existence corresponding [to] it. So (the) idea of the absolute (is) formal. (There is) no phenomenon corresponding to it. But without (the action) of this idea (there could be) no account for (the) effort to reduce experience to a unity, without which (there would be) no knowledge. (Green, MS15: 1 ; quoted in Wempe, 1986: 191, additions by Wempe)

This “deanthropomorphized” reading brings us to the conclusion that the increasing coherence of our knowledge is better understood as the result of our instinctive drive or desire to understand the world as unified than as evidence of the gradual reproduction of the “divine” eternal consciousness in man.<sup>29</sup> As Green puts it, “we only find unity in the world because we have an idea that it is there, an idea which we direct our powers to realise.” (Green, 1906: 149)

This reading is attractive because it removes two of the main criticisms of Green’s epistemology - that it is mystical, and that it does not explain how individual consciousnesses “partake” of the eternal consciousness (Sturt, 1906: 231-2, 237-40, 251 ; Hylton, 1990: 37-9). All of this goes some way to establishing that Green’s theory is not as implausible as some have argued, once its religious overtones have been removed.

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See Joachim, 1906: 42 ; Muirhead, 1908: 13-8 ; Muirhead, 1931: 204-5, 209, 213-4 ; Crossley, 1990: 14 ; Milne, 1986: 94-7.

## 6. Conclusion.

This final section brings together the most important points made in the chapter by sketching very quickly the main points of Green's epistemology. It emphasizes the self-expressive nature of human consciousness in the creation of the known world. From this basis, his claim that man's capacity to know demonstrates that he must be free in some sense can be introduced. This leads to a detailed examination of his theory of the will in the next chapter.

Green starts from the Kantian question "how is knowledge possible?" (Green, 1906: 8, 38) Knowledge is and can only be of experiences and what the possibility of experiencing logically requires. What cannot be experienced or logically derived from the fact of experiencing cannot be known. Thus far, Green is an empiricist. Nevertheless, as an idealist, he argues that "things in themselves" cannot be experienced by humans (Green, 1906: 38-41). The very act of experiencing destroys the mind-independent nature of the object. He attacks Kant for his inconsistency on this point because, even though Kant accepts idealism, he still postulates the existence of an external world, a world of "things in themselves" (Green, 1890a: 5). This to Green is unjustifiable. The only world that humans can know is, in its essence, mental (Green, 1885a: 328).

The next stage of Green's argument is more problematic. He argues that consciousness interprets sensations which seem to originate in an external world (Green, 1885e: 73, 77, 87-9). The problem is that - from the way Green describes it - this external world would have to be mind-independent. More importantly, on his own terms the sensations which are interpreted by the mind cannot be experienced in themselves, and so cannot be known in themselves. For this reason, they cannot form valid aspects of his epistemology. Many commentators have noted Green's inconsistency on this point (e.g. Seth, 1887: 74-5). He is committing the sin for which he condemned Kant.

Knowledge presupposes relations (Green, 1906: 16). To know that, for example, a stone is grey, one must know that stones can be grey. Furthermore, the concept of "grey" is only intelligible when one is aware of the concept "not-grey". Similarly, the idea of "a stone" only makes sense when one also appreciates the concept of "not-stone". The logically primary predicates are therefore "Being" and "Not-Being" (Green, 1889d: 52). Furthermore, knowledge can only be assumed to be possible once one presupposes that all facts are ultimately consistent with each other (Green, 1906: 26-7). If facts were not ultimately unified in this way, there could be no orderly understanding of the world. Even

the very act of denying the ultimate necessity of this unity presupposes that beliefs must be internally consistent. The denial must fail due to its own internal inconsistency. The categories (or, interchangeably, qualities, predicates or universals) which constitute the objects of our experience are themselves necessarily constituted by their relations to other qualities (Green, 1890b: 28). This act of relating can only be performed by a mind - finally establishing the mental nature of reality (Green, 1890a: 11). The categories which are applied cannot be given by any experience because they are necessarily presupposed in every experience. Hence, they must be present within consciousness - they must be logically prior to any experience (Green, 1889d: 55-61). This obtains even if consciousness can only become aware of them through analysing its own experiences. In arguing this, Green is echoing Kant's concept of the synthetic unity of apperception (Green, 1906: 32-3). The important point is that the act of experiencing is necessarily constitutive of the world in which we live. Hence, the distinction between the nature of the subject and the nature of the object disappears.

Green's arguments that a) knowledge only exists for consciousness, b) the system of facts is ultimately coherent, and c) the truth of a fact does not depend on its being known, lead him to make a second illegitimate move. He posits the existence of a divine mind of which individual human minds "partake" (e.g. Green, 1906: 36, 43, 51). This is "the eternal consciousness". This infamous concept can be depersonified and hence becomes the underlying structure of human consciousness. It is the potential which is progressively actualised by the act of experiencing. This chapter has established that Green presents a more plausible and coherent epistemology than is often claimed. Its most obvious problem, the eternal consciousness when understood as God, is a thoroughly dispensable aspect of the theory. Crucially, Green has successfully established that the human mind is the creator of the world in which humans live. In other words, the world we know and act in is a manifestation - a self-expression - of the human mind. In this sense, man must be free when he acts for he is not determined by anything outside of his own mind in the manner which empiricists, such as Herbert Spencer, allege. The following chapter considers this next stage of Green's argument in far greater depth by examining of the role played by voluntarism and the will within his philosophical system.

## CHAPTER TWO: *SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, VOLUNTARISM AND THE WILL*

### 1. Introduction.

One of the peculiar features of Ben Wempe's characterisation of Green's writings is his assertion that Green fails to present a fully developed theory of positive freedom (Wempe, 1986: 165). Similarly, Smith argues that Green fails to give a full and coherent account of his theory of the will in his published writings (Smith, 1981 *passim*). This chapter and the two which follow it examine those parts of Green's writings which together directly contradict the views of both Wempe and Smith. It will be established that understanding Green's theory of the will is fundamental to understanding the remainder of his philosophical system and in particular his conception of positive freedom. Moreover, it will be shown that such an understanding can be gleaned from his published writings.

Muirhead has gone as far as to argue that Green's ethics "is fundamentally a theory of the will." (Muirhead, 1924a: 170) Indeed, although Thomas rejects use of the term "will" (Thomas, 1987: 237-9), he has argued that Green's theory of agency "is of overriding importance and ... colours his treatment of nearly every topic he discusses." (Thomas, 1987: 121) More straightforwardly, his moral and political thought relies on his theory of free agency for its coherence. The link between human nature and morality springs from the nature of the will and in particular its expression in "distinctively human action". It will also be demonstrated here that this aspect of Green's thought is in turn shaped by his epistemology. Indeed, his epistemology has importance to him primarily because of the role which it plays within his theory of moral action. His theory is complicated by the fact that, although human nature is necessarily structured by the eternal consciousness, it is reliant, in a significant sense, upon social experiences and living for its particular expressions. Therefore, given the empirical fact of diversity both between and within cultures, human nature is present in the world in various manifestations. He believes the nature of human progress is fundamentally structured by the nature of the eternal consciousness and so as an agent develops, he is in a process of becoming more self-harmonised, and so more fully human. An essential aspect of this self-realisation is the development of the agent's moral will and character.

Given that his metaphysics of moral agency is so important to his ethical thought, it is more than a little unfortunate that Green runs two contradictory theories simultaneously

in his writings on the nature of the will. I label these the ‘neo-Aristotelian’ and the ‘spiritual determinist’ strands. The neo-Aristotelian strand is one which has been stressed in the past (e.g. D’Arcy, 1901: 36n1) and increasingly in recent years.<sup>1</sup> It expresses a belief in the importance of voluntary self-determination of one’s character and rests on a further belief in the agent’s capacity (indirectly) to make himself want certain objects and act from certain morally valuable motives. Hence, the neo-Aristotelian strand holds that the agent can choose to become virtuous (once certain minimum social conditions are met). The spiritual determinist interpretation, on the other hand, has now fallen from favour. In one form or another it was the orthodoxy in the older commentators, such as Henry Calderwood (Calderwood, 1885), James Seth (Seth, 1899: 390-1), W H Fairbrother (Fairbrother, 1900: 51-7), Henry Sidgwick (Sidgwick, 1902a: 15-22 ; Sidgwick, 1905: 247-53 *passim*), Henry Sturt (Sturt, 1906: 243-4, 251-3), Hastings Rashdall (Rashdall, 1924: II.309-10) and Bernard Bosanquet (e.g. Bosanquet, 1927a: 323-6).<sup>2</sup> In particular, this strand was later developed by Bernard Bosanquet, for example, in his *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (Bosanquet, 1927a: 318-57). It characterises human agency in terms of the self-generation of action from the interaction of the mind with circumstances. Any capacity for deliberate action is denied and the agent becomes, in Bosanquet’s words (used in a slightly different context), “an immense structure of automatic machinery” (Bosanquet, 1927a: 181). Of the current commentators only Gaus and Kloppenberg mention this reading. Even then, Gaus does so only in a brief endnote which is highly dismissive of Bosanquet’s reading of Green (Gaus, 1994 : 416 and importantly 432n16), whilst Kloppenberg - again, in an endnote - does not highlight the tension within Green’s writings (Kloppenberg, 1986: 434n50). At least one commentator has admitted to being simply confused about this. Haldar asks “If the adopted desire is will, what is choice and what is the activity by means of which effect is given to it?” (Haldar, 1927: 41)

In this chapter, I will examine each strand in turn and demonstrate that ultimately they are irreconcilable. The conclusion will be reached that the self-contradictory nature of Green’s writings on the will presents his theory with a profound difficulty which no recent commentator has properly recognised. Furthermore, it will become clear that the recent

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Hoover, 1973: 558, 562-5 *passim* ; Vincent et al, 1984: 20-1, 23 ; Milne, 1986 ; Thomas, 1987 : 124-95 *passim*, 369-70 ; Simhony, 1989: 483-4 ; Nicholson, 1990: 117-22

<sup>2</sup> Also, see Lamont, 1934: 27-30, 72-85 ; Copleston, 1966: 172-3.

neglect of the spiritual determinist strand can be explained in part by the concurrent neglect of Green's epistemological theory.

Before starting on the body of the discussion, a criticism which is fundamental to its whole approach must be addressed. Geoffrey Thomas has argued that "'the will' is, and is recognised by Green as being, a redundant term of explanation." (Thomas, 1987: 237) On this view, use of "the will" is unnecessary as all of the important issues which it raises can be fully dealt with merely using terms such as "desire", "intellect", and "character". In short, the will is a superfluous term (Thomas, 1987: 237-9). Secondly, Thomas argues that Green himself recognised the redundancy of "the will" as a philosophical term.

I do not accept either of these arguments. In regard to Thomas' first criticism, one might just as well argue that physiologists and doctors should cease to use the word "body" because they already have "liver", "kidneys", "skin", and so on. Thomas' second claim is just as implausible as his first. Green always presents his discussion of moral agency in his published and unpublished writings in terms of "the will" (as Thomas admits (Thomas, 1987: 238)), and even entitles one of his most important works *On the Different Senses of 'Freedom' as Applied to Will and to the Moral Progress of Man*. Furthermore, one of Green's main arguments against Bishop Butler is that the latter fails to present a fully worked out "theory of the will" (Green, 1889e: 99) If Green thought the term was redundant, why did he use it so often?

The real discussion now begins with an assessment of the neo-Aristotelian strand of Green's thought.

## **2. Aristotle's Theory of Moral Agency.**

To understand this theory, one must understand Aristotle's own defence of moral responsibility as set out in the first three books of *The Nicomachean Ethics*. What follows is a very brief sketch of the elements most relevant to the central concerns of this chapter. I do not seek to examine Aristotle's thought in any significant depth. This section is here merely to present the most important ideas which are developed in the subsequent critique of Green's writings.

Aristotle's theory of moral agency and hence moral responsibility is structured by his theory of rational action and hence his teleological framework. For Aristotle, the nature of any particular rational action is determined by the goal towards which it aims. As he famously writes, "Every art and every investigation, and similarly every action and pursuit,



is considered to aim at some good. ... [T]he end of medical science is health ; of military science, victory ; of economic science, wealth.” (Aristotle, 1976: Ii) In any complex activity, the rational agent will pursue a number of instrumentally valuable goals. However, if a particular goal is only instrumentally valuable, its worth necessarily derives from the value of the ‘higher’ goals which it serves. In this way, the goal at the pinnacle of the hierarchy is the source of the meaning and value of the other (lower order or derivative) goals. Aristotle takes the further step of assuming that there is one goal “... at which all things aim” and labels this “the supreme good” or more simply “the Good” (Aristotle, 1976: Ii). Hence, a necessary condition of an action’s rationality is that ultimately it seeks this supreme goal. Ultimately all truly rational action aims at the Good.

In Aristotle’s teleology, man is in his highest essence a rational creature. That is, for Aristotle man is in essence a creature who can engage in rational or deliberately goal-orientated action. In doing so, he pursues valuable goals. In this context, that goal is valuable which either is or brings the agent closer to realising the Good. This will be explained shortly. For the moment, the important point is that human conduct is worthwhile to the extent that it accords with the good or telos which is proper to man given his essential nature as a rational being.

Aristotle labels this end “eudaemonia”, which is frequently translated as “happiness”. However, the term “happiness” is misleading because of its utilitarian overtones. Any associations with pleasure and pain are to be carefully avoided because Aristotle is concerned with a lasting state of character and action, and definitely not with merely passing feelings. A man who possesses eudaemonia is fully realised as a human being. He embodies all of the properly human virtues, with “virtue” being defined as “a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent man would use to determine it.” (Aristotle, 1976: IIvi) There is insufficient space to examine this definition in much greater depth. All that must be highlighted are the references to the doctrine of the mean. This states that one should act in the manner appropriate to the particular circumstances. If circumstances require extreme violence, following the doctrine of the mean requires one to be extremely violent. It does not require one to be restrained in all circumstances as some commentators have argued it does (e.g. Williams, 1985: 35-6).

Aristotle’s list of virtues includes courage (Aristotle, 1976: IIIvi-ix), temperance or self-control (Aristotle, 1976: IIIx-xii), liberality (Aristotle, 1976: IVi), and magnificence

(Aristotle, 1976: IVii-iii) (see also Aristotle, 1976: Iivii). Two aspects of his theory of virtue are especially significant in the present context (Aristotle, 1976: IIiv). The first is his emphasis upon rationality and choice. The second is the role played by the agent's permanence of disposition as a necessary factor in determining his worth. These must be examined in turn.

As a rational activity, the properly human life must be deliberately undertaken by the agent. The idea of deliberate performance is necessarily entailed by the goal-orientated nature of rational action. To reinforce this point, Aristotle distinguishes between "deliberate", "voluntary" and "involuntary" actions (Aristotle, 1976: IIIi-iii ; see Hardie, 1980: 152-81, 377-86). An involuntary action is one in which the person plays no active part. A person is acting involuntarily when, for example, he is pushed through a pane of glass by someone else and against his own will. The agent is not responsible for such actions. A voluntary action on the other hand necessarily "has its origins in the agent himself, and where this is so it is in his power either to act or not." (Aristotle, 1976: IIIi) Not all voluntary acts are deliberate as not all of them involve real choice. "[W]e call actions done on the spur of the moment voluntary, but not the result of choice." (Aristotle, 1976: IIIi) Yet by definition, all deliberate acts are also voluntary acts. A deliberate act is a voluntary act which the actor chooses to do having considered the relevant 'pros' and 'cons'. It is a voluntary act which has been reflected upon and from the basis of that reflection its performance has been consciously adopted as a motive by the agent. Hence Aristotle defines "choice" as "a deliberate appetite of things that lie in our power. ... [W]e first make a decision as the result of deliberation, and then direct our aim in accordance with the deliberation." (Aristotle, 1976: IIIiii)

It is definitional for Aristotle that there can only be deliberation about means and never about ends. For this reason, one can only choose how to achieve one's intrinsically valued goals and not which intrinsically valued goals to have. Instead, "the end" Aristotle argues, "is an object of wish" (Aristotle, 1976: IIIiv). Although he is vague here, the essential point appears to be that whereas means are chosen and hence the agent has the option of not acting in the manner that ultimately he does, ends are simply either desired or not. One cannot directly make oneself want something, although this is not to say that the agent cannot do so indirectly. The way we act changes our character - "in every sphere of conduct people develop qualities corresponding to the activities they pursue." (Aristotle, 1976: IIIiv) In this way, the means which we decide to adopt to attain our (wished) goals

affect the sort of person we will become by determining the type of character we will come to possess. This is important because for Aristotle the good man is he who habitually acts correctly (Aristotle, 1976: Iii). One should not judge a man simply on the basis of an action which he pursues but which is atypical of him. Atypical actions may indicate a weakness of the will and that is a sign of imperfection, but the agent's moral worth is measured more properly by assessing the value of his settled disposition to act in a certain manner rather than by evaluating his occasional lapse into an uncharacteristic action.

We have now reached the heart of Aristotle's theory of moral responsibility and so we have reached what will later be established to be the root of the difficulties inherent within the first strand of Green's theory of the will. Aristotle proceeds as follows.

For Aristotle, a man is not born with a particular character. He therefore requires socialisation which will allow him to act and to improve himself through improving his character (Aristotle, 1976: Xix). Not all socialisation will allow him to act in this way (hence Aristotle discusses deficient constitutions throughout his *Politics*). The nature of valuable socialisation and social living is dependent upon the implicit nature of man. Famously, this nature is such that properly man is a polis-dwelling animal (Aristotle, 1962: Iii). Once these minimum social conditions have been satisfied, Aristotle believes that - at least at the beginning of their adulthood - men have a real choice about which means to adopt and hence what sort of person to become. However, once they go a certain distance down particular paths they lose the ability to save their own characters from moral corruption (Aristotle, 1976: IIIv). After a certain point their values and perspectives are so corrupted that their way back to having a virtuous character is inconceivable to them. The vistas of possible action take on new and perverse normative significances for them and they are then incapable of making themselves desire paths which will truly improve them as men. However, their subsequent moral state - whether virtuous or vicious - is voluntary and thus they are morally responsible for them because there was an initial situation where they could have become either saved or damned and at that point they chose which paths to take. Aristotle sums up his position with the words:

Our actions are under our control from beginning to end, because we are aware of the individual stages, but we only control the beginning of our dispositions; the individual stages of their development, as in the case of illness, are unnoticeable. They are, however, voluntary in the sense that it

was originally in our power to exercise them in one way or the other.

(Aristotle, 1976: IIIv)

I have real problems with this last step - that we are responsible for our actions now even though we no longer have the ability to act well. Unless we have the capacity to act in a way which is not evil, it becomes difficult to see that we are morally responsible for 'our' present actions. It seems better to argue that we are responsible to the extent that we could have chosen to have acted in a morally different manner than in fact we did. If we can now only chose to act badly, then we are not truly responsible agents. This obtains even if we did have a real choice between virtue and vice many years earlier in our lives.

Leaving this objection to one side, there is a far more fundamental question to be raised in relation to Aristotle's discussion of moral responsibility. To what extent is he operating within the freewill/determinist paradigm? Opinion amongst Aristotle scholars is divided, as W F R Hardie has pointed out (Hardie, 1980: 380-2). I do not intend to get into this debate to any serious extent. I will merely assert that Aristotle seems to hold the view that people do possess the capacity to make undetermined choices but between limited options. These are options which they cannot directly chose and which depend upon the sort of character they possess and the sorts of circumstances in which they act. Such a reading makes Aristotle's position intelligible (see Urmson, 1988: 59-61) if not totally convincing (see e.g. Williams, 1985: 37-40).

I take this belief to be at the heart of the first strand of Green's theory of the will as well. Unfortunately, it is as unsatisfactory there as it is in Aristotle. It is with this thought in mind that the discussion of the neo-Aristotelian strand of Green's theory of the will can now begin in earnest.

### **3. Green's Concept of 'Distinctively Human Action'.**

the transition from mere want to consciousness of a wanted object, from the impulse to satisfy the want to an effort for realisation of the idea of the wanted object, implies the presence of the want to a subject which distinguishes itself from it and is constant throughout successive stages of the want. (Green, 1906: 85)

It has been shown that Aristotle's conception of man is as a rational agent - an agent who deliberates, an agent who acts for reasons and who could have acted otherwise than in fact he does (Aristotle, 1976: IIiv). This belief is also at the heart of the first strand of Green's theory of "distinctively human action" (Green, 1906: 91).

The foundational characteristic of properly human action (rational agency in general) is that it is willed. Green defines "the will" differently as "the effort of a self-conscious self to satisfy itself" (Green, 1986d: 21) and "an effort (or capacity for such effort) on the part of a self-conscious subject to satisfy itself" (Green, 1986e: 177). This does not make interpretation easy. It is important to be clear about whether Green sees the will as "a capacity" or "an effort". Combining them as he does in the last definition merely encourages confusion. Fortunately, there are clearer passages than the previous two. The clearest runs as follows. The will is:

the capacity in a man of being determined to action by the idea of a possible satisfaction of himself. An act of will is an action so determined. A state of will is the capacity as determined by the particular objects in which the man seeks self-satisfaction; which becomes a character in so far as the self-satisfaction is habitually sought in objects of a particular kind. (Green, 1986a: 6)

It can be seen from this that self-awareness is a fundamental precondition of what it is to act in a truly human fashion (Green, 1986i: 1). Self-consciousness is a necessary aspect of being human because the conception of a wanted object which the idea of "an act" necessarily entails further entails the conception of something which is not the particular wanted object (Green, 1906: 118-24). As the first chapter demonstrated, awareness of Being necessarily entails awareness of Not-Being. The more definite this awareness of the wanted object is, the more definite must be the desirer's conception of this 'other'. Furthermore, the conception of the object as 'wanted' necessarily implies a subject which is doing the wanting. Hence, for one to be aware of oneself as desiring an object, there must be a "distinction of self from wants" (Green, 1906: 86). The most immediate case of a wanted object is found in one's own desires. Consequently, the most fundamental conception of 'a wanting entity' is one's self as an appetitive being.

This point can be made in another way. The concept of "a world of practice as

distinct from the world of experience” (Green, 1906: 86) is also logically entailed by the idea of a want. A world of practice is a world of possible changes which an agent has the capacity to make actual. Furthermore, it is a world which requires us to imagine what could exist and in particular what could be created. It is as part of this world - in other words, as creative beings - that we are, in Green’s phrase, “distinctively human”. This world of practice necessarily entails the ideas of “practical reason” and “a motive” to action. In a purely natural world (and hence not a world of practice, as Green understands it), there can be no goals which an agent is aiming at, simply because the idea of aiming at something contains within itself the very idea of an agent with motives and therefore with self-awareness. Hence, Green writes:

It is this [self-]consciousness which yields, in the most elementary form, the conception of something that *should be* as distinct from that which *is*, of a world of practice as distinct from that world of experience of which the conception arises from the determination by the Ego of the receptive senses.  
(Green, 1906: 86, emphasis in original)

Green uses the phrase “practical reason” to denote “the capacity on the part of such a subject [i.e. one which is self-conscious] to conceive a better state of itself as an end to be attained by action.” (Green, 1986e: 177 ; see also Green, 1986a: 6 ; Green, 1986d: 21) It is concerned with knowledge and evaluation - knowledge of a possible future state of himself and an evaluation of its worth compared to his present state. In itself it is not appetitive. Hence, it is possible to conceive of this better state as a better state but not to pursue it (Green, 1986d: 21-2). This necessitates the concepts of “motive” and “desire”.

Green attacks those who portray “a motive” as merely another word for “a desire” (Green, 1906: 103-5). He argues that desires are “[those] impulses or inward solicitations of which a man is conscious” (Green, 1906: 143). A motive, on the other hand, is “an idea of an end, which a self-conscious subject presents to itself, and which it strives and tends to realise.” (Green, 1906: 87). Immediately, one must sound a note of caution. Here, Green equates the motive with the end sought. Indeed, for a time this became the standard view in British academic debates because of his influence (Seth, 1899: 73-4). However, this lack of distinction is unwarranted. An agent’s motive should be understood, and from Green’s own writings is often used so as to mean, an effort to attain the end sought. The crucial idea

is that of 'an effort to attain'. Still, Green's error in this does not affect his contention that in seeking to attain a desired object, one transforms the desire (which is one amongst many) into a motive (which is unique). This transformation is one result of pursuing a particular desired object rather than another. In short, one's motive "is a particular self-satisfaction to be gained in attaining one of these objects [of desire] or a combination of them. The 'motive' which the act of will expresses is the desire for this self-satisfaction." (Green, 1906: 104) In this way, a motive "is an expression or utterance of the man, as he for the time is. It begins from him, from his self-conscious self." (Green, 1906: 144) Furthermore, the agent's capacity for self-consciousness enables him to be aware of himself as having performed less than perfect actions and hence creates the possibility of remorse and self-correction. In this way, Hammond is wrong to assert that for Green "Repentance is an afterthought arising from disappointment." (Hammond, n.d.: 96)

To clarify this line of thought, Green makes the distinction between instinctive or natural and self-conscious or moral actions (e.g. Green, 1906: 85-96). Instinctive behaviour is non-self-referential in the sense that the agent is not aware of himself as the performer of the action. It is the result of a purely animal impulse. An instinctive act is one of which the agent may not even be consciously aware. It drives him rather than being consciously followed. A self-conscious, moral or (again synonymously) distinctively human action, on the other hand, is one whose end the agent is aware of and which he conceives of as related to himself as an agent. This clearly echoes Aristotle's model of rational agency. Only by being self-reflective can the agent deliberate about how to act and therefore make choices about how to live. Only in this way can he be truly human (Green, 1889e: 97-101 *passim*).

Often, a rational action aims to satisfy a desire which originates in the instinctive (or 'animal') aspect of man. However, this does not mean that distinctively human agency and animal behaviour merge. They remain qualitatively distinct. Green gives the example of hunger (Green, 1906: 91). The hungry animal engages in one form of action when he grasps and devours the food and a properly human being engages in a different form when he chooses to satisfy his hunger. Firstly, the human is aware that he desires the food. This consciousness that *he* desires the food represents an essential aspect of the moral nature of man as it is a necessary precondition of his presence in the world of practice. Next, the agent must decide whether or not to satisfy this desire and, if so, in which way. In the instinctive or animal world, there can be no possibility of facing such a choice. For this reason, the being's relationship to the want - and therefore the nature of the want itself - is

fundamentally different in the instinctive and practical worlds. Without self-reference, Green argues,:

the resulting act would not be moral but instinctive. There would be no moral agency in it. It would not be the man that did it, but the hunger or some 'force of nature' in him. The motive in every imputable act for which the agent is conscious on reflection that he is answerable, is a desire for personal good in some form or other (Green, 1906: 91)

Green's claim that humans act for a personal good has been wildly misunderstood. As with many such misunderstandings, the most noticeable and influential offender is H A Prichard. Prichard argues that Green presents an egoistic theory of the will and as such he (Green) cannot explain how someone can act purely for the good of others or out of a sense of duty.<sup>3</sup> This is an unsustainable interpretation of Green's position. Prichard is blissfully unaware of the many passages where Green explicitly anticipates and rebuts such a line of attack (e.g. Green, 1906: 105-14, 131-31, 232; Green, 1889e: 99-100 ; Green, 1890a: 119).

To say that someone acts from the idea of a personal good does not necessarily entail that he seeks some purely private benefit (see Muirhead, 1908: 34-7 ; Bosanquet, 1927a: 174-81 ; Simhony, 1993b *passim*). Green is not a Hobbesian in the manner that Prichard and Plamenatz interpret Hobbes (Prichard, 1949: 80 ; Plamenatz, 1938: 75). Simply, he is arguing that a human must adopt a desire (make it his motive) and, in so doing, make it his good in the sense of goal or end (but not necessarily telos). It is what he desires, and not what he should desire. Some commentators have missed this point (e.g. Carritt, 1947: 46-8). A motive is necessarily personal because, as has been emphasized already, the moral agent is necessarily self-conscious. His actions have no properly moral aspect if he is not self-conscious. It is in this way that every moral action is necessarily self-referential. This does not make Green an egoist. For example, to act purely for the sake of duty towards his fellows requires the agent to conceive of himself as being subject to the claims

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<sup>3</sup> Prichard, 1949: 69-74, 80-2, 111-6 *passim*, 120-8; Taylor, 1901: 121, 224 ; Sturt, 1906: 252-8 *passim* ; Rashdall, 1924b: II.101-2 ; Lamont, 1934: 212-5 ; Plamenatz, 1938:73-6; Monson, 1954: 81-6 ; Chapman, 1966: 82-3 ; Walsh, 1969: 70-1 ; Kemp, 1972: 230-1. See Nicholson, 1990: 68-71 for an excellent refutation of this line. See also Lewis, 1952: 63n2 ; Cacoullous, 1974: 108-11 ; Crossley, 1990: 18.



of duty. He must adopt the performance of his duty as his personal motive, otherwise he would not be an agent, or truly acting, or a “distinctively human being” in relation to the action. As Nicholson puts it, “if saying that all actions, good and bad alike, are deliberate makes Green an egoist, it is hard to see how anyone could be anything else.” (Nicholson, 1990: 71)

Summing up - the distinctively human agent must pursue a personal good, because, in the terms of the neo-Aristotelian approach outlined above, by deliberately pursuing a given course the agent is expressing his nature as a rational being (for he is acting in accordance with his own choice). It is only in this limited and specific sense that the rational agent necessarily pursues a personal good.

Another misunderstanding of the idea that a truly human agent acts for a personal good is found in the writings of A J M Milne. He argues that for Green, in acting for a personal good, the agent is necessarily acting for “a good reason” and more importantly that “a good reason can only mean seeking one’s self-interest through helping one’s community” (Milne, 1986: 67). The implication is that one only helps one’s community because that is the course of action which furthers one’s purely private interest. In one way, this is simply a species of Prichard’s egoism objection and is subject to the same rebuttal (see also Mabbott, 1967: 41-2). However on another level, it is more revealing than that. Milne’s reference to this type of “a good reason” gives far too much content to Green’s notion of a personal good. Milne implies that conceptually this type of good is far more substantive than in fact it is for Green. Green is actually making the fairly straightforward point that in acting in a properly human manner, the agent acts on his own motive. Nevertheless, this is a straightforward point with far reaching ramifications. These will be examined shortly. The important thing for the moment is that Green is making a formal and not a substantive claim about human action. The claim is not of the order Milne alleges.

The final objection to Green’s claim that a distinctively human agent necessarily acts for a personal good is presented by Mabbott (Mabbott, 1967: 37-42 ; Chapman, 1966: 85-8). He considers the case of the deliberate martyr. How can this person be said to act for a personal good - for an idea of a personal satisfaction - when the very success of his action necessarily prevents him from gaining any satisfaction at all from its completion? Mabbott presses this point home with the serious question “Are we to postulate an immortality for him to contain the satisfaction required?” (Mabbott, 1967: 40)

It is true that Green does use the idea of immortality in his discussion of the martyr

(Green, 1906: 229-32). There is, for example, Green's statement, which Mabbott quotes, "Everyone thus immortalises himself, who looks forward to the realisation of ideal objects ... objects in which he thinks of himself as still living when dead." (Green, 1906: 229) In reality however, Green does not contradict himself here, although his talk of immortality is decidedly unhelpful. His essential point is that it is part of the very nature of this type of goal that the agent understands it as making a meaningful contribution to the true well-being of a group of people with whom he understands himself to form a community. Thus, he writes:

This well-being he [the agent] doubtless conceives as his own, but that he should conceive it as exclusively his own ... would be incompatible with the fact that it is only as living in community, as sharing the life of others, ... that he can sustain himself in that thought of his own permanence to which the thought of permanent well-being is correlative. (Green, 1906: 232)

This idea will be criticised on different grounds in the next chapter. For the moment, the important point is that the very idea of the good sought by the martyr is still a personal good, but it is one which by virtue of its own inner logic aims at social well-being. Similarly, "[t]he reformer cannot bear to think of himself except as giving effect, so far as may be, to his project of reform" (Green, 1906: 299). In order to conceive of such an act when the act's realisation will only occur after the martyr's death, the latter must, in Green's words, "imagine" or "project" (Green, 1906: 229, 231) himself into the future, past his own death to the time of the act's fruition. Mabbott's criticism does highlight a particularly unhelpful use of metaphorical language on Green's part, but it does not undermine the essence of Green's claim that all distinctively human actions aim at some personal good.

It has been established Green stresses that a distinctively human action is one which aims at attaining a personal good in the sense that the agent makes his self-satisfaction his own motive. In this way, rational action is of necessity "formally free". As Green writes, "since in all willing a man is his own object to himself, the object by which the act is determined, the will is always free - or more properly ... a man in willing is necessarily free, since willing constitutes freedom" (Green, 1986d: 1). Green is echoing Aristotle, Kant and Hegel at this point. It was shown earlier that for Aristotle, choice and therefore truly rational agency necessarily entails conscious deliberation and therefore *self*-consciousness.

Similarly, for Kant the morally good will acts for duty's sake and therefore out of reverence for universal law. The idea of acting for duty's sake is inherently purposeful and therefore also presupposes deliberation and self-consciousness. This thought underlies Hegel's discussion of "**The Will-of-Choice [Arbitrariness]**" in *The Philosophical Propaedeutic* as well (Hegel, 1986: 14-9 ; also see Hegel, 1967: 4-28). Self-authorship and more particularly conscious self-authorship is crucial for moral freedom (Green, 1986d: 1). For Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and - in these moods - Green, moral responsibility is only imputable to an agent who can choose how to act and who recognises that he can choose how to act.

It is vital to note that this does not mean that a distinctively human agent is an (existentialist) radically free chooser. Green remains an neo-Aristotelian. His emphasis is on character in ways which are essentially the same as Aristotle's, although his metaphysical basis is different. Green argues that specific expressions of the eternal consciousness are found in the world as the different characters of different human beings (Green, 1906: 99). The increasing coherence of one's character represents the increasing actualization of the eternal consciousness (i.e. the form of human nature) in the world (as long as one is moving in such a way that one can become completely coherent). Thus, "the self, as here understood, is not something apart from feelings, desires and thoughts, but that which unites them, or which they become as united, in the character of an agent who is an object to himself." (Green, 1906: 101) This thought comes through clearly in his linking of the concepts of "the will" and "character" in the passage quoted earlier:

Will is the capacity in a man of being determined to action by the idea of a possible satisfaction of himself. An act of will is an action so determined. A state of will is the capacity as determined by the particular objects in which the man seeks self-satisfaction; which becomes a character in so far as the self-satisfaction is habitually sought in objects of a particular kind. (Green, 1986a: 6)

The type of character possessed by a particular moral agent is defined by the nature of the objects in which he habitually seeks self-satisfaction. The neo-Aristotelianism of this claim should be clear from the first section of this chapter. Furthermore, Green follows Aristotle in his argument that the circumstances in which we act exist in the manner we perceive them. This idealist line underlies Aristotle's claim that man has the capacity to

become irredeemably corrupted as his opportunities for agency are delimited by his character and the vision of the world which follows from it and that this delimitation can rule out some options for action (Aristotle, 1976: IIIv). Hence for both Aristotle and Green, there can be times when the agent can no longer act well because his moral perspective has become so corrupted that he can no longer think virtuously (Green, 1906: 99).

At this point another objection must be made. The theme of permanence plays an important role within Green's thought. It has already been shown to be present in both his religious and his epistemological positions. Similarly, it underlies his discussion of the ethical quality of the agent's character (Green, 1906: 133). A man's worth should be judged by his tendency to seek the permanent satisfaction of his permanent self. Hence, "[c]oncentration of will" - that is, having a strong character - is a necessary (but not a sufficient<sup>4</sup>) condition for being a good man (Green, 1906: 105). Yet for Green, a man is not justified in feeling guilt for a bad action unless it expressed his character. He asks the rhetorical question:

If a man's action did not represent his character but an arbitrary freak of some unaccountable power of unmotivated willing, why should he be ashamed of it or reproach himself with it? (Green, 1906: 110)

However, Green is overstepping the mark here a little. Certainly, a man's self may be expressed permanently in his character, but it does not follow from this that the agent should be morally blamed only for those actions which properly express this character. On the basis of Green's own theory, all of the agent's self-conscious actions should be imputed to him (Seth, 1899: 390-1). This includes actions which are 'out of character' as well as those which are not. They may be 'temporary' but Green has already established that they can be nothing apart from the man and so must be formally free. They can be nothing other than in some sense expressions of the eternal consciousness and so the agent must be as responsible for them as he is for those actions which express his character.

Moving on, Green argues that by acting in a distinctively human manner, the agent is realising his essence and so is 'free' in the "positive" sense. It is to an examination of this

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<sup>4</sup> This condition is not sufficient because one's character can be directed towards either good or bad objects.

claim that the discussion must turn now.

#### 4. Positive Freedom as Autonomy.

Green uses the term “freedom” in three ways. The first use - “juristic freedom” - refers to “exemption from compulsion by others” (Green, 1986d: 2). It is the primary meaning of “freedom” in that it is not metaphorical. “[E]very usage of the term [”freedom”] to express anything but a social and political relation of one man to others involves a metaphor.” (Green, 1986d: 2). However, juristic freedom is not relevant to the main concerns of this chapter. Necessarily, juristic freedom refers to the existence of other agents, whereas this chapter focuses upon the freedom of the will of the individual.

The second use of the term “freedom” is metaphorical and was examined earlier. “Formal freedom” concerns the nature of the will in relation to external - that is, natural - determination. The preceding section of this chapter established that all acts of will must be formally free because the human will proceeds from a desire which the agent conceives necessarily as being for a personal good (Green, 1890a: 82-3) and so every such act presupposes self-awareness. The third use of the term “freedom” is “real freedom” or “positive freedom”.<sup>5</sup> Green defines this as “a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others.” (Green, 1986b: 199) This section examines the first part of this definition. The second - concerning the communal nature of autonomy - forms the focus of the third chapter.

The first point to make is terminological. Some commentators have objected to Green’s use of “freedom” as a label for self-realization arguing that it is unhelpful and inaccurate.<sup>6</sup> This point need not detain us long. Green himself goes to great lengths to make his audience aware of the metaphor involved in his usage (Green, 1986d: 2). Nevertheless, he emphasizes that often in practice, “freedom” is used in senses which are at least very similar to his own positive conception (Green, 1986d: 18). Many people - including philosophers and the American Supreme Court - have shared Green’s use of the

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholson denies that ‘real freedom’ is the same as ‘positive freedom’ in Nicholson, 1990: 160.

<sup>6</sup> Carritt, 1947: 159-60 ; Cranston, 1954: 33-62, esp. 46-62 ; Brinton, 1962: 216-7 ; Richter, 1964: 201-7 ; Weinstein, 1966 ; Kemp, 1972: 237-8 ; Hurka, 1993: 23 ; but see Gaus, 1983: 168-9.

term.<sup>7</sup> This is probably why Green's defence of this term in his *Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract* was and still is so effective and perceptive as a practical text (Green, 1986d: esp. 199-200). To the average person,:

the feeling of oppression, which always goes along with the consciousness of unfulfilled possibilities, will always give meaning to the representation of the effort after any kind of self-improvement as a demand for 'freedom'.  
(Green, 1986d: 18)

In reality, different usages express different moral concerns and place slightly different emphases in debate. However, there is no reason to think that one approach is necessarily clearer than the other. Consequently, there is little reason to favour one approach over the other on the grounds of 'correct usage'. The 'anti-positive usage' theorists have no more ground for their particular attacks than the 'pro-positive usage' theorists (Nicholson, 1990: 126-31 ; Simhony, 1991a: 44-7).<sup>8</sup>

Next, David Weinstein argues that "positive freedom" can be understood in certain contexts as "equal freedom" (Weinstein, 1991: 254-7 ; Weinstein, 1993: 620-1). However, this mistakes equal judicial and equal negative freedom for "true freedom". In reality, Green's conception of "real freedom" equates with a common conception of autonomy which denotes the habitual tendency to act in accordance with one's highest essence. In Green's case, this highest essence is the eternal consciousness. Weinstein labels such liberty "inner freedom" (Weinstein, 1993: 621). Although positive freedom equates to inner freedom, it is conceptually distinct from "'juristic' or 'civil' freedom as well as outward freedom" (Weinstein, 1993: 621). Positive freedom presupposes the agent's possession of juristic and outward freedom, yet they remain three conceptually distinct types of freedom and should be treated as such.

Primarily, Green is concerned with the difference between the good will and the bad

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<sup>7</sup> Nicholson notes that Green himself refers to "Plato, St. Paul, the Stoics, Kant and Hegel" and states that Green "might have added others, for instance, Milton, Spinoza, Rousseau, and possibly Locke ... [as well as] Carlyle or Mazzini" (Nicholson, 1990: 127). See also Freedon, 1978: 56 ; Vincent, 1987: 341-2 ; Simhony, 1993a. On the Supreme Court, see Phillips, 1976.

<sup>8</sup> See the *Introduction* for a consideration of the general point at issue here.

will. As he writes, “[t]he good will is [positively] free, not the bad will.” (Green, 1986d: 16). It is important to bear in mind that this difference is not between the autonomous will and the formally free will. It denotes the difference between the non-autonomous and the autonomous will. Formal freedom is a fundamental characteristic of all acts of willing. Therefore, the non-autonomous will is as formally free as the autonomous will. If the non-autonomous will were not formally free, it would have no inherently moral character.

The difference between a moral and an immoral act originates in the type of object sought by the agent, that is, the object “with which he [the agent] identifies himself.” (Green, 1986d: 1) The autonomous will seeks that object, or end, in which the agent can find true self-satisfaction. It is “that satisfaction, otherwise called peace or blessedness, which consists in the whole man having found his object; ... [it arises from] the fulfilment of the law of our being” (Green, 1986d: 1). Ritchie stresses Green’s Lockean conception of reason when he describes ‘real freedom’ as “self-determined action directed to the objects of reason” (Ritchie, 1896: 147 ; Locke, 1988: 6). The non-autonomous will is any will which does not follow reason in this specific sense. In not seeking his own “true rest”, the non-autonomous agent is “in the condition of a bondsman who is carrying out the will of another, not his own.” (Green, 1986d: 1)

Therefore, the autonomous will is necessarily bound up with the agent’s essence. Importantly, the autonomous agent wills to satisfy this ‘highest’ or ‘essential’ (in the sense of most expressive of his true nature) desire, because he recognises that he should will to do so (Green, 1986d: 1). To do this in a real sense, the agent must feel the desire as an inward voice, and not as an externally-imposed law (Green, 1986d: 2). The importance of this point has been missed by some commentators (e.g. Wempe, 1986: 156-8, 172-3). It forms the essence of Green’s attack on the Judaic and Roman Catholic faiths (Green, 1889k: 187-8). The leaders of both faiths require their believers to follow the particular orthodox interpretations of “God’s law” on the pain of eternal damnation (if not earthly persecution). In this way, God’s law is represented to the Jew and Catholic as *a*) something to be taught to them by some eternal authority, and *b*) something to be followed out of fear. The significance for the agent of both of these defects is immense. This will be shown in the next chapter, but first Green’s argument concerning self-identification must be examined in greater depth. This is crucial when attempting to understand the failure of the accusation that his theory is open to despotic abuse (Berlin, 1969a: xlix and lxi). Indeed, it forms the basis of a strongly liberal defence of personal autonomy as a moral ideal.

Two of Green's beliefs are central here. Firstly, the Catholic, Jew or misguided secular agent understands the moral law of God as "external" to his being. This law is imposed on the agent rather than being an unmediated expression of his conscience. The deficiency of this type of 'identification' with the divine law is experienced by the agent as a feeling of self-alienation. On the one hand, the agent does not totally identify with God's law and, on the other, he feels compelled to follow it. In that his desires conflict with what he has been brought up to believe is the correct way to live, alienation "makes the man feel the bondage of the *flesh*." (Green, 1986d: 2, emphasis in original) Secondly, this law is "external" to the agent in the sense of being fulfilled by the agent because of the fear of the consequences of not doing so (Green, 1986d: 2). The moral problem with this is that the individual lacks an ultimately coherent conception of the reasons why the law should be followed for its own sake.

In order to overcome this perception of the law as externally-imposed, the agent must recognise "'himself as the author of the law which he obeys'" (Green, 1986d: 2).<sup>9</sup> In understanding himself in this way, the agent feels himself to be expressing his nature through his actions. Only then is he acting autonomously. Only then does "the object of [his] will ... coincide with the object of reason." (Green, 1986d: 21) In other words, for the agent to act autonomously, he must will to pursue the attainment of that object which he recognises (through his reason) would realise his highest essence - the eternal consciousness.

Importantly, the will seeks its perception of its best object - the object in which the agent finds his own true spiritual rest and not simply its animal satisfaction (Green, 1986d: 23). This does not mean that it would be better for the agent's animal desires to be denied - to be totally ignored or suppressed. Indeed, Green claims to have avoided the dualist conception of man - 'higher man' and 'lower man' - which such suppression would presuppose. He argues that there is only "one indivisible reality of our consciousness" but that this reality "cannot be comprehended in a single conception." (Green, 1906: 68) Peter Nicholson defends him with the argument that "whilst Green does apply the words 'higher' and 'lower' to the self, he does not mean that there are two selves, but a better and a worse state of one and the same self." (Nicholson, 1990: 124-5) Certainly, there are passages where Green does put forward the view supported by Nicholson (e.g. Green, 1906: 68-9 ;

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<sup>9</sup> Green is quoting Kant (see Harris and Morrow, 1986: 352n8). In turn, Kant is quoting Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, Book 1, Chapter 8.



Green, 1986d: 19-25). However, in other places, Green concedes that “[t]he idea of the subjection in us of a lower or animal man to a higher appeals to us as it did to the Greek. We too think of the higher man as the law-abiding, law reverencing man.” (Green, 1906: 264 ; see also Green, 1986e: 217, 266 ; Green, 1986a: 247-51) It is very difficult to read such passages in any way except as a doctrine of two selves - the animal and the spiritual (see Greengarten, 1981: 106-9).

In reality, Green’s central contention is secure. For an agent to act without animal desires would require an unmotivated act of the will which is an impossibility. Instead, the agent must “overcome [them] ... in the sense of fusing them with those higher interests, which have human perfection in some of its forms for their object.” (Green, 1986d: 21) For instance, the animal emotion of anger can help to change an unjust practice such as slavery. In this way, animal desires are given a spiritual purpose and nature by the establishment of a positive relationship to the agent’s moral essence and purposes. They form a necessary part of the context of his autonomous action (Green, 1986d: 22). Similarly, those passions which tend to hinder the agent’s attainment of perfection should be suppressed (Green, 1986d: 22). Thus, when pride leads the agent to belittle others, the action is wrong morally to the extent that it hinders the increased self-harmonisation of the characters of both the victim and the agent. In this way, the drive for self-harmonisation is also the source of the impulse to action thus making man part of a world of practice.

It can be seen that a central aspect of Green’s neo-Aristotelian line remains his contention that

Even those desires of a man then which originate in animal want or susceptibility to animal pleasure ... become what they are in man, as desires consciously directed to objects, through the self-consciousness which is the condition of those objects or any objects being presented. And it is only as consciously directed to objects that they have a moral quality or contribute to make us what we are as moral agents. (Green, 1906: 125)

This is in line with the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle writes, “if it is in our power to do right and wrong, and similarly not to do them ; and if ... doing right and wrong is the essence of being good or bad, it follows that it is in our power to be decent or worthless.” (Aristotle, 1976: IIIv ; see also Aristotle, 1976: IIiv)

It is clear that some form of voluntarism is necessarily entailed by this strand of Green's theory of moral responsibility (Green, 1986a: 184-7 *passim*). The truly free agent could have chosen to have acted in some other way than in fact he did. Indeed, this interpretation of Green's theory of the will underlies most of the recent commentaries. It is evident in Peter Nicholson's interpretation and more particularly in the writings of Geoffrey Thomas (Thomas, 1987: 122-241 *passim*) and A J M Milne (Milne, 1986). I do not have the space to say anymore than a very few words about each, but I do wish to highlight the importance which these influential commentators attribute to the role of voluntarism in Green's system. Firstly, Nicholson argues that for Green:

[s]ince he is self-conscious, he [the moral agent] can reflect upon his inward condition and see that he can choose what he likes, and has the capacity to act according to his preference (Nicholson, 1990: 119)

A J M Milne, like Nicholson, argues that Green is concerned with "imputable" or "voluntary" actions (Milne, 1986: 63-8 *passim*). "Such an action" he writes, "is voluntary in the sense that the agent could have refrained from doing it. That is why he is and knows himself to be, answerable for it." (Milne, 1986: 63)

Similarly, Geoffrey Thomas characterises "the philosophical question of free will" as "whether an agent can choose otherwise than he does" (Thomas, 1987: 149 ; see also Thomas, 1987: 369-70). Thomas sets out three conditions which must be satisfied by any viable theory of free will. At first, they are:

- (1) A was able to do X.
- (2) A did X knowingly.
- (3) A could have done otherwise, if he had chosen. (Thomas, 1987: 124)

Later, Thomas amends condition (3) to fit Green's position more obviously - "(3A) A could have done otherwise, if his character and desires had been different." (Thomas, 1987: 158) Steps (1), (2), and (3A) now form the conditions of free action on this reading. Thomas asserts that "Green definitely accepts the free formation and revisability of character." (Thomas, 1987: 158) It is important to note this last claim, otherwise it could be thought that (3A) is far more dissimilar to (3) than in fact it is. A clearer idea of the role played by

voluntarism in Thomas' reading can be gained by noting two further passages. Firstly, Thomas draws attention to Green's belief that an individual can consciously choose to change his character over time (Thomas, 1987: 172-3). This is our possibility of "self-intervention" (Thomas, 1987: 177-80). Secondly, he refers to "[t]he ability to distance oneself from one's desires in such a way that one is not merely subject to them (as on Hume's account), but can decide what to satisfy" (Thomas, 1987: 185). Green is a pure neo-Aristotelian on Thomas' reading.

Two questions must be faced by anyone who supports the neo-Aristotelian line. Firstly, is it powerful enough to ground a satisfactory theory of moral responsibility? Secondly, does Green consistently hold that the human will is a voluntaristic manifestation of the eternal consciousness? In reality, these questions are intertwined. Green writes:

self-reflection is the basis of the view here given in regard to the distinctive character of the motives which moral actions represent. Any one making this admission will of course endeavour to conduct his self-reflection as circumspectly as possible (Green, 1906: 95)

Immediately after iterating this point, he concedes that whether or not the agent does attempt such self-criticism necessarily depends on the state of his character. However, he also stresses that the state of one's character is unchosen, being the result of past determinations of the eternal consciousness (Green, 1906: 95 ; Green, 1986i: 3). He argues that even when this is accepted, humans are still morally responsible at least to a limited extent because they can choose how to act although their particular characters are formed from an initial situation which they did not create. In other words, even though one's character creates some options for action and rules out others within these parameters, the agent is responsible for what he chooses. This is Green at his most neo-Aristotelian.

It is not clear that Green does hold to the neo-Aristotelian line consistently in his writings. He does use the phrase "consciously directed" at times. However, often his meaning is ambiguous. For example, he refers to desires which can potentially form part of a world of practice as "desires consciously directed to objects ... [I]t is only as consciously directed to objects that they have a moral quality or contribute to make us what we are as moral agents." (Green, 1906: 125) Clearly, the most obvious interpretation of the passage relies upon the idea of an unmotivated act of willing. Yet, the context makes this reading

less secure. At the point at which it comes, Green is stressing the necessity of self-awareness in moral action - the central idea being that of seeking “a personal good”. He is clarifying the distinction between an instinctive and a moral action. His main point is that animals (including humans purely as animals) are in essence unaware of instinctive actions. They happen to us rather than we perform them. The nature of the desired object is defined by the relations in which it stands to other objects and the subject for which such objects can exist. An unperceived object - such as an instinctive desire - has a different nature to a perceived one. Furthermore, an instinctive desire cannot be weighed against other desires, whereas a desire of which the purposive mind is aware can be weighed by that mind. This does not mean that the purposive mind must always be consciously directable in the sense of being an unmotivated chooser, as Freudian analysis (for all its own difficulties) demonstrates.<sup>10</sup> It is simply that the moral facets of the eternal consciousness must be aware of the object before it can calculate “automatically” - as Bosanquet puts it (Bosanquet, 1927a: 181) - whether or not to will its attainment (Green, 1906: 125). “Consciously directed” could mean in this context then, ‘directed by a mind which perceives itself to be seeking a personal good’. This second reading coheres perfectly with both a voluntaristic position (such as the neo-Aristotelian line) and a non-voluntaristic position.

Elsewhere, Green does use the phrase “consciously self-realising principle” (Green, 1986d: 20) explicitly to denote the eternal consciousness as it expresses itself in the human will without the conscious choice of the agent. This logically entails a rejection of his ultimately voluntaristic neo-Aristotelianism.

By a consciously self-realising principle is meant a principle that is determined to action by the conception of its own perfection, or by the idea of giving reality to possibilities which are involved in it and of which it is conscious as so involved ; or, more precisely, a principle which at each stage of its existence is conscious of a more perfect form of existence as possible for itself, and is moved to action by that consciousness. (Green, 1986d: 20)

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that Green is a proto-Freudian in any meaningful sense. It is just that the Freudian analysis, like Green’s spiritual determinism, relies on some idea of subconscious willing. For a very interesting discussion of the link between Green, Richard Wollheim and Freudian psychoanalysis, see Hart, 1992.

In fact, interpreting many similar passages is often difficult because Green holds both that the will is determined and that it is undetermined and in doing so he is being inconsistent. This point comes out clearly in section 147 of the *Prolegomena* where Green argues that “an act of will” need *not* be preceded by “any conscious deliberation as to which [options] should be pursued.” Instead, some acts may arise “‘impulsively’ or according to a settled habit”. These acts are morally imputable to the agent because they are of necessity practical manifestations of “the self-seeking and self-distinguishing self” or eternal consciousness. This passage reflects the fact that on the more philosophically developed level, Green argues that the will is a manifestation of the eternal consciousness and the agent cannot indeterminately chose how to act. However, in his moral and political philosophy, he contradicts this position by frequently adopting a neo-Aristotelian theory of conscientious action. This can be put another way. Although Green’s neo-Aristotelianism necessarily commits him to a form of indeterminism at a fundamental level, his spiritual determinism logically rests on a form of determinism.

Even though the neo-Aristotelian line is philosophically weak, it may be objected that it retains its intuitive appeal. However, such a response *is* simply an assertion at root as is clear from Aristotle’s own writings (Aristotle, 1976: IIIv). The philosophical case in favour of Green’s second or ‘spiritual determinist’ theory of the will is more substantial. However, adopting this second approach does logically entail jettisoning any commitment to ideas such as voluntary action, moral responsibility and even ethical action. It is to this dangerous second strand that the discussion must turn next.

## 5. The ‘Determinist’/‘Indeterminist’ Debate

To understand the spiritual determinist strand, one must be clear about the exact nature of the “question” which Green sets himself to answer in his consideration of the freedom of the will in *On the Different Senses of ‘Freedom’* (Green, 1986d: 9-14). Easily, it could be thought to be a more familiar but, in fact, very different one. He is not concerned to answer what he calls “the question commonly debated, with ambiguity of terms, between ‘determinists’ and ‘indeterminists’ ; [that is,] ... the question whether there is, or is not, a possibility of unmotivated willing” (Green, 1906: 87). In other words, he is not asking whether or not an agent can, in some sense, ‘step outside’ his desires and motives, so as to consciously choose between them from some ‘neutral’ standpoint (see also Bradley, 1927: 142-59). Indeed, he believes that such a question is fundamentally wrong-headed. The

manner in which it is wrong-headed is important for Green, given that he wishes to show that all humans are necessarily self-determining and hence must be moral agents.

Framing the question of the freedom of the will in terms of the possibility of unmotivated willing implies two profoundly confusing things (Green, 1986d: 10). Firstly, it implies that the motive of one's action is, in some sense, separable from and potentially able to overrule one's will. Secondly, to be intelligible, this first implication requires the further assumption that such a motive is 'external' to man. In other words, for the motive of a man's action to be separable from his will, this motive cannot itself originate within that will. This is important because the will equates with the individual's capacity for agency and indeed his being. If the agent's actions were separable from his will, then he could not be free because his will is his self in this context. For this reason, his actions could be neither moral nor immoral.

an unmotivated will is a will without an object, which is nothing. The power or possibility, beyond any actual determination of the will, of determining what that determination shall be is a mere negation of the actual determination. It is that determination as it becomes after an abstraction of the motive or object willed, which in fact leaves nothing at all. (Green, 1986d: 12)

This process of abstracting the motives from the will makes the latter concept unintelligible. For this reason there must be something inherently incoherent about the terms of reference of the 'determinist'/'indeterminist' debate. On its assumptions, the only way in which a motive could determine the will is for the agent to will it to do so. Yet, given that this latter act of the will cannot exist without being determined by a motive to perform it, an infinite regress is established. The whole approach fails due to its inability to explain how a will without a motive can act. Green concludes that "[t]o a will free in the sense of unmotivated we can attach no meaning whatever." (Green, 1906: 97). In other words:

Unless there is an object which a man seeks or avoids in doing an act, there is no act of will. Thus a motive is necessary to make such an act. It is involved in it, is part of it ; or rather it is the act of will, in its relation to the agent as distinct from its relation to external consequences. (Green, 1906:

Summing up, if the concept of the will is to be made intelligible, then it must be recognised that it is incoherent to view a motive as ever being - in any sense which is not merely terminological - separable from the will. The will is merely the practical expression of the motive. Attempting to understand the freedom of the will from an assumption that the will is determined by separable motives could work only on the further assumption that the will can have content without a motive, and that is a logical contradiction. Ultimately, the concepts of “the will” and “the motive” must, in one crucial sense, merge to be intelligible.

At times, Green is emphatic about this argument which is very important because it seriously undermines any portrayal of him as a neo-Aristotelian. The two strands are mutually exclusive, thus invalidating D’Arcy’s attempt to reconcile them (D’Arcy, 1901: 36n1).

The spiritual determinist line in Green’s theory must be examined in depth with this fact in mind. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that most of the preceding analysis of Green’s thought is shared by his neo-Aristotelian and his spiritual determinist theories. The substantial differences between the two approaches are logical consequences of the different stances which they adopt in regard to the issue of voluntarism. The majority of the analysis is shared.

## **6. Green’s Spiritual Determinism and the Self-Realisation of the Eternal Consciousness.**

If the terms of the debate have been drawn up incorrectly in the past, what should we ask ourselves about the freedom of the will? Green’s answer is implicit in his response to the ‘determinists’/‘indeterminists’ question. When faced with the query, “‘Has a man power over the determination of his will?’”, Green argues:

we must answer both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. ‘No’, in the sense that he is not other than his will, with ability to direct it as the will directs the muscles. ‘Yes’, in the sense that nothing external to him or his will or self-consciousness has power over them. (Green, 1986d: 14)

A man's every action is determined by and hence is an expression of his character (e.g. Green, 1889a: 6 ; Green, 1906: 107-8, 303, 311). This point comes out most clearly in Green's papers where he writes:

It may be allowed that if it were possible for us to have insight into a man's character [Denkungsart], as exhibited in his inner no less than outer actions, so thorough that every slightest impulse should be known to us as well as all outward circumstances acting on him, we could predict his future conduct as certainly as <the> occurrence of an eclipse ; and for all that it may be maintained that he is free. (Green, MS10A, 37, as quoted in Thomas, 1987: 207)

Despite significant differences between their wider theories, this position is also held by John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1875: II.421-2) and Francis Bradley (Bradley, 1927: 1-57 *passim*), and finds its most lucid expression in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*:

We may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves ; but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character ; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper, and the most secret springs of our complexion and disposition. (Hume, 1978: 408-9)

Throughout this chapter, it has been emphasized that, as an agent and therefore as a purposive being, every man must have himself as his own object (Green, 1906: 124). On the spiritual determinist line, Green's reasoning on this point is bound up with his conception of the relationship between the capacity to want an object - labelled "Desire" - and the capacity to know an object (and, therefore, the capacity to interrelate objects) - labelled "Intellect" (Green, 1906: 129). At first sight, the relationship appears to be compatible with the neo-Aristotelian commitment to voluntaristic agency as well. Hence, it has been picked up by the recent commentators in their neo-Aristotelian interpretations. Most noticeably, this is the line followed by Geoffrey Thomas (Thomas, 1987: 160-95). However, such an interpretation fails because the relationship between Reason and Desire is related to Green's theory of human nature and hence the eternal consciousness in a



manner which necessarily excludes the element of voluntarism which the neo-Aristotelian approach just as necessarily entails. I will defend this contention now.

Chapter one demonstrated that Green's theory of harmonisation is internally related to his theory of human nature. Knowledge entails coherent relations. More particularly, it requires that ultimately the categories of knowledge form one perfectly harmonious (in the sense of coherent) system. This idea of harmonisation carries through to Green's consideration of agency proper. It is not merely the agent's epistemic categories which must ultimately form a coherent system. His normative categories - broadly, his values and the manner in which they interrelate - must do so as well.

Reason and Desire are manifestations of the same human essence, then. One logical consequence of this is that Reason and Desire are both inherently self-referential and interrelate so as to form a perfectly coherent whole. Therefore,

It is clear ... that we must not imagine Desire and Intellect, as our phraseology sometimes misleads us into doing, to be separate agents or influences, always independent of each other, and in the moral life often conflicting. (Green, 1906: 129)

Furthermore, the Reason and Desire of a particular individual are manifestations of aspects of that particular expression of the human essence, of that particular self. It is plainly true that the agent cannot desire an object about which he knows nothing, and whether or not he desires a given object will partially but necessarily depend on what he understands that object to be.<sup>11</sup> Green's point is that increased knowledge of an object can transform a potential desire into an actual desire, but this is achieved by, in a sense, 'showing' Desire that the object could exist. In this way, Intellect uncovers the specific contents of a particular agent's Desire - that is, particular desires.<sup>12</sup> It is not a matter of choice, but of automatic reaction. It is for this reason that Green's analysis of Intellect (or Reason) and Desire is necessarily incompatible with the neo-Aristotelian strand of his thought.

Green's Lockean conception of "practical reason" establishes this intimate link

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<sup>11</sup> This does not mean, of course, that knowing about something is the same as wanting it.

<sup>12</sup> This is an idea which has echoes in the latest work of the animal psychologist, Dr. Marion Dawkins (Dawkins, 1993 : Vines, 1994).

between the facility of knowledge and the facility of evaluation. For instance, Green defines “practical reason” as “the capacity on the part of such a subject [i.e. one which is self-conscious] to conceive a better state of itself as an end to be attained by action.” (Green, 1986e: 177) However, an important point to notice here is that practical reason is not appetitive in itself. It cannot create (as opposed to activate) any desire let alone in itself motivate the agent.

It is in these ways that Reason and Desire are two necessarily interrelated aspects of the single self which constitutes the particular agent (Green, 1906: 130):

In the one case, it [thought] appears in the formation of ideal objects and the quest of means to their realisation ; in the other, it appears in the cognisance of a manifold reality which it is sought to unite in a connected whole. This community of principle in the two cases we may properly indicate by calling our inner life, as determined by desires for objects, practical thought, while we call the activity of understanding speculative thought. (Green, 1906: 133)

It is not just that the agent’s desires must harmonise amongst themselves and that his beliefs must also harmonise amongst themselves. To fully manifest his nature, the agent has to know everything fully (which necessarily requires that he is aware of his knowledge as forming one properly integrated system), and also he has to satisfy all of his higher desires (those desires which express his true nature - the eternal consciousness - rather than his imperfect animal desires) (Green, 1986d: 5). This necessarily implies that the epistemic and moral facets of a perfectly realised human being must fully cohere with each other. Only then is the agent truly living in accordance with his proper essence. Only then do Reason and Desire express the ultimate unity of the self in the worlds of experience and practice.

It is for this reason that Green stresses the importance of character. A man’s character is the (relatively) stable manifestation of his being. It is, in this sense, “abiding” in the same manner as the eternal consciousness which it expresses is “abiding”.

The removal of contradictions within an imperfect agent’s knowledge and desires is the driving force of human action and progress. It is one of “[t]he primary demands of human consciousness” (Green, 1986a: 137) that we search for coherence in our world (Green, 1906: 149). This drive for harmonisation is an attempt to overcome the feeling of alienation which must arise from the recognition of present disharmony in the manifestation

of an ultimately self-harmonised being and which was referred to earlier in this chapter.

The antithesis of Green's spiritual determinist line is encapsulated in the existentialist claim that the agent must voluntarily direct all of his own actions (e.g. Sartre, 1946: 56-9). It is true that Green - in his spiritual determinist mood - does believe the agent possesses, as Nicholson puts it, "the capacity to act according to his preference" (Nicholson, 1990: 119). However, when adopting this approach, he does not believe that the agent possesses the capacity to choose voluntarily to act in this manner. He argues that reflection on one's capacity to gain self-satisfaction is an essential stage in the development of man's moral agency and, hence, his moral responsibility, but this is because it aids the formation of a self-aware character (Green, 1906: 112). Moreover, self-awareness is a necessary precondition of being able to conceive of a world of practice. The importance of this stage of Green's theory was emphasized earlier. Nevertheless, on the spiritual determinist line, self-reflection is not an activity which any human agent can voluntarily choose to undertake, because in itself this would have to be an unmotivated act of the will. When the individual's character determines his will, he is aware of his capacity for moral agency, but his conscious self-awareness is a "spectator" of this agency (Green, 1986a: 9-14). As Green puts it, "moral action is the expression of a man's character, as it reacts upon and responds to given circumstances." (Green, 1906: 107)<sup>13</sup> The agent is not morally responsible because of his capacity to voluntarily determine his will, but because his character (including what could now be termed his "subconscious") is necessarily self-aware and, vitally, necessarily self-referential in its understanding of all of the circumstances in which the agent can form part of a world of practice.

At this point an objection may be made. Sidgwick asks, if human agency is an (imperfect) expression of the human essence and is therefore 'automatic', how can Green explain the existence of evil? (Sidgwick, 1905: 253-5 ; Brett, 1913: 439) The answer is implied by the fact that the evil human is an imperfect manifestation of his own essence (see also Hoover, 1973: 556-7). Evil actions are the result of the disharmony necessarily entailed by imperfection. Consider the example of racism. A perfected agent, Green argues, will recognise in theory and practice that all rational agents as rational agents should be respected (Green, 1906: 267). Furthermore, on one level, all people as people feel a desire to respect personhood. The racist's evil act expresses the interaction of his imperfect desire

to respect personhood and his imperfect recognition of what classes as being a person. An imperfect individual (in the present case the racist) - depending on the degree of imperfection - can recognise this only partially. Furthermore, he may well misidentify what is morally valuable in being a person - for instance, by wrongly stressing the need to embody a particular culture or to have a certain ethnic background. This can be extended to ideas of the good which fail to express themselves in the agent's actions. In Bosanquet's words:

ideas which prove inoperative are such as are not carried out into the connections and associations which would constitute at once their meaning and their power. (Bosanquet, 1927a: 348)

This is the source of evil agency and all other human error (Green, 1889b: 73). In this way, there is no place within Green's thought for the "wilful choice of evil" (Sidgwick, 1902a: 24). In large part, this reflects the lack of space for any "wilful action" at all.

This is an interesting understanding of evil. Furthermore, it is crucial to Green's moral and political thought and yet has largely been missed by recent commentators (e.g. Carritt, 1936: 140). What does it say about the other side of the coin from evil agency? In other words, what does it tell us about Green's theory of positive freedom? As has been established already, Green argues that true freedom is the most valuable state of human life. His theory shows that real freedom only exists where one fully understands and identifies with the world. These are necessary but not sufficient conditions of true freedom. Where an agent understands some aspect of the imperfect world, but sees something morally wrong with it, he feels alienated from the world and his self. He is not truly - that is, positively - free.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the removal of immorality from the world is necessary in order to gain complete real freedom and therefore inner peace which is:

a self-satisfaction to be attained in his becoming what he should be, what he has it in him to be, in the fulfilment of the law of his being - or, to vary the words, but not the meaning in attainment of the righteousness of God, or in perfect obedience to self-imposed law (Green, 1986d: 17)

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, this can be a matter of degree - the agent can be more or less alienated.

Again, the role of the human essence must be stressed in this spiritual determinist line. Positive freedom is “the fulfilment of the law of his [the agent’s] being”.

At this point, I will sum up what has been established so far about the spiritual determinist line. Green has demonstrated that all thought - necessarily including all objects of desire and all willing - requires and is fundamentally structured by the nature of the eternal consciousness as it has been made explicit as the particular consciousness of the particular individual. Moreover, Green has established that every human will is necessarily free in a formal sense because “we must assume, as the basis of the character ... , a self-distinguishing and self-seeking consciousness.” (Green, 1906: 114) Hence, Reason and Desire are self-conscious aspects of the agent’s unified self. The activity of self-consciousness changes the essential nature of the desires and the action. A man “is self-determined and his own master, because [he is] his own object.” (Green, 1906: 112) More specifically, it means that the agent comes to recognise the actions as its own and so he must be formally free. Reflecting this, Green writes of “the human self, or the man, reacting upon circumstances, giving shape to them, [and] taking a motive from them” (Green, 1906: 99). In this way, both become moral and not primarily or essentially natural or instinctive (Green, 1906: 91-2). There are no forces external to the law of his being which necessitate that the agent act in the manner in which ultimately he does. This brings into sharp focus the true import of Green’s emphasis on the ideas of a personal good and human nature (sc. the eternal consciousness). On this spiritual determinist view, therefore, the act is imputable to the agent because it expresses the interaction of the agent’s true being with circumstances and is not merely some whim or accident.

## **7. The Collapse of Moral Responsibility.**

In that the spiritual determinist approach establishes that one’s motives (or, in other words, one’s will) are essentially *self*-determined, Green believes this further establishes that every person is morally responsible for his own actions. This does not entail that everyone is equally responsible for ‘their’ actions. For example, a child is less morally responsible than an adult because he is less self-aware (Green, 1986d: 201 ; Knox, 1968: 41-4). This is the logical implication of his argument that:

[t]he reason and will of man have their common ground in that characteristic of being an object to himself which ... belongs to him in so far as the eternal

mind, through the medium of an animal organism and under limitations arising from the employment of such a medium, reproduces itself in him. (Green, 1986e: 175)

Nevertheless, Green's spiritual determinist theory of the moral responsibility continues to face significant problems. The most powerful objection is presented by Henry Sidgwick. He attacks the very foundations of Green's whole approach to establishing the moral imputability of distinctively human actions by recognising that:

[t]hat the motive 'lies in the man himself, that he makes it' ... ([Green, 1906:] 102), does not really make any difference [to the agent's degree of moral responsibility], if that in his character which causes him to make his motive good or bad is due to its past history ... It seems to me that Green's use of the terms 'freedom' (cf. 'free effort to better himself,' [Green, 1906: 112] and 'self-determination' is misleading : since any particular man's effort to better himself, as its force depends at any moment on his particular past, is not 'free' or 'self-determining' in the only important sense. (Sidgwick, 1902: 20, 22)

I take "the only important sense" to refer to the oft-mentioned voluntarism - in other words, the ability of the agent to chose to act otherwise than ultimately he does. Indeed, the unfairness of imputing moral responsibility to humans in this way is compounded by the apparently arbitrary nature of their actions. As Bosanquet puts it, "The self ... bears in its quality and content the banner of its place and time." (Bosanquet, 1927a: 325) It is a matter of pure luck therefore that the particular individual's history has led to the development of a particular will, and that the circumstances faced by the individual in a particular instance are of a given sort (Green, 1906: 110). Indeed, this last consideration leads Green to argue that

We praise the successful reformer, and forget that he is but what the man of unnoticed conscientious goodness might be in another situation and with other opportunities. (Green, 1906: 303)

The essence of Sidgwick's argument is perfectly correct, then. The power of his objection overwhelms Green's spiritual determinism theory of moral responsibility. For a being to be morally responsible for its actions, it must have the capacity to choose how to act. For a being to be moral, it must be capable of acting differently from the way in which in fact it did in the particular circumstances. This is a necessary aspect of truly moral agency. The model of the self which Green presents in his spiritual determinist theory precludes him from ever being able to ascribe this sort of choice to humans. The problem is that Green's theory rests upon the assumption that, in Bosanquet's words, "all logical process without exception is unconscious" (Bosanquet, 1927a: 333). One should not be as sure as some commentators are that Green saves man from "being a mere automaton" (Hammond, n.d.: 95).

This conclusion obtains whether or not one agrees with Bosanquet (Bosanquet, 1927a: 353-7) that Sidgwick (Sidgwick, 1902: 15-22) is wrong to portray Green's position as essentially deterministic. The essence of Bosanquet's attempted defence of Green is to insist that Sidgwick fails to appreciate the full implications of Green's idealism. However, Sidgwick does appreciate that Green believes the collapse of the subject-object distinction establishes that a human has free will in formal sense. Nevertheless, his objection bites against Green's (and Bosanquet's own) position - and does so fatally. Bosanquet's defence of Green (and implicitly himself) fails due to both his and Green's inability to recognise that even though the subject-object distinction does collapse in the manner outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, that does not mean that a human being is a moral agent, for the simple reason which is given by Henry Sidgwick. Moral responsibility requires that the agent has the possibility of acting otherwise than he did in given circumstances. Green's spiritual determinist theory removes this possibility and ultimately in doing so destroys the notion of human moral action.

The full import of Sidgwick's objection for Green's ethical thought can be further emphasized by asking how Green or anyone else can coherently make prescriptive moral statements. For example, on the spiritual determinist reading, how can any agent choose to be careful when interpreting the nature of their actions and when judging their moral worth? As Calderwood realises,

A philosophy which accounts for all things by 'the action of a free or self-conditioned and eternal mind,' has by its own structure created a difficulty

in the way of shaping a theory of personal obligation ; for an injunction to conform to law seems as unmeaning in a nature which is the 'reproduction of an eternal consciousness,' as in a 'being who is simply a result of natural forces'. (Calderwood, 1885: 81)

This holds for both moral and political laws.

Even so, Green does believe that this paradox can be resolved (Green, 1906: 107-14). Acquaintance with prescriptive moral philosophy, or any expression of thought, as with any other form of life, can be of benefit to man's moral development. It does not matter that the agent cannot consciously act on new beliefs or experiences. For example, reading the *Prolegomena to Ethics* can affect a man's character, and, in this way, can affect how he will act. Expressing his opinions and understanding those of other's necessarily affects the mind of the individual involved because each act of expression is also a new experience for the agent. Consequently, even though Green did not choose in an undetermined manner what to write and the reader does not choose to believe or reject what he reads, both Green's and reader's characters are changed by their respective activities. Not only can Green be prescriptive but, given his self-consciousness and his particular character and circumstances, he can be nothing else.

Ultimately, this is a weak reply as it fails to address the essential point at issue - how can a being incapable of choice be held responsible for 'its' actions? The Sidgwick-Calderwood attack stands.

It is true that there is something very plausible about Green's claim that the agent is responsible for actions which express his character because that character is the true manifestation of his being as a particular moral agent. Nevertheless, in his spiritual deterministic moods, Green himself accepts that nobody indeterminately chooses his own character. The manifestation of his essence is in an important sense a result of circumstances even if those circumstances can exist only for a particular type of nature - for a self-referencing being - in essence, the eternal consciousness. Yet, despite the fact that circumstances are self-determinations of a self-conscious agent, it is still the case that the "automatic" nature of their 'creation' radically undermines the imputability of the subsequent actions.

This is not to argue that - on this view - all states of our being are of equal worth. A human being is in some sense 'better' if he lives in accordance with his essence. He is less



alienated from its true nature. Consequently, he is more 'at peace' with himself as was detailed earlier. Green can still argue that humans are in a sense 'freer' when they express and identify with their true nature - the eternal consciousness.

## 8. Conclusion.

This chapter has covered a lot of ground. Despite that, it has not produced a satisfactory resolution of the most significant difficulties inherent in Green's writings on the freedom of the will. This should not be surprising because, for the most part, the problems which Green faces - particularly the duality of his position(s) on the will - are reflections of important problems which continue to lie at the heart of the free will debate. Although Green is correct in his belief that the terms of the 'determinist'/indeterminist' debate make a resolution impossible, he is wrong to think that his approach is different enough to secure such a resolution. The neo-Aristotelian approach reveals the limitations which necessarily attend indeterminist and compatibilist positions. The spiritual determinist approach is deterministic, even if it is not physically deterministic in any meaningful sense. As such, it brings serious problems for anyone wishing to combine it with a belief in human moral responsibility.

Two senses of "freedom" have been examined here - formal freedom and real freedom. Yet, how can the agent be free on a spiritual determinist reading if he cannot choose - in an undetermined manner - how to act? The self-conscious will is formally free in that its motive is necessarily self-referential and its circumstances are necessarily related to the inherent structure of the man's epistemic, appetitive and moral nature. This has been established in the course of both this and the previous chapter. This brings the discussion to Green's conception of real freedom. Every human has a split nature in the sense that he is a manifestation of the eternal consciousness in animal form. Although it is not always the case, the latter can be a hindrance to the expression of the former in the motives (or will) of the individual. Where this obstruction exists, the true human essence (the eternal consciousness) is prevented from realising itself perfectly in the agent's will. In this sense the imperfect will is unfree. Only when the agent truly acts in accordance with his highest essence and recognises himself as doing so is he completely 'really' free. Only then is he perfectly self-determined, or in Hegelian terms only then is his will "infinite" (e.g. Hegel, 1967: 7). As Hegel puts it, "[t]he **Universal Self-Consciousness** is the intuition of itself not as a particular existence distinct from others but as the implicit universal self." (Hegel, 1986:

63, emphasis in original ; see also Jones et al, 1921: 55) Gaining such insight does require the agent to experience particular desires which may be ‘animal’ in some sense. Nevertheless, in a perfect being these are desires which harmonise with the human essence and which are indeed transformed into the vehicles of expression for this essence by the action of self-consciousness. In this way, the individual is truly self-determined and, so, is ‘free’ in the most valuable sense of

freedom from sin and law, freedom in the consciousness of union with God  
or of harmony with the true law of one’s being, freedom of true loyalty,  
freedom in devotion to self-imposed duties (Green, 1986d: 17)

These first two chapters have demonstrated the manner in which Green’s epistemological theory forms the foundation of his theory of human agency and therefore his moral philosophy. This marks a return to an older school of interpretation of Green’s thought. Most significantly, it has been demonstrated that at least on this spiritual determinist interpretation of Green’s thought, the will cannot be motivated by a voluntarily chosen object as this would necessarily rely on the incoherent idea of an unmotivated act of willing - an idea which, at times, Green is at pains to reject. The moral importance of self-consciousness has also been highlighted here. Several objections have been assessed. Most have been shown to be inadequate, including objections to his alleged egoism.

The remaining problem is that the spiritual determinist line makes Green’s theory of conscientious agency unsustainable and given the importance of conscience in his ethical and political thought there is real reason to balk at this fact. Nonetheless, one does not resolve a problem which is so fundamental by simply denying its existence. At the very least, one should say that Green misconceived the coherence of his system. That may not be a problem for many commentators, but it certainly would have been for Green himself.

The neo-Aristotelian line, no matter how popular in recent commentaries and despite the evidence for it within Green’s writings, is clearly not the only strand of Green’s writings on the will. I challenge anyone to reread, for example, sections 99 to 114 of the *Prolegomena* or sections 9 to 14 of the *Lectures on the Different Senses of ‘Freedom’* and retain their belief in the unproblematic nature of a neo-Aristotelian reading of Green. These passages can only be reasonably understood as what I have labelled “spiritual determinist”. Green has two alternatives. If he pursues the spiritual determinist strand, then he must

jettison his account of moral agency and hence moral responsibility. Conversely, if he wishes to claim that the agent can be morally responsible, then he must at least modify significantly but probably ultimately reject the essence of this strand of his writings in favour of the neo-Aristotelian approach.

In fact, he does adopt the neo-Aristotelian line in the later stages of his system in spite of his failure to present a coherent justification of voluntarism. He merely ignores the problem. Only in this way can he ask the ethical question which drew him to philosophy in the first place. For the most part, Green drops the spiritual determinist line as soon as he concludes his direct consideration of the nature of the will.

Looking forward, this chapter, and in particular its treatment of distinctively human action and the abstract nature of positive freedom as a realisation of the human essence, has lain the basis for the examination of Green's moral and political philosophy. From this point, the discussion must move to the next chapter where Green's argument outlining the relationship between the individual, his character and his society is examined in depth and his theory of positive freedom developed. In the fourth chapter, the discussion turns to conscientious action and social criticism. It is at that point that the ethical and political implications of this chapter are considered more fully.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### *RELATIONAL ORGANICISM AND THE COMMON GOOD*

#### 1. Introduction.

There have been many excellent discussions of Green's theory of the common good (e.g. Simhony, 1989 ; Nicholson, 1990: 54-82) and this chapter attempts to present one more. This chapter and chapter four examine Green's understanding of the relationship between the individual and his society by setting out and criticising his theories of the common good, conscientious agency and social criticism. It is established that these theories form the heart of his defence of the moral integrity of the individual against "unwelcome" social interference. He will be shown to equate respect for the individual with respect for his self-assumed communal memberships and activities.

Frequently, it is claimed that Green presents an organic conception of society.<sup>1</sup> More often than not, this is taken to equate with holism and to imply potential authoritarianism. In this chapter, I establish that although Green is an organicist, he is a "relationist" rather than a "holist". This is important because it means that he does not run the risk of promoting authoritarianism in the manner that some of his critics argue.

The chapter begins by outlining the categorization of social forms which Avital Simhony has presented - i.e. "individualist", "holist organicist" and relational organicist". The discussion proceeds to an analysis of Green's conception of the nature of morality and in particular of the true good. It will be established that only when one properly understands his theory of social embeddedness can one properly understand his conceptions of (imperfect) common goods and (perfect) Common Good. The latter is examined in depth in terms of a) its formal structure, b) its inherently non-competitive nature and c) its substantive element. The claim that the notion of "a common good" is conceptually confused is refuted as is Berlin's claim that his theory could justify authoritarianism. The

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Hobhouse, 1918: 96, 118 ; Laski, 1949: *passim* ; Bowle, 1954: 224, 254, 297 ; Packe, 1954: 403 ; Richter, 1964: 202-5, 224-5 ; Greaves, 1966: 19 ; Berlin, 1969a: xlix(n) ; Berlin, 1969b: 133n1, 150 ; Kemp, 1972: 236-7 ; Diggs, 1974: 26 ; Pant, 1977: 27-8 ; Gaus, 1983: 68, 82-5 ; Greenleaf, 1983: 29, 124-42 ; Kainz, 1984: 56, 58 ; Grant, 1988: 701-2 ; Gaus, 1994: 440-5. Cacoullous is one of the few commentators to deny that Green is an organicist (Cacoullous, 1974: 14). H J McCloskey's article examining what is entailed by the claim that the state is an organism is indirectly relevant here (McCloskey, 1963). Unfortunately, space constraints prevent including it.

chapter moves to its end by introducing the idea that the increased social fragmentation of the modern world fundamentally undermines the relevance of Green's conceptions of both the perfect and the imperfect common good. The discussion concludes with the claim that this fragmentation is not a problem for Green's theory due to the role which is played by conscientious agency. This thought is examined in greater depth in chapter four.

The importance of Green's conception of human nature will be emphasized throughout both this and the next chapter. The failure of at least one recent commentator to do this (Thomas, 1987) has led many valuable aspects of Green's theory to be seriously misunderstood and/or underrated and hence underemphasized.

Although this chapter focuses upon the third book of the *Prolegomena to Ethics*, my discussion omits some very interesting parts of it. For example, Green's arguments concerning the ancient and modern virtues have attracted much attention from his commentators. They are interesting, but not sufficiently relevant to the concerns of this chapter to warrant extended discussion. They will be used mainly to clarify other points in the chapter. Similarly, there is no detailed consideration of his famous attacks upon utilitarianism.

In the previous chapter, Green was shown to adopt two theories of the will at the same time. It will be remembered that they are differentiated in large part by their differing position on the issue of voluntarism. Nonetheless, this does not create any problems for the current chapter as everything that follows here obtains whether or not the will is capable of being directed voluntaristically. There are problems for his theory of conscientious agency but that is the subject matter of the next chapter and not this one.

## **2. Simhony's Categories.**

Avital Simhony distinguishes between three categories of social organisation (Simhony, 1991b) which she labels the "individualist", the "holistic organicist" and the "relational organicist" conceptions. The first "proceeds atomistically and builds on the basis of single individuals". She continues:

Fundamental to the individualist model of society is the ontological primacy of the individual. Based on this premise society is, accordingly, viewed as an aggregate of individuals. This contrasts with the holistic perspective according to which the social whole is somehow more real than individual

human beings involved in it. (Simhony, 1991b: 515)

These are fairly well-known alternatives and I will not clarify them any further for the moment. However, Simhony argues that these two categories are not the only ones available for an understanding of social ontology. Indeed, she argues that the British Idealists (with the possible exception of Bernard Bosanquet) adopt a third approach which she labels “relational organicism”. This category possesses three “salient features” (Simhony, 1991b: 520-2). Firstly, the mutual interdependence of whole and parts which characterises this category “is a non-reductive relationship” (Simhony, 1991b: 520). This is the ontological claim that society cannot be reduced to a simple aggregate of its members and the members cannot be reduced to mere parts of society. This implies the second feature which is that the whole and the parts both have dual aspects in that they form and are formed by each other (also see Phillips, 1970: 413, 418-20). To clarify this point, Simhony cites F H Bradley’s claim that “the social whole ‘cannot live *except* in its many members. Just so each of the members is alive but *not apart* from the whole which lives *in it*.’” (Simhony, 1991b: 521, quoting Bradley, 1927: 79, emphasis added by Simhony). The third “salient feature” of relational organicism rests upon the reconciliation of these dual aspects:

The constitutive elements are, respectively, unity and difference (social structure and human agency, respectively) which deprived of their respective absolute independence of each other, make up the third view of society - relational organicism - but not in mere conjunction, rather in their mutual interdependence. (Simhony, 1991b: 522)

In reality, these are not three separate features. They are more like three perspectives on the same point. I will retain Simhony’s characterisation as it is useful for bringing out some of the different implications of the reconciliation of whole and parts which is at the heart of “relational organicism”. Hence, it helps to structure and clarify my discussion of Green’s theory.

The essence of relational organicism can summarised as follows. Society exists only in the conceptual frameworks and therefore in the activities (the two are interdependent) of concrete individual human agents. Hence, these minds and activities are heavily influenced

by the idea of a wider whole - a society - in which the agent understands himself to act. A crucial idea then is that the agent constitutes part of a society, that he is part of a group which is neither an individualistic aggregate of its members, nor something which exists 'beyond' its members. Instead, society is the result of a certain perspective which the individual has on his world. With this in mind, I turn to Green's theory proper.

### **3. Morality and The True Good.**

By a moral ideal we mean some type of man or character or personal activity, considered as an end in itself. (Green, 1906: 194)

Positive freedom is the most valuable state of existence for any moral agent. This was established in the previous chapter. The best starting point for a deeper analysis of such a claim is Green's conception of "the moral good".

Human desires can be divided into two types (Green, 1906: 229). In both cases the self-conscious agent recognises them as his own and so they constitute possible objects of a personal good and are not purely instinctive (Green, 1885b: 3-4). The first type can be termed 'fleeting gratifications'. These are appetites for particular objects, for example, the satisfaction of a specific instance of hunger. This type of desire makes no reference to anything apart from the short-term feelings of the agent at the given time. The gratification to be gained from satisfying these desires tends to be brief and often a similar want arises soon afterwards. Consequently, the agent's situation is unaltered in the long-run. Yet, this experience is a spur to the individual's development:

As a man reflects - perhaps quite inarticulately - on the transitoriness of the pleasures by imagination of which his desires are from hour to hour excited; ... he asks (practically, if without formal expression) what can satisfy the self which abides throughout and survives those desires (Green, 1906: 229)

This question gives rise to a new sort of want in the agent - the desire for an abiding satisfaction of his highest nature. An object is sought which will bring him what can be "otherwise called peace or blessedness" (Green, 1986d:1). This object is the realisation of his truly human potentials. In attaining this end, the agent believes that he will find an

“abiding satisfaction of ... [his] abiding self.” (Green, 1906: 234) This “abiding self” equates to the agent’s true essence - the eternal consciousness in its epistemic, moral and aesthetic aspects (Green, 1906: 173-5). In this way, the agent seeks to realise the (presently inchoate) conception of the law of his being as an embodiment of the eternal consciousness (Green, 1986d: 1 ; Green, 1890a: 127). For these reasons, “the moral good” is defined as that personal good which will bring abiding satisfaction to a moral agent (Green, 1906: 171). Strangely (given Green’s apparent clarity on this matter), at least one critic has missed this point in Green’s published writings at least (Smith, 1981: 194-201 *passim*).

There is a certain degree of ambiguity within Green’s treatment of “the moral good”. On the one hand, he simply adopts the common liberal understanding of ‘the moral sphere’ (i.e. the arena of ‘other regarding’ actions) (e.g. Green, 1906: 355 ; see Milne, 1967: 322 ; Cacoullos, 1974: 63-6 *passim* ; Weinstein, 1993: 626-7). On the other hand, he refers to those potentials which express man’s highest essence - “personal excellence, moral and intellectual” (Green, 1906: 355). He founds this second strand on the Aristotelian concept of “eudaemonia” which can be defined as the state of being where man lives a truly human life (Gaus, 1983: 17-9). More determinately, Green refers to eudaemonia as “the full exercise or realisation of the soul’s faculties in accordance with its proper excellence, which ... [is] an excellence of thought, speculative and practical.” (Green, 1906: 254) Eudaemonia concerns qualities far wider than those which are nowadays commonly judged to be within the moral sphere, although necessarily it does include the truly ethical life as well. It brings in ideas of personal self-realisation where morality is now usually restricted to “other regarding actions”.<sup>2</sup>

Restricting the usage to purely ‘other regarding’ actions excludes very important human talents and needs (Milne, 1967: 322-3). Here, I will use the wider sense of ‘moral’ (i.e., eudaemonia), whilst being clear that even when Green does use the narrower meaning he continues to stress the need for the realisation of self-regarding capacities (even if he does tend to give them a lower status than the other-regarding ones (see below)). In this way, Green is always concerned with his own brand of eudaemonia, no matter how he uses the term ‘moral’.

It should be clear from the preceding analysis that Sidgwick is incorrect to argue that Green believes an immoral action brings only partial satisfaction, where a good action brings

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Hurka misses this point in Hurka, 1993: 19-20, 165.



complete satisfaction (Sidgwick, 1902a: 37-8, 61-2). This claim implies that there is only a quantitative difference between the satisfaction brought by the different forms of action. In fact, it is important that there is a qualitative difference between them. In the case of an evil action, the satisfaction springs from man's imperfections - his animal aspect - as the previous chapter demonstrated. In the case of a good action, it is a man's spiritual satisfaction which is gained. They are very different things.

Henry Sturt describes Green as a subjectivist (Sturt, 1906: 256-7). However, this cannot be a subjectivist in any very usual sense of the word because Green does not argue (and Sturt does not argue that Green argues) that morality is simply the result of arbitrary preferences. Instead, morality is the result of our most essential - our highest - needs and aspirations as human beings. Sturt fails properly to take into account that Green's conception of morality concerns values which we should have (reflected in goals we should pursue), in contradistinction to values we choose to have and consequently choose to pursue.

Thomas highlights five criteria which any good has to satisfy in order to be legitimately classed as a Greenian "true good". "[It] (i) is achievable only as an object of pursuit, (ii) contains a constructive element, (iii) is imperatival, (iv) is non-exclusive and non-competitive, and (v) is social or common." (Thomas, 1987: 244-5) Although I will not deal with the true good with specific reference to Thomas' analysis (Thomas, 1987: 247-55), the discussion can begin with his first criterion.

The actualization of the agent's permanent good is something towards which he constantly feels himself drawn as a demand of his inner being (Green, 1906: 199). It "will excite an interest in [the individual] like no other interest" (Green, 1906: 193) because it seems to have "the permanence necessary to satisfy the demand arising from a man's involuntary contemplation of his own permanence." (Green, 1906: 230)

There has arisen, in short, a conception of good things of the soul as having a value distinct from and independent of the good things of the body, if not as the only things truly good, [then as that] to which all other goodness is merely relative. (Green, 1986e: 243)

As long as the agent conceives of himself as desiring these two very different types of object, he can act to realise either his animal wants or his permanently satisfying potentials

(Green, 1986e: 176). It was established earlier that this constitutes a fundamental step in the individual's moral development as it forms a necessary step in making normative judgements concerning the objects of his desire:

without capacity for conceiving anything as good permanently or on the whole, there could be no possibility of judging that any desire should or should not be gratified. (Green, 1906: 220)

This object is made known to man by his capacity “to conceive a better state of [him]self as end to be attained by action”, which Green calls his “practical reason” (Green, 1906: 177) and which was examined in chapter two. In the same manner that humans are self-conscious only because they embody the eternal consciousness, they possess capacities to be realised and practical reason to guide their realisation only because they embody it (Green, 1906: 180).

Plamenatz misrepresents Green's conception of the true good when he asserts that Green saw the highest state of being - i.e. virtuous life - as that form of living which aims at the satisfaction of the most desires (or alternatively the greatest amount of 'desire' - Plamenatz does not tell us which) (Plamenatz, 1938: 76-80 ; see de Burgh, 1938: 89-90 for a similar attack). It should be crystal clear that Plamenatz has misinterpreted Green. True virtue aims at gaining certain types of object. These are sought in response to those desires which spring from the moral aspects of the human essence. Plamenatz's misunderstanding is frankly incredible.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, there are certain ambiguities within Green's notion of “the true good” (see also Lamont, 1934: 190-6 *passim*, 212-5, Carritt, 1935: 132). One central question is, is the true good a state of abiding satisfaction or a state of character? If it is a state of character, then the question arises, is it a disposition to act or a form of activity? Turning to the first question first. Green frequently refers to the true good in both ways. It is significant that he attacks utilitarianism with the argument that a desiring agent aims at an object of desire rather than the pleasure which attaining the object brings (Green, 1906: 158). Hence, there is reason to favour the view that the true good is a form of character

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<sup>3</sup> Looking back at the work in which he presents this criticism of Green, Plamenatz concedes that he did ‘much less than justice to Bosanquet and Green’ (Plamenatz, 1968: 166).

rather than a feeling of self-satisfaction (cf. Green, 1906: 364, Green, 1986a: 2). However, it is still the case that at times he does refer to the true good as self-satisfaction or “an abiding satisfaction of an abiding self” (e.g. Green, 1906: 234). This makes the most common interpretation of this point - i.e. the true good is a state of character - less secure than it appears at first sight (e.g. Richter, 1964: 194-207 *passim* ; Thomas, 1987: 242-7 *passim* ; Nicholson, 1990: 64-7). Green is just ambiguous about this matter.

In fact, the conceptual gap between these options is very small. Having a perfect character is a necessary precondition of gaining abiding satisfaction, and abiding satisfaction always results from possessing a perfect character. This could be one reason why Green is not concerned to identify only one as the true good. Fortunately, the strength of the conceptual link between the two options is so slight that Green’s vagueness does not significantly undermine his moral philosophy.

The second ambiguity centres on whether the true good is a disposition to act or a form of activity. What can be said about this? Firstly, the true good may be a state of being which can only be gained whilst actually performing those sorts of actions which utilize the highest human potentials (Green, 1906: 304). An essential aspect of these potentials is the possibility of acting from the highest moral motive (Green, 1906: 247). These potentials can only be utilized once the agent has attained a perfect character. Indeed, they are constitutive elements of the perfect character. (The other aspect is the habitual disposition to use these potentials.) However, the second option is that instead of being present only when the agent is acting well, in fact the agent always feels an abiding satisfaction when he has developed a perfect character. The former stresses noble activity where primarily the latter stresses the simple possession of a good character

Once more, these two claims are interrelated, but they are not the same. Certainly, only a man of perfect character can perform perfect actions, and performing good actions fosters a better character. Yet, this does not answer the question of whether or not Green believes the true good is possessed by good men all of the time or merely when they are exercising their characters in practice.

Can this ambiguity be resolved? Green’s is a practical philosophy (Richter, 1964: 344-76). His basic question is, how can we live the good life? (see e.g. Green, 1889e) In more determinate terms, he seeks to discover the manifestations in which “the spirit operative in men finds its full expression and realisation” (Green, 1986e: 183). Elsewhere, he poses the question in terms of trying to find a “state of life or consciousness” (Green,

1986e: 187). He does not seem aware that these are not strictly equivalent. The answer may lie in his writings on the will and reason:

we may properly ascribe to reason - not as gradually unfolding itself in us, but as in the perfection to which that process tends, and which we must suppose to be actually attained in the eternal mind - a fully articulated idea of the best life for man, and accordingly speak of life according to reason as the goal of our moral effort. (Green, 1906: 179)

Internally related to the state of being in which an agent can find true self-satisfaction is the motive to act for the highest object presented by reason. In other words, the highest potentials which a man can possess necessarily push him to act so as to attain the highest possible object - i.e. his full realisation as a human being (Green, 1906: 253-5, 286 ; see Simhony, 1989: 482-5). It is in this sense that a distinctively human agent is self-realising. For instance:

The reformer cannot bear to think of himself except as giving effect, so far as may be [possible], to his project of reform ; and thus, instead of merely contemplating a possible work, he does it. (Green, 1906: 299)

In this way, a compromise can be made whereby a good character brings a high degree of abiding satisfaction to the possessor of the former even though complete abiding satisfaction can only be present when the agent uses his potentials to the full.

Neither of these ambiguities materially affects Green's case, especially given that mankind is condemned to at least some degree of imperfection (Green, 1986e: 183). In relation to the first ambiguity, if a man seeks 'more' abiding satisfaction, he will have to improve his character and the characters of those around him. In seeking a better character, each person will have to act as well as he can given who he is at the time. The link to Aristotle's theory of eudaemonia is clear at this point.

So far in his ethical theory, Green has focused upon the individual. This continues the trend which began right at the beginning of his epistemology. It will be remembered from chapter one that Green begins his theory of knowledge with the question, how is knowledge possible? Importantly, his question is, how is it possible for particular human

beings to gain knowledge? His answer stresses the unifying and hence creative power of the individual mind. Certainly, all human minds are the same in the sense that they share the same underlying structure and self-creating principle which he labels “the eternal consciousness”. Nevertheless, learning is, in an important sense, individuated. This point is fundamental within his writings on the will (whether one follows the neo-Aristotelian or the spiritual determinist line). Again, the eternal consciousness (sc. the universal) exists only in concrete people (sc. the particular).

It should not be surprising then that when Green moves to the ethical realm proper, he stresses the individual agent once more. Only concrete individuals can feel an abiding satisfaction because only concrete individuals possess an abiding self (the eternal consciousness). Given that this is how Green’s argument has proceeded so far, one may believe that he will fall into the individualist category set out by Simhony. However, this is famously not the case, as will be established now.

#### **4. The True Good and Social Embeddedness.**

Green emphasizes that, in many ways, the individual is not and should not be alone in his world. He is brought up and lives as part of a social group. Green highlights two reasons for this.

Initially, men form societies simply to facilitate the satisfaction of their personal ‘animal’ desires. Indeed, even as societies progress, this is a motive which is never totally absent from human action (Green, 1906: 281 ; Green, 1986a: 124-8 *passim*).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Green highlights the anthropological observation that all recorded societies (if not all possible societies) have had some division of labour (Green, 1906: 190). That is, empirically there have always been sub-groupings within society which interrelate to form a social network. Division of labour increases productive efficiency and reduces competition for the utilization of scarce social resources by giving different roles to humans based on their membership of the different social groupings. He defends this type of social division of labour with the argument that it can ease harmonious social interaction and so foster personal development.<sup>5</sup> By limiting “the scope of ... [his] personal interests” (Green, 1906:

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<sup>4</sup> Cacoullos misses this point in Cacoullos, 1974: 123.

<sup>5</sup> There are several classic discussions of this point of which Green would have been aware. For example, Plato, *The Republic*, 369-72 ; Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1252a24-1253a39 ; Hume, 1978: 534-49.

191) in this way, the individual is brought to rely on help from other individuals in different sections of society. Moreover, specialisation allows him to pursue his dominant personal interests more effectively by providing the context of a social network which provides for the satisfaction of his other desires. In this way, a social division of labour can help the individual to develop himself by helping to stabilize his society at the same time as enabling him to concentrate his efforts in specific areas of work. It is in this sense that autonomy is “a power which each man exercises through the help or security given him by his fellow-men, and which he in turn helps to secure for them.” (Green, 1986b: 199)

This does not mean that the citizens feel obligated to perpetuate their society simply because it allows them to satisfy more of their animal desires more efficiently and more safely (Green, 1906: 242 ; Green, 1986a: 113-36 *passim*). There is a less contingent reason for human beings to live in communities. Once the means of satisfying the agent’s animal wants have been secured, there arises the idea of a permanently better state of being - “our haunting human sense of some supreme good”, as Smyth calls it (Smyth, 1893: 21):

Until life has been so organised as to afford some regular relief from the pressure of animal wants, an interest in what Aristotle calls ‘living well’, or ‘well-being’, as distinct from merely ‘living’, cannot emerge. (Green, 1986e: 240)

By virtue of their essence, humans are self-creating and therefore moral agents. This nature is the form of the human essence. However, form alone allows no action. Humans are of such a nature that they require socialisation to give content to the world in which they act or could conceive themselves acting (e.g. Green, 1906: 324 ; Green, 1986a: 2 ; Green, 1986i *passim*). For this reason, in the process of manifestation, social relationships come to be understood by the moral agent as:

a complex organisation of life, with laws and institutions, with relationships, courtesies, and charities, with arts and graces through which the perfection is to be attained (Green, 1986d: 23)

It is this contention which gives Green’s moral and political philosophy much of its distinctive flavour and it must be carefully explained because at least one commentator is

unclear about his theory (Cacoullos, 1974: 72-85 *passim*). In the remainder of this section, I will examine the first stage of the argument (i.e. that the individual's consciousness is necessarily socially embedded. In the three sections after this one, I examine the stages which establish Green's more controversial claim that the true good is a common good.

An example will help to introduce the relationship between essence and social context in Green's thought. There is no way in which the agent can avoid the need to possess a language (Green, 1890a: 71). Therefore, one of the most basic and influential stimuli on the human mind is the linguistic structure in which he is born, grows and acts. In that a language makes sense only in the context of an understanding of the social practices which it helps to define and hence to construct, the individual's capacity for agency is necessarily social. Language and the individual's life in its wider forms are framed, therefore, with reference to "institutions and arrangements of life, social requirements and expectations, [and] conventional awards of praise and blame." (Green, 1906: 279) Consequently,

social life is to personality what language is to thought. Language presupposes thought as a capacity, but in us the capacity of thought is only actualised in language. So human society presupposes persons in capacity - subjects capable each of conceiving himself and the bettering of his life as an end to himself - but it is only in the intercourse of men, each recognised by each as an end, not merely a means, and thus as having reciprocal claims, that the capacity is actualised and that we really live as persons. (Green, 1986e: 183)

There are strong Aristotelian and Hegelian echoes here which link in with what survives of Green's passionate and unpublished defence of Hegel's claim that "*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.*" (MS4 ; Hegel, 1967: p. 10, emphasis in original)<sup>6</sup> The eternal consciousness in its moral aspects is equivalent to the formal moment of Hegel's "concept of right" (Hegel, 1967: 1-2). This is "its mode of being as concept alone" (Hegel, 1967: 1R). It constitutes the underlying structure of that aspect of right in the analysable world in which humans have lived and live at present which coheres perfectly

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<sup>6</sup> There are echoes in Green, 1986a: 115 as well.

with the rest of the one fully self-consistent system of concepts. For both Hegel and Green, this concept must be fully realised in the world for it to possess full existence and its highest worth. Only then is it “the Idea of right, i.e. the concept of right together with the actualization of that concept.” (Hegel, 1967: 1) It is not enough for the correct way of living to be merely known intellectually (Green, 1986a: 114). It must also be lived through the actual dealings with and attitudes held towards other persons. Social interaction is essentially the practical expression of a conceptual scheme which in turn is a partial and - given human imperfection - to some extent distorted expression of the eternal consciousness (Green, 1906: 180, 232). As a practical conceptual scheme, it is a living network of epistemic, aesthetic, and moral concepts which are instilled in the individual through the necessarily social processes of “inheritance and education” (Green, 1986d: 23). The individual’s innate desires and drives are thus given practical expression through this socially-derived conceptual framework. The former include both the need to express his conception of his own essence and consciousness and his drive to live in conformity with a principle or moral law which he feels best accords with that essence (Green, 1986d: 24 ; Green, 1890a: 107-10 *passim*). This thought underlies Green’s observation that the selfish ambitions of Napoleon and Caesar were expressed in modes which reflected the norms of their particular societies (Green, 1986a: 128-30 ; see also Monro, 1951: 352-3).

Humans are not perfectly malleable - they are not solely created by ‘outside’ influences. Green criticises Lewes at length on this point (Green, 1885f: esp. 93). Nonetheless, experiencing such influences does play a necessary part in the self-formation of all determinate moral agents. He argues in his manuscripts that:

Quite true that ind[ividual] man neither is, nor conceive himself as, anything apart fr[om] relations to others. Such relationships make up the reality of the man’s self, but it is only as central in his self-consc[iousnes]s that they are w[ha]t they are. ... All that ind[ividual] is or has is derived fr[om] that society in w[hic]h he lives, but it is derived to that ind[ividual]. (MS23, emphasis in original)

Socialisation is necessarily linked to the underlying structure of the human mind and to the more determinate manifestations of this structure where the individual has already gained some experience of the world around him (MacCunn, 1907: 240-5 ; Sabine, 1973: 672).



Again, this was examined in chapters one and two. Ultimately, there is no viable subject/object distinction. We cannot simply be products of our history. Instead, we are (imperfect) expressions of our essence.

Green insists upon the importance of this link between abstract human nature and determinate human lives (with their beliefs and values) and between determinate human lives and their particular social frameworks (Green, 1906: 205 ; Green, 1986a: 38-9). Practical expression of the moral aspects of the human essence is vital because the good life must be lived self-consciously and so must be known and human beings cannot be aware of this underlying form unless it has determinate - and, therefore, practical - content. The human 'mental skeleton' is discovered only once one has analysed how its 'mental flesh' can be arranged as it is. Indeed, this has been shown to apply to all aspects of the eternal consciousness.

It is clear that different stimuli push human nature to develop in different ways. Consequently, an individual's determinate mind is intimately connected to the intellectual structure of the influences by which it is socialised. These influences are "derived from a common dwelling-place with its associations, from common memories, traditions and customs, and from the common ways of feeling and thinking which a common language and still more a common literature embodies." (Green, 1986a: 123)

Following Aristotle, then, Green is arguing that the forms of action which the agent has available to him (primarily, in the sense of being able to comprehend and identify his own true self with them) must be *social* forms or developments of the social forms in which he was socialised. With this in mind, consider Geoffrey Thomas' argument that:

Green's morality of social roles suggests the idea of a coherent form of social organization in which each role is associated with a practice that respects the rights and serves the interests of individuals. The complete network of social roles provides the conditions in which the individual, all individuals, can achieve self-satisfaction through self-realization. (Thomas, 1987: 302)

Thomas is concerned with Green's vision of the perfect society and - for the moment at least - the present discussion is not. Nevertheless, this passage is very rich and it helps to bring out an important difference between Thomas' interpretation of Green and my own.

The first thing to notice is the claim that “each [social role] is associated with a practice”. Thomas defines “a practice” as “a rule-governed pattern of activity” (Thomas, 1987: 283). One must be careful here because arguing that a social role “is associated with” only one practice is very likely to imply that Green’s position fails to capture the full complexities of social life. No doubt, there is some sense in which a social role can be characterised as embodying just one practice. For example, ‘being a parent’ could be defined as ‘ensuring the present and future well-being of one’s child(ren)’. However, on another level it is a peculiar idea to portray ‘ensuring one’s child’s well-being’ as a practice (sc. “a rule-governed pattern of activity”) in the way Thomas seems logically committed to doing. It is not that Thomas sees a practice as simply a structured activity - all rational actions must be structured at some level. Instead, most social roles require many different practices to be carried out in order properly to fulfill that role. In other words, a social role is a network of structured activities which the agent reflects upon and then decides to follow in the particular circumstances. Consequently, to portray a social role as being defined in terms of merely one practice is an unsuccessful attempt to capture the full complexities of most functions. Importantly in the present context, it is not an inadequacy which Green perpetuates. Social roles are made up of many different practices.

Unfortunately for Green as a liberal, the structured nature and inner logic of every particular conceptual scheme and role immediately imposes limitations on the moral agent’s capacity for self-expression and consequently self-reform (Green, 1906: 182-3). This rests on an empirical claim about the extent of the agent’s power to transcend his conceptual starting-point and has important consequences for the normative aspects of Green’s social theory. Firstly, it means that in part the existing structure of society should be protected for prudential reasons. The individual who undermines the agency of other members of his society and the structures within which they operate tends to make his environment more hostile to all agents within that society (Green, 1906: 234). Through acting in an anti-social manner then, the agent tends to undermine his own practical capacity for agency by making his world harder to comprehend, live in and shape (see Bosanquet, 1927a: 180-1). More fundamentally, the agent is necessarily socially-embedded because his self-image can only arise out of an analysis of his own experience of acting morally and his ability to act morally is structured by his socialisation (Green, 1906: 184). In other words, the manner in which the agent conceives of himself as a moral being is inherently structured by his analysis of his own actual moral norms and actions. This is a logical consequence of Green’s idealist

empiricism which was outlined in the first chapter of this thesis and is returned to later in this chapter. As it stands, the idea is fairly unspectacular. Yet the effect of socialisation means that the agent's self-image must be framed with reference to the norms of the group or groups with which he identifies himself (Green, 1906: 199). It establishes their perceptions of their own social embeddedness. As Richter puts it,

individuals within a given society do not construct infinitely varied ideals.

They share common assumptions about the nature of the good and thus are ready to acknowledge the legitimacy of duties which may involve the sacrifice of individual inclination or interest. (Richter, 1964: 208)

Finally, the individual's perception of these social norms embodies a fundamental characteristic of morality - its categorical nature. Its authority is not binding on men because they chose to make it so. Indeed, an 'authority' which lasted only as long as the 'subject' wished it to would be very peculiar. By definition, authoritative norms are binding whether or not one wants them to be (Green, 1890a: 126). They should be obeyed independently of our wishes. Social norms embody this 'givenness' which of necessity the moral aspects of the eternal consciousness possess as well.

From the basis of this analysis, it is relatively easy to establish the error in Carritt's and Plamenatz's criticism that Green's justification of the moral or true good is circular.<sup>7</sup> I concentrate on Plamenatz's formulation here as it is the most convincing. His case centres on the following passage from the *Prolegomena*:

As his [a man's] true good is or would be their [his will's and his reason's] complete realisation, so his goodness is proportionate to his habitual responsiveness to the idea of there being such a true good. ... In other words, it consists in the direction of the will to objects determined for it by this idea. (Green, 1906: 180, quoted in Plamenatz, 1938: 65, Plamenatz's editing and clarification)

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<sup>7</sup> Carritt, 1935: 132 ; Carritt, 1947: 46-8 ; Lewis, 1948 ; Plamenatz, 1938: 65-8 ; see also Schneewind, 1977: 408-11 ; Freedman, 1978: 57. Cacoullos argues against Plamenatz in Cacoullos, 1974: 127-9.

On the strength of this passage, Plamenatz claims that:

Green ... equates the goodness of the individual with *the complete* realization of certain of his capacities, and also with a *responsiveness to the idea* that such a realization would be good. It follows from this that a man's capacities are completely *realized* when he is *responsive to the idea* that such a realization would be good. (Plamenatz, 1938: 66, emphasis in original)

Turning to the interpretation first, such a theory is indeed circular. However, it is a misreading of Green. In fact, it is clearly a misreading of the passage Plamenatz quotes from the *Prolegomena*. Certainly, Green does make a distinction between “the true good” and “goodness” but obviously it is not of the type Plamenatz thinks. The true good equates to the complete actualisation of will and reason, and a man's goodness is the degree to which his will and reason are actualised in him personally. In other words, “the true good” is the practical expression of the agent's highest potentials, whereas the agent's “goodness” is his actual (and probably imperfect) embodiment of these potentials. The true good is the human telos, whereas the particular agent's goodness is his embodiment of this telos in his particular character.

Indeed, not even Plamenatz himself is satisfied with this attack. He considers an alternative way of interpreting the passage and argues that:

[as] Green thinks that some goods are not true goods, he must mean that they are not really goods at all, in the sense that all statements made about them asserting that they possess the property of being good would be false. If he does not mean this, he means nothing, for this is the only possible meaning of his words. (Plamenatz, 1938: 66-7)

In reality, Plamenatz has fallen into the trap of confusing “good” understood as ‘possessing moral worth’, with “good” understood as ‘object desired by an agent’. The agent's good (sc. moral worth) may not be found through his goods (sc. desired objects). The problem originates in part from Green's use of one term to refer to two concepts, however, his meaning is usually fairly clear from the context. In any case, his justification of the true

good is not circular.

Furthermore, Plamenatz has objected that Green cannot explain which comes first - moral persons or the common good (Plamenatz, 1938: 68) and hence cannot sustain his theory. In fact, this is primarily a doubt about the coherence of Green's theory of socialisation rather than the nature of the common good as such. In reality, the objection fails to appreciate the coherence and complexity of Green's position. It has been demonstrated already that Green regards personality and society as necessarily interrelated. Moral persons are born with the capacity to conceive of and, once they have been socialised, live according to a common good. Plamenatz's objection fails to appreciate this.

This is a good point at which to sum up the points which have been established so far. Green's moral and political thought is founded upon his conception of human nature (sc. "the eternal consciousness"). This point comes out clearly in his conception of "the true good" which is defined as that personal good which actualizes man's highest nature. This nature is present within the moral world 'subjectively' as the agent's determinate capacity for action and 'objectively' as social norms, practices and institutions. This is the only object whose attainment will bring an abiding satisfaction to a human being (Green, 1906: 171). The moral agent must seek to realise the (presently inchoate) conception of the law of his being in practice (Green, 1986d: 1). It is only as part of a social system that the individual's capacity for agency can receive the content, self-awareness, orientation and opportunities necessary for meaningful self-expression and self-development (Green, 1986a: 2-5). Without such social groups and activities, the agent is merely an 'empty shell' and so is incapable of acting autonomously and morally. Indeed, properly he could not act at all. In this way, Green follows Aristotle in arguing that an individual without a society is a poor and stunted expression of his nature (Aristotle, 1957: Iii). He is subhuman. Given man's inherent drive for self-realisation, he could never attain his true good and gain permanent satisfaction of his abiding self.

The individual's ability to be a self-creating being - to step beyond his social roles - is inherently limited. At one point Green even goes as far as to argue that "[e]ach has primarily to fulfill the duties of his station." (Green, 1986e: 183) Nevertheless, remembering what was established in the second chapter of this thesis, it can be seen that for the claims which these roles impose upon the agent to possess true moral worth, the individual must freely identify with them. If he does not do so, "they present themselves to the man as imposed from without." (Green, 1986d: 24) and so he cannot recognise himself in his

actions and so cannot feel himself to be autonomous. In the self-consciousness of an alienated individual, the rules of society:

do not form an object which, as contemplated, he can harmonise with the other objects which he seeks to understand, nor, as a practical object, do they form one in the attainment of which he can satisfy himself. (Green, 1986d: 24)

This point is returned to later in this chapter when the discussion considers the claim that Green's theory can justify authoritarianism.

This does not alter the fact that, at heart, we are always communal beings and this imposes certain duties on us. It is with this thought in mind that Green defines "true" or "positive" freedom as:

a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others. We mean by it a power which each man exercises through the help or security given by his fellow-men, and which he in turn helps to secure for them. ... [I]n other words, [we mean] the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good. (Green, 1986b: 199-200)

Before examining Green's conception of "the common good" in some depth, it is necessary to round off this section by returning briefly to Simhony's categories. Clearly, Green's conception of society cannot fit into the individualist category. The preceding analysis established that the agent must live according to forms of life which are, or arise out of, 'inherited' social practices. Furthermore, he has limited powers to step beyond his social forms, given the type of being he is. "[T]he ontological primacy of the individual" (Simhony, 1991b: 515) must be denied and, therefore, one must be highly sceptical about the emphasis which Freedman places upon the 'individualistic' strand of Green's thought (Freedman, 1978: 58-60 *passim* ; see also Metz, 1938: 283). Society cannot be a mere aggregation of individuals as it is portrayed in the individualist conception. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated already that Green cannot be a holist either because the primary unit of analysis in his epistemology, his theory of the will and his conception of

morality is the individual. The vision of society which remains from Simhony's categories is "relational organicism". It must be established whether or not Green's theory can legitimately given this third label.

The category has three "salient features" (Simhony, 1991b: 520). The first is that "[the m]utual interdependence [of whole and parts] is a non-reductive relationship ; consequently and secondly, whole and parts possess a double nature. Thirdly, relational organicism is a reconciling idea." (Simhony, 1991b: 520)

With this in mind, the present discussion undertakes a detailed examination of Green's controversial claim that the social embeddedness of human consciousness transforms the true good into a common good.

## **5. The Formal Structure of the Common Good**

It is in fact only so far as we are members of a society, of which we can conceive the common good as our own, that the idea [of human and hence personal perfection] has any practical hold on us at all (Green, 1986e: 183)

Green argues that the concept of "a common good" is necessarily entailed by the concept of "a community" :

Some sort of community, founded on such unity of self-consciousness, on such capacity for a common idea of permanent good, must be presupposed in any groupings of men from which the society that we know can have been developed. (Green, 1986e: 202)

Straightaway, one must draw a distinction between "a common good" and "the Common Good". Unfortunately, Green does not do so himself at the terminological level and although his theory is still coherent, this failure does make his exposition a little misleading at times. Ann Cacoullos is an exemplar of the commentators who have fallen into the trap it creates by misconceiving Green's theory of the Common Good (Cacoullos, 1974: 120-44 *passim*).

The distinction between "the common good" and "the Common Good" works as follows. The term "the Common Good" (capitalised) refers to that good which is shared

by humans as perfect practical expressions of human nature. Ultimately then there is only one moral ideal which can be labelled “the Common Good” as there is only one fully human nature. There are many “common goods” (without capitalization). These are particular structures of belief and values which are common to the individual subsets of humanity which make up different cultural groups. In that they logically require their holders to fundamentally disagree with members of other cultures about the nature of the good life, common goods can only be held by imperfect beings. Of necessity, they entail disagreements where ultimately there should be concurrence. Again, it must be repeated that there should be agreement because humans share one essence and hence - in terms of content if not mode of expression - can only properly realise it in one way.

To use this distinction between “the Common Good” and “the or a common good”, three possible qualities should be detailed. An end could be one which the individual a) self-consciously seeks in cooperation with his fellows (Green, 1906: 199), b) believes it is right to pursue, and c) understands as being of equal moral worth (but not necessarily as pleasurable) for all members of his social groupings (e.g. Green, 1906: 200-1 ; Green, 1890a: 123). Bellamy’s characterisation - “[t]he ‘common good’ consists of a set of common meanings about what are worthwhile goals of freedom and of how they should be shared” (Bellamy, 1992b: 284) - details the formal aspect of both “the Common Good” and “the common good”. Of the three facets listed above, this includes b), but not necessarily a) and c). However, the Common Good contains certain further necessary and substantive elements which are included under a) and c). It is these which must be examined now. I begin with an examination of Greengarten’s interpretation of Green, which leads into a consideration of the roots of Green’s theory as they are set out in the writings of Hegel, Rousseau and Kant (considered here in that order).<sup>8</sup>

Greengarten argues that Green puts forward four separate arguments to establish that the true good is a common good (Greengarten, 1981: 37-9). Firstly, individuals share an essence and hence a telos (Greengarten, 1981: 38). Secondly, man can gain the permanent satisfaction he seeks only by satisfying a group whose members and in particular

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<sup>8</sup> Sidgwick and others struggle but ultimately fail to understand Green’s justification of this crucial move. Sidgwick, 1902a: 56-9, 76-9 ; Kloppenberg, 1986: 128-32 Cacoullous, 1974: 72-85 *passim*, 120-2, 133-44 *passim* ; against this view see Fairbrother, 1900: 171-9, 183-4 ; Barbour, 1911: 122-34 *passim* and - to a certain extent - Gaus, 1983: 61-3.



whose cultural identity will survive him (Greengarten, 1981: 39 ; also MacCunn, 1907: 234-5 ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 60-1). Thirdly, a human's animal nature leads him to have purely altruistic interests in the well-being of all others (Greengarten, 1981: 39), Fourthly, a human's sense of personal identity can only be gained through his practical and intellectual recognition of the identity of other persons (Greengarten, 1981: 39).

The discussion must examine the extent to which these arguments are, firstly, present in Green's positive writings and, secondly, internally coherent. Greengarten's first argument fails to establish that the common good is one which must be non-competitive and so it fails to establish what is undoubtedly a central pillar of Green's conception of "the common good". However, the fault does not lie with Green but with Greengarten's (and Mukhopadhyay's (Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 58-60)) interpretation. There is a separate argument doing the work in the passage from the *Prolegomena* which Greengarten highlights (Green, 1906: 377). This particular argument will be returned to shortly. The second justification, on the other hand, *is* present in Green's thought at times (e.g. Green, 1906: 229-32, 246). He argues that the true good must be a social good because pursuing such a collective object is the only way that a human being "can sustain himself in that thought of his own permanence to which the thought of permanent well-being is correlative." (Green, 1906, 232). Many nationalist groups have propagated something akin to this myth and it does have some emotional appeal. However, the idea that one can gain permanent satisfaction through some form of projection of the group's existence after one's death into one's own present self-image does not appear strong enough to bear the weight Green would have to put upon it if it were to be his only support for the claim that the true good is a common good. Fortunately, Green's third reason is stronger - man is the sort of animal which instinctively cares for his fellows (Green, 1906: 200-1). This line of thought appears to shade into the fourth approach detailed by Greengarten. However, it is crucially different in the sense that objects which are sought *instinctively* are incapable of satisfying a self-conscious being such as a human. Green's fourth argument is especially important because of this. Green holds that a human can only gain self-awareness through awareness of the intrinsic spiritual worth of others with whom he has relationships which are based upon mutual respect (Green, 1906: 200-1). This is the most philosophically satisfying justification of the four Greengarten cites. It underpins the first argument given above and is the one on which I shall concentrate here. In what follows I will clarify Green's argument as well as indicate some of his intellectual debts to the Rousseau, Kant and Hegel. I use

Hegel's thought to clarify the phenomenological stage of Green's argument, then Rousseau's concepts of "the general will" and "moral freedom" to clarify the ontology of community and finally Kant's conception of moral agency and the Kingdom of Ends to clarify the formal moment of a just society.<sup>9</sup>

Those aspects of Hegel's theory of personal identity which are indispensable for our current purposes are set out in the phenomenological sections of his *Encyclopaedia* (Hegel 1971: 413-4) and his *Philosophical Propaedeutic* (Hegel, 1986: 61-3). Green quotes the former in his papers and translated large parts of the latter.<sup>10</sup> In essence, Green adopts Hegel's now familiar argument from intersubjectivity. Hegel's essential point is that an agent's self-conscious participation in social relationships enables him to recognise himself as a particularized manifestation of a universal essence. In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel writes:

Just as light is the manifestation of itself and its Other, darkness, and can manifest itself only by manifesting that Other, so too the 'I' is manifest to itself only in so far as its Other is manifest to it in the shape of something independent of it. (Hegel, 1971: 413z)<sup>11</sup>

Here, Hegel is emphasizing the need for subjective self-awareness of particularity. In the *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, he writes "[a] Self-Consciousness which is for another is not for it a mere object but is its other self. ... It beholds in the other its own self." (Hegel, 1986: 61) In this instance, Hegel is asserting the agent's need to be aware of his own essence through his recognition of its (separately) particularised presence in the minds and actions of his fellows. From this Hegel (and Green) conclude that in order to realise itself, Self-Consciousness must recognise its own essence as perfectly expressed in practice, and can only do so if it also recognises this essence as perfectly expressed in the practice of other persons. From this, Hegel argues that "Positive Freedom" - the life where self-conscious

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<sup>9</sup> Also see de Burgh, 1938: 265-6 ; Sabine, 1973: 659-60 ; Sherover, 1974: 304-8 *passim*; Vincent et al, 1984: 22-3, 26-7 ; Simhony, 1993b ; Simhony, 1993c: 7-14.

<sup>10</sup> Green quotes two passages (in German) from Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* (see Hegel, 1971: 413) in MS6b which set out crucial stages in the theory of intersubjectivity. One of these is quoted below. The manuscript of the *Philosophical Propaedeutic* survives in Balliol College library although the translation remains unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> This is a complete translation of one of the passages which Green quotes in MS6b.

agents perfectly express their highest nature - can only exist where all persons respect each other as persons (e.g. Green, 1906: 190 ; Wempe, 1986: 32-44, 162-4). As Green puts it in his *Notes on Moral Philosophy*:

With most men, as strangers, one can only deal on [a] footing of *right*. But in such dealing the good man respects [the] right of others not merely as [a] condition of his own right being respected, but as [an] *allos autis* [other self] - as that which he has taken into himself and loves as himself. (Green, 1986i: 2, emphasis in original, additions by Harris et al)

Hegel's phenomenological theory reflects its epistemological foundations, and these foundations underpin much of Green's epistemology. In particular both embody a relational theory of knowledge. Hegel and Green place this level of emphasis upon intersubjectivity and mutual recognition because of their shared belief that a human can only know the nature of any object fully by understanding the conceptual relations in which it stands to every other object. From this, the argument goes, one can only recognise one's own nature as an agent by understanding the essence of all other agents. As has been pointed out already, both thinkers recognise that this essence must be expressed before it can be analysed and so properly known. Given the need for socialisation which they both stress, the normative and wider conceptual structure of the individual's social groups helps to structure his consciousness and so enable him to gain a determinate sense of personal identity. It is for this reason that the agent can only feel at home in the world when he understands himself as living a life which expresses his true essence. To do this, he must respect and be respected by all other members of his community. By definition, these are people who share his conception of the good and whose daily lives are intertwined with his own. Only by thus understanding his inner life as finding expression in his activity in a social framework can a human gain a proper perception of his potential for autonomous action (Green, 1986b: 199). Consequently, both Hegel and Green recognise that "the noblest savage" must submit himself to social restraint as "the first step towards the full exercise of the faculties with which man is endowed." (Green, 1986b: 199)

This thought underlies Rousseau's *The Social Contract* as well (Green, 1986a:

116).<sup>12</sup> Green attacks Rousseau's use of the contract idiom (Green, 1889e: 113-7 *passim*, 122-4 *passim* ; Green, 1986a: 77 ; see Simhony, 1991a: 312-5 *passim*). Green argues that the device of a contract fails to properly convey the relation of the individual to society. In short, it denies the necessary social embeddedness of human agency. Furthermore, in doing this, he believes that the device contradicts Rousseau's use of "the general will" which Green rightly regards as the most important and powerful idea in Rousseau's social and political thought. He defines "the general will" as "an impartial and disinterested will for the common good" (Green, 1986a: 69) and as "that impalpable congeries of the hopes and fears of a people bound together common interests and sympathy" (Green, 1986a: 86). This implies a significant connection to Green's own idea of "the common good" (in Green's mind at the very least).

Despite these definitions, "the general will" is a notoriously vague concept. Nevertheless, its relationship to the idea of "a culture" is clear in this context. For both Rousseau and Green, a true community possesses a "common *ego*, ... life and ... will." (Rousseau, 1968: 61, emphasis in original) Its culture is a living and relatively unified network of epistemic concepts and normative judgements and beliefs. As was noted earlier, these norms and beliefs define the agent's identity. Only when the culture facilitates the agent's manifestation as a true citizen - by encouraging him to follow the general will and so to live for the common good - will he act in accordance with his 'higher self'. In this case, Rousseau argues that in moving from a natural to a civil condition, the agent incurs certain losses and gains (Rousseau, 1968: 64-5). He loses "natural freedom" - the freedom to keep whatever he has the physical ability to acquire and defend. However, he gains "civil freedom" which means legal protection of his possessions (i.e. they become his property). Crucially, he gains "moral freedom", "which alone makes man the master of himself ; for to be governed by appetite alone is slavery, while obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself is freedom." (Rousseau, 1968: 65) The general will then is such "a law one prescribes to oneself" in the important sense that it expresses the essence of the individual as a member of a particular community from which he gains a sense of personal identity. It has moral primacy over the 'wayward' desires (which the agent experiences whether or not he is in

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<sup>12</sup> For two differing views of the relationships between Rousseau, Green and the general will, see Muirhead, 1924a-c and Monro, 1951. The former focuses upon the British Idealists, including Green.

society).<sup>13</sup>

So far the discussion has been concerned with the formal aspects of “a common good”. Rousseau’s concept of moral freedom marks the movement to the distinguishing characteristics of the Common Good.

Rousseau’s idea of moral freedom, like that of the general will, was developed by Kant and inherited by Green. Indeed, it is so important that Green founds his ethical and political thought upon the Kantian imperative “Act so as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end, never merely as a means.” (Green, 1906: 214 ; Kant, 1964: 428-9) This forms the justificatory basis of all valid moral principles. They must conform to a universal moral law which properly respects the capacity for rational agency of all persons (Green, 1906: 196). This insistence appears strange at first given that Green stresses the contextuality of consciousness so forcefully throughout his writings. What is so special about the categorical imperative to respect humanity (sc. rationality)? As will be shown now, the crucial idea is that social relations can only occur between persons.

For Kant, the good will is the highest expression of man’s moral freedom:

Only a rational being has the power to act *in accordance with his idea* of laws - that is, in accordance with principles - and only so has he a *will*. Since *reason* is required in order to derive actions from laws, the will is nothing but practical reason. (Kant, 1964: 412, emphasis in original)

The categorical imperative (in the formulation given above) requires all rational agents to show respect in practice for humanity (sc. rationality) as an end in itself. This requirement leads Kant (like Green) to conclude that the perfect society is “a Kingdom of Ends” (Kant, 1964: 433-4):

there arises a systematic union of rational beings under common objective

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<sup>13</sup> However, no human is perfect. Green recognises that the individual may not follow truly the general will because of his error in gauging what it requires in the particular instance, just as Rousseau did himself. Mysteriously, Lewis seems to deny that he did so (Lewis, 1962b: 112-3).

laws - that is, a kingdom. Since these laws are directed precisely to the relation of such beings to one another as ends and means, this kingdom can be called a kingdom of ends (which is admittedly only an Ideal). (Kant, 1964: 433)

It is significant that at this stage in Kant's argument, this is a formal Ideal only. It is the purely abstract structure of the perfect society. Even so, it is still clearly founded on the idea of the moral equality of all rational beings. Despite its formality, it does entail some more substantive claims even at this stage. Hence, the kingdom of ends links in with Rousseau's idea of "general will" through Kant's argument that members of a kingdom of ends have a common motivation and that is to act out of reverence for duty (Kant, 1964: 434-6). Only by acting in accordance with such a norm can a rational agent show proper recognition of "the dignity of virtue" and only in this way can they express their highest nature as rational beings. Indeed, when Kant details the system which (erroneously) he believes to be the political embodiment of the kingdom of ends, he explicitly refers to the law (in the legal sense) as "the pronouncement of the general will" (Kant, 1991b: 75).

The concept of "the kingdom of ends" is clearly central for Green:

perfect morality, [is realised as] the ideal of a society in which every one shall treat every one else as his neighbour - in which to every rational agent the well-being or perfection of every other such agent shall be included in that perfection of himself for which he lives. (Green, 1986e: 205)

This passage establishes that Green shares Kant's belief that the individual is the foundational moral unit and deserves respect as such (see de Burgh, 1938: 273). Indeed, Green even argues that this "is almost an axiom of popular Ethics ... [W]hen we are free from private bias, we do not seriously dispute its validity." (Green, 1906: 206) All sane adults in Christendom are recognised as having a valid claim to possess the same basic rights (Green, 1906: 280). For example, normally, "the free enjoyment and disposal of the fruits of his labour, is guaranteed to every one, on condition of his respecting the like freedom in others." (Green, 1906: 210) This optimism may seem strange given Green's awareness of oppression in his own society which is evidenced by his work to combat the disadvantaged place of, for example, women and the poor (see Anderson, 1991 ; Green, 1906: 263).

However, his point is that, as an empirical fact, “the higher moral culture of Christendom” (Green, 1906: 354) recognises all humans should be accorded the same basic rights (Green, 1906: 210). He argues that in the late Victorian age, respect for the idea if not the practice of the fundamental moral equality of all human beings is overridden really only in times of war.

The different strands of this derivation of the Common Good must be brought out. Green argues that social interaction can only occur between persons with certain potentials to realise and these are potentials which have primary moral value. As social relationships presuppose the agency of those between whom the relationships exist, any interaction which fails to fully recognise this agency - such as that which occurs between a master and a slave (Green, 1906: 176) - must be imperfect for humans and hence must ultimately be unsatisfying given the demands for coherence inherent within the human essence. This should be clear from the sketch which has been given of Hegel’s phenomenology and Kant’s kingdom of ends. It means that truly satisfying social relationships must be based upon the Common Good. Necessarily, this entails self-conscious, full and mutual practical respect between persons (Green, 1906: 245, 270 ; Green, 1986b: 199-200).

The fact that humans are *imperfect* expressions of their essence means that no one individual can become all that he has in him to become. No one human can realise all of their truly human potentials (Green, 1906: 183, 191, 256, 273, 286, 309, 377 ; see Gaus, 1983: 54-74 *passim* ; Nicholson, 1990: 271n18). However, in a vibrant and diverse culture, the individual member is far more likely to become aware of other virtues than the ones which they themselves currently exercise. In this way, a diverse culture benefits all of its members (Gaus, 1983: 19-21 ; Nicholson, 1990: 126 ; Gaus, 1994: 418-20). This idea fits in well with Green’s comment in his manuscripts that “[a] rational life is not a uniformity but a harmony.” (MS4)

Less abstractly, what is needed is a culture of cooperation for mutual moral improvement. Such a culture will be one in which each member helps his fellows to make the best of themselves - to realise their true good and so become truly or positively free. In Raz’s phrase, the Common Good is an “inherent public good”. (Raz, 1984: 187 ; see also Bellamy, 1992b: 283) Such a culture is too ephemeral and fragile to be directly created or maintained just as one cannot directly create an atmosphere at a party or in a theatre. Yet, in spite of the fact that it cannot be commanded, it can be indirectly encouraged. Each citizen performing his particular duties for duty’s sake encourages others to do the same and

so tends to promote (as well as actually expressing a particular aspect of) Green's conception of the kingdom of ends.

However, human imperfection means that the kingdom of ends "is admittedly only an Ideal" (Kant, 1964: 433). Remembering that Green (like Rousseau) emphasizes every community must possess a general will, it can be seen that some common goods (without capitalization) will be worth more than others. The more valuable ones are those which more adequately give practical recognition and respect to moral agents as persons. In other words, they are the ones which more fully embody the Common Good.

## **6. The Non-Competitiveness of the Common Good.**

Before going any further, two important objections to Green's claim that the true good is an inherently shared good must be considered. One relates to the existence of competitive social forms and material scarcity and the other stems from the existence of value pluralism. Milne (like many others) has argued that Green fails to grasp the importance of the effect of finitude on an ethics of self-realization.<sup>14</sup> "Resources are limited and the opportunities for the development of gifts and capacities are finite. Not everyone who has the ability can become a first violinist in a symphony orchestra or a university teacher." (Milne, 1986: 69) This may be a purely empirical point - i.e. that as a matter of fact there are insufficient resources for everyone to become fully self-realized and therefore competition for these resources becomes inevitable. If this is the objection, then Green's theory remains intact. His point is, firstly, that in such a circumstance, no one could ever be completely self-realized, although some may be nearer to perfection than others. Secondly, once a minimum level of property has been secured for everyone, the existence of inequalities does not inhibit self-realisation to the extent Milne alleges. This is because in essence the true good is a moral and not a material condition (see Vincent et al, 184: 24-6; Nicholson, 1987: 120-2, 195-6).<sup>15</sup>

However, Milne's claim may be slightly different. He could be arguing that some

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<sup>14</sup> Milne, 1967: 328-9 ; Milne, 1986: 69-70 ; see also Sidgwick, 1902a: 67-9, 106 ; Sidgwick, 1902b: 260 ; Rashdall, 1924: II. 98-101 ; Carritt, 1928: 61-2 ; Lewis, 1962a: esp. 98-104 *passim* ; Lewis, 1962b: 129-30 ; Kemp, 1972 : 238-9 ; Cacoullos, 1974: 120-2, 133-44 *passim* ; Smith, 1981 : 200-1 ; Bellamy, 1990b: 141-2 ; Hurka, 1993: 67; but see Fairbrother, 1900: 178, 184-6 ; Barbour, 1908 ; Gaus, 1983: 68-74 *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Bellamy denies this in Bellamy, 1990b: 141.



social forms (or states of being) are inherently competitive and so anyone who chooses to develop himself by engaging in them must compete with other people. The role of 'first violin' is one example of an inherently competitive social form or state of being as is 'being the richest person in the world' or 'being the most powerful person'. All of these forms are intelligible only on the presupposition that other people exist who are, for example, the second violin or poorer or less powerful. Yet, even this attack fails because on Green's logic such options must be imperfect modes of expressing the human essence. They cannot form part of a perfect community of ends. This claim has radical implications for Green's moral and political thought which even Green himself does not seem to understand fully. These implications will be brought out when the discussion turns to his conception of property rights in chapter six.

Milne's objection from finitude would only invalidate Green's claim that the true good is a common good if he (Milne) could establish that some aspect of the true good was inherently competitive and furthermore that this inherent competitiveness was part of the very essence of this aspect of the true good (see Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 57). It is not enough to establish that, given the empirical conditions of the world as it is or ever could be, the particular and necessary aspect of the true good could never be expressed in any mode of living which was to any degree inherently uncompetitive. This would only establish something which Green frequently insists upon - that our world and we ourselves are doomed to imperfection for all time. We are manifestations of the spiritual principle in a physical world and in animal form.

However, Milne does not establish that the very idea of the true good is necessarily competitive. Indeed, he does not even come close to attempting to do so. Consequently, his criticism of what he labels Green's "metaphysical morality of the true good" - in essence, the eternal consciousness - falls apart. This failure is pivotal in the context of Milne's paper given that he rests his subsequent arguments upon it (Milne, 1986: 70-5).

This is a crucial point. It is certainly true that we live in an imperfect world. Also, the world's material resources, though vast, are so poorly distributed that many people lack the means which Aristotle, Green and many others recognise are a precondition of human development. As a result, there is competition between people for many reasons, including to gain the means to secure personal moral development. Nevertheless, it is clear and important that Green's conception of the true good as conceptually-non-competitive is not refuted by any of this. Indeed, in itself such inequality (sc. scarcity) is simply not relevant

at a philosophical level. The true good (sc. the Common Good) is still inherently non-competitive as it remains the case that it can only be realized through cooperation and community. Indeed, the immorality of material scarcity is heightened by this very non-competitiveness. The immorality arises from the very clash between the non-competitiveness of the true good and the existence of material scarcity. If moral progress did not require the agent to perform non-competitive actions, then the rivalry for scarce material resources would be far less important. These problems are further heightened by Green's eudaemonism, as Nicholson argues (Nicholson, 1990: 80-2). Yet, none of this alters the fact that the ideal remains inherently non-competitive.

This brings us to Isaiah Berlin's claim that certain key values inevitably conflict with each other. His contention has received a widespread acceptance.<sup>16</sup> The thought is, "[t]hat we cannot have everything is a necessary, not a contingent truth." (Berlin, 1969b: 170). Nevertheless, this inevitability is not something which Green accepts *at the level of the ideal* (Green, 1906: 322-9 *passim*). It is fundamental to his position that, when correctly perceived, true values and virtues form a harmonious system with each other (e.g. Green, 1906: 251-2). There would be no irredeemable conflicts of value if human beings could be perfected.

Berlin gives two arguments in support of his position. Firstly, the belief that ultimately there is one fully coherent (metaphysical) order of values has been "responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals" (Berlin, 1969b: 167). However, clearly this is a merely pragmatic reason for believing in value pluralism. It has no truly philosophical purchase and so can be disregarded here.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, there is the empirical fact of value pluralism (Berlin, 1969b: 171-2). Now, one must question the epistemic and normative status of this fact. Berlin assumes that its existence in itself goes a long way to discrediting a monistic view such as Green's. However, why should the fact that values conflict in practice make us believe that it is "a necessary, and not a contingent truth" (Berlin, 1969b: 170) that they always will?

Green accepts that we do experience conflicts between values now, in precisely the

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<sup>16</sup> Berlin, 1969b: 167-75 ; de Burgh, 1938: 210 ; Lewis, 1962a *passim* ; Lewis, 1962b: 129-30 ; MacCallum, 1966-7; Kemp, 1972: 238, 239 ; Gray, 1980 ; Wempe, 1986: 283-9 *passim* ; Bellamy, 1990b: 140 ; Nicholson, 1990: 125-6, 270n15.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to argue that there is not a very good pragmatic case for value pluralism to be treated as a 'permanent' truth in practice.

same manner that Berlin argues. Given the way in which these values are currently defined, this may always be the case. Our moral judgements are, and will forever be, imperfect. To clarify this point, we must draw out Green's logic here. Very crudely, imperfections will usually have one of two causes (Green, 1889c: 25-6). Firstly, the concepts we use do articulate values which a perfect being would find similarly valuable, however, they articulate them in an inadequate (sc. incomplete and/or confused) way. Adopting Kantian terminology - the analytic and synthetic judgements are confused. Human development would remove more and more of these conceptual imperfections. Secondly, concepts may be adequate in their individual definitions, but their normative significances are imperfectly recognised. In other words, the analytic judgements are fine, but the (normative) synthetic judgements are skewed. For example, we value freedom from external impediment to the wrong degree or in the wrong manner. Human moral development, on this reading, requires these deficiencies to be overcome and not simply accepted as necessarily permanent imperfections. Still, we may never achieve perfection.

Berlin favours what he labels (rather misleadingly<sup>18</sup>) an "empirical view of politics" and he argues that Green favours a "metaphysical" view. There is simply no proof of one approach over the other which does not ultimately beg the question.

Despite this, one must ask what reasons Green has for favouring the claim that there is an ultimate harmony of values given the ample evidence of conflicts in our present world? (see also Barbour, 1911: 122-34) Why should we believe that all values ultimately form a fully coherent system in the manner which Berlin and others so strenuously and famously deny? Green's position is logically entailed by his ontology of human existence. It will be remembered from the first chapter in particular that for Green the eternal consciousness is inherently harmonious. All of its elements interrelate to form a coherent whole. These elements are not merely epistemic but concern normative matters also, as chapter two showed. It is for this reason that ultimately, there can be no incompatible values whether they relate to the good life or right (Green, 1906: 252). Green is indebted to Plato and Aristotle here (Green, 1906: 251-2). He quotes Aristotle from his *Nicomachean Ethics*

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<sup>18</sup> These labels are misleading because every empirical judgement must rest upon some metaphysical presuppositions, no matter how vague and confused they are, and no matter how little the person making the judgement attends to them (if indeed he does so at all). Similarly, Green's metaphysical theory is an *a priori* judgement in the sense that it is derived from an analysis of experience as was established in the first chapter of this thesis.

which A C Bradley translates as “Desire for what is beautiful or noble ; this is the common characteristic of all the virtues.” (Green, 1906: 252n1)

From this, it may appear that in a society of perfected individuals, no two goals will conflict even if they are goals of two different people. Unfortunately, the situation is not that simple. Even Green himself failed to recognise this. It has been established that the human essence is actualised in different ways depending on the nature of the socialisation undergone by the particular individual. The form is the same and yet its manifestations differ. This creates the possibility that the different manifestations may clash even though they represent essentially the same thing. There can be idiosyncratic ways of life which still express our higher natures almost perfectly. (Such a problem will tend to be most acute in a multicultural society.) Still, it cannot be the *perfect* situation as it necessarily implies disharmony and disharmony cannot be present within the ideal.

This analysis goes a long way towards disproving Bellamy’s claim that the coherence of Green’s argument that personal development arises from unconstrained action by individual moral agents for a common good “rested upon a putative harmony between all such attempts which must be regarded as over-optimistic and which hence vitiated the workability of his ideas.” (Bellamy, 1990b: 140)

In practice, the distance between Green and Berlin is not as great as it may first appear. As has been emphasized repeatedly throughout this thesis, Green accepts that, as human beings, we are condemned to imperfection for all of our (physical) lives (Green, 1986e: 183 ; Barbour, 1911: 104) and his position anticipates Berlin’s claim when dealing with an imperfect world. Given the unalterable conditions of human life, values will always conflict to some degree. Green himself was a principled pragmatist in his practical political activities. The closeness of his position to Berlin’s is indicated by the fact that both philosophers would agree that:

To demand more than [value pluralism] is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need ; but to allow it to determine one’s practice is a symptom of an equally deep and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity. (Berlin, 1969b: 172)

It bears stating once again that the unavoidability of human imperfection does not undermine Green’s ethical and political thought. Indeed, if man were not imperfect, there would be no need of morality or politics.

## 7. The Substance of the Common Good: Citizenship and Public Service.

The conviction of a community of good for all men can never be really harmonised with our notions of what is good, so long as anything else than self-devotion to an ideal of mutual service is the end by reference to which those notions are formed. (Green, 1986e: 244)

Moving from the abstract to the substantive moment of the permanent good, it can be easily established that there is simply no weight to Germino's claim that "it is doubtful that [Green] possessed any real concept of community at all. His 'independent,' self-governing man is ultimately too absorbed in his own personal problems and possessions to become fully involved with those of others." (Germino, 1972: 269-70) An indispensable aspect of Green's position is that a man is only properly self-governing when he freely seeks to help others. In other words, the moral agent finds his abiding satisfaction in the attainment of "a good not private to the man himself, but good for him as a member of a community." (Green, 1906: 232)

For example, in his manuscripts Green writes:

Consider [the] life of a healthy peasant. He is interested in his parents, on whom to begin with, he is physically dependent, and in whom, in virtue of his self-conscious nature, his interest does not cease as it seems to do with other animals when [the] period of physical dependency is over. They become involved in the self in w[hic]h he is interested, so that he cannot detach himself in thought fr[om] them, tho' no appetite connects him with them. Then he forms new ties - if no other, those implied in becoming a father, so that the self w[hic]h he presents to himself as {the best} for the future is considered by [his] relations to [his] children. To live for himself means to live for them. (MS9, sheet 2 RLN ; words in { } are not fully legible)

By acting as a "citizen" (broadly conceived), the agent actualises his highest nature. And it is in this sense that "citizenship only gives that self-respect which is the true basis of respect for others, and without which there is no lasting social order or real morality." (Nettleship,

1889: cxii) More specifically, Green portrays his conception of the Common Good as a particular set of shared interests:

[These are not merely] interests dependent on other persons for the means to their gratification, but interests in the good of those other persons - interests which cannot be satisfied without the consciousness that those other persons are satisfied. The man cannot contemplate himself as in a better state, or on the way to the best, without contemplating others, not merely as a means to that better state, but as sharing it with him. (Green, 1986e: 199)

This translates - *in the majority of Green's writings at least* - into an ethic of public service and hence citizenship with the latter being understood, in Himmelfarb's words, "as much [as] a moral as a political condition" (Himmelfarb, 1991: 236) (see also Green, 1986a: 121-3 ; Richter, 1964: esp. 344-76 *passim*). As has been stated, this is a recurring theme of his writings and public speeches. For example, in a speech to the Wesleyan Boy's School in Oxford he emphasized that "The object of going to school was not to win prizes, but to gain knowledge and become active, and useful members of society."<sup>19</sup> On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1879 he gave a speech at the Liberal Hall, Abingdon entitled "National Loss and Gain under a Conservative Government." In a passage highly reminiscent of one of his great heroes, John Bright<sup>20</sup>, Green distinguishes between "a false patriotism and a true":

False patriot is a man who clamours for display of national strength without considering whether cause in which strength is to be displayed is just or no. Who seeks to gratify a passion for excitement by calling for wars, in which he will not shed his blood, without considering the effect on the permanent good of his nation. True patriot is man who will sacrifice ... to serve his nation not merely in war, ... but by making the people more virtuous and

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<sup>19</sup> As reported in the *Oxford Chronicle*, 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1874. Speech given on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1874.

<sup>20</sup> See Harvie, 1976: 113. Also, see John Bright's speech in Birmingham, October 29<sup>th</sup> 1858 which particularly inspired Green (Nettleship, 1889: xx-xxiv), printed in Bright, 1869: 466-79, especially p. 478

content, and therefore greater and stronger with only true greatness and strength. Those who talk most about patriotism not best patriots.<sup>21</sup>

True patriots seek to help *people* rather than simply to maintain the dignity of a (mythical) ‘transcendent’ nation because

the life of the nation has no real existence except as the life of the individuals composing the nation - a life determined by their intercourse with each other - and deriving its peculiar features from the conditions of that intercourse.  
(Green, 1986e: 184)

Hence, “[o]ur ultimate standard of worth is an ideal of *personal* worth. All other values are relative to value for, of, or in a person.” (Green, 1906: 184, emphasis in original)

Similarly, he rejects the impersonal and transcendent aspect of some views of Humanity. Moral action and moral progress do not occur “in some impersonal Humanity” (Green, 1906: 181). The individual’s duty is to all men which is a duty to particular people and not to an abstract idea of “Humanity”. Green is well aware that talk of the duty to humanity is often an attempt to mask insincere or romantically vague thoughts about morality (Green, 1906: 215). Consequently, he stresses that for it to have real hold on our lives, there must be a determinate expression of what duty requires of particular persons in the form of actual social norms and practices (Green, 1986a: 89-90). This requirement is frequently missed by those who call for respect to be paid to an impersonal Humanity. Hence, in an undergraduate essay entitled “National Life”, Green writes “Let the flag of England be dragged through the dirt rather than sixpence be added to the taxes which weigh on the poor.” (quoted in Nettleship, 1889: xx-xxi) This “better patriotism” only comes through active participation “in service of the state” (Green, 1986a: 122) and - as part of the Common Good - benefits the helped, the helper and society as a whole (Himmelfarb, 1991: 204-5).

Green argues that this idea of a duty to a personal Humanity does have real purchase with most people in his contemporary society (Green, 1986a: 89-90). It does form the basic intuition of their moral judgements and of the social institutions which form and reflect such

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<sup>21</sup> Green’s MS notes for this speech are in his papers. Also, see Green, 1986g.

judgements. This belief is supported by the evidence. Green's call for active citizenship was one source of the attraction which Green's ethical thought held for his followers, as comes through clearly in, for example, Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (where Green is represented by Mr. Grey) and in the writings of Henry Scott Holland.<sup>22</sup> Before Green's teaching "we had lost all touch with the Ideals of life in Community" wrote Scott Holland,:

... Then at last the walls began to break. ... Philosophically the change in Oxford thought and temper came about mainly through the overpowering influence of T H Green. ... He gave us back the language of self-sacrifice, and taught us how we belonged to one another in the one life of high idealism. We took life from him at its spiritual value. And then we were startled and kindled by seeing this great intellectual teacher gave himself over to civic duties, and take up personally the obligations of citizenship, and work for poor despised Oxford City. This had an immense practical effect on us.<sup>23</sup>

The Common Good signifies the need to work for "a common well-being" then (Green, 1906: 232). This translates into the development of the character of the citizen's fellows:

An interest has arisen, over and above that in keeping the members of a family or tribe alive, in rendering them persons of a certain kind ; in forming in them certain qualities, not as a means to anything ulterior which the possession of these qualities might bring about, but simply for the sake of that possession; in inducing in them habits of action on account of the intrinsic value of those habits, as forms of activity in which man achieves

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<sup>22</sup> See also MacCunn, 1907: 213-66 ; Barbour, 1911: 125, 137, 394, 400 ; MacKenzie, 1929: 391-4. There are many differing histories here. For a fascinating account of the ethical movements which Green inspired, see MacKillop, 1986. For various other assessments of Green's influence in other areas see, for example, Nettleship, 1889 ; Bryce, 1903 ; Chin, 1920: 125-45 ; Ulam, 1951: 62-71 ; Richter, 1966: *passim* ; Jenks, 1977 ; Freedon, 1978: 16-9, 55-6 ; Gordon et al, 1979: *passim* ; Inglis, 1982: 26-8 ; Greenleaf, 1983: 137-41 ; Vincent et al, 1984, *passim* ; Kloppenberg, 1986: 30-4 ; Anderson, 1991 ; Himmelfarb, 1991: 247-62 *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Scott Holland, *Lombard Street in Lent*, quoted in Carpenter, 1959: 483-4.



what he has it in him to achieve and so far satisfies himself. (Green, 1986e: 243)

Hoover's claim - also made by Freeden - that for Green "the communal remains in the abstract world of consciousness, rather than in the real world of political behaviour" (Hoover, 1973: 562 ; Freeden, 1978: 57) is unsupportable. Kloppenberg is right to emphasize that Green's ethics "begins and ends in praxis." (Kloppenber, 1986: 142) Apart from his own personal crusade for temperance, land, education and electoral reform, Green gives many other examples of actions for a common good.<sup>24</sup> For instance, he argues that in his own society fulfilling one's role in ensuring "the welfare of a family ... has probably had the largest share in filling up the idea of [the] true and permanent good." (Green, 1906: 229) Also, he gives the examples of life as part of a "nation, of a state or a church" (Green, 1906: 232) and of helping in "the sanitation of a town." (Green, 1906: 229) Also, he refers to a person's need "to get A.B. to leave of drinking" as "a troublesome moral duty of benevolence to his neighbour." (Green, 1986a: 118)

Ultimately, however, one can only give content to the idea of acting "in service of the state" when one is actually faced with a concrete moral situation. In his own discussion of the ethical ideal, Green stresses the virtues of fortitude, temperance and self-denial (Green, 1906: 258-78 ; see also Turner, 1981: 358-65). His analysis takes its cue from the Greeks - in particular, Plato and Aristotle. However, he is too aware of the contextual nature of human thought to believe that the Socratic analysis is perfect or even adequate for his own time. Here, Green agrees with Hegel (Hegel, 1959: 233-77). As Green puts it, "the true good presents itself to men under new forms." (Green, 1906: 257) The virtues of his own society were (often subtly) different to those valued by the Greeks (see Irwin, 1992). Similarly, the virtues of the late twentieth century Britain will be different from those of Green's society.

Thus far, Green's emphasis has been on direct public service. One reason for this is his belief that the good consequences of any particular action are solely the result of the good intentions of the agents involved (even if overall these agents proceed from evil motives) (Green, 1906: 295 ; Green, 1986a: 104, 106). He gives the example of the leader

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Green, 1885b: 4 ; 1889e ; 1889q *passim* ; 1889r ; 1889s ; 1889t ; 1906: esp. 154-382 *passim* ; 1986a: 148-246 *passim* ; 1986b ; see also Nettleship, 1889: *passim* ; Muirhead, 1908: 7-8, 81-113 *passim* ; Richter, 1964: 344-76.

of a political movement who acts out of selfish motives rather than for duty's sake. He concludes that:

The good in the effect of the movement will really correspond to the degree of good will which has been exerted in bringing it about ; and the effects of any selfishness in its promoters will appear in some limitation to the good which it brings to society. (Green, 1906: 295 ; see also Green, 1986a: 127-31)

However, Green does not hold to this position unambiguously. Disinterested citizenship is not the only progressive force which he identifies and this creates problems of inconsistencies within his writings. For example, there is an interesting and highly significant passage in his lectures on Kant's ethics which clearly shows how close his conception of public service comes at times to the thought of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. All three argue that human actions can have unintended beneficial consequences. In Smith's case, narrowly self-interested actions tend to bring economic benefits to everyone through the action of the "invisible hand". In the case of Mill, a situation in which each individual is allowed to be an eccentric fosters the maximisation of human capacities in all their diversity throughout the society. In a similar vein, Green writes:

a man may be living for objects in the effort after which he takes no positive thought for the good of others, without being therefore selfish. An artist or man of science, who 'lives for his work' without troubling himself with philanthropy, is yet not living for an object merely private to himself. His special interest may be shared by no one, but the work which results from it, the machine constructed, the picture painted, the minute step forward in knowledge, i.e. the man's good as attained, is a good for which others are the better (Green, 1890a: 123 ; see also Green, 1986a: 163)

As well as Smith and Mill, this passage has affinities with Hegel's "cunning of reason" (Hegel, 1959: 20-37). Reason is cunning for Hegel in the sense that the actions of agents have consequences which on the one hand push human life in general to develop, whilst on the other hand bringing the downfall of the agents themselves - "it sets the

passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty, and suffers loss.” (Hegel, 1959: 33) For example, violence, especially in war, often brings progress in unforeseen ways. This leads Hegel to characterize “History as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized.” (Hegel, 1959: 21). *Usually*, Green is not so pessimistic. *Usually*, he does not argue that - of necessity - History victimizes the virtue of its agents and to this extent Cowling is incorrect when he argues that “Green ... has a fully Hegelian sense of the deviousness of all social action.” (Cowling, 1965: 150) However, at one point in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, Green does claim that,

It may be that, according to the divine scheme of the world, such wrong-doing [as occurs in and as the result of war] is an element in a process by which men gradually approximate more nearly to good (in the sense of a good will). We cannot think of God as a moral being without supposing this to be the case. (Green, 1986a: 163)

However, he differs from Hegel in the strength of his pity for the victims of conflict. Green’s thought seems to be that a truly good Creator must give back some net benefit to compensate for the suffering caused by war. This is one point where Green’s religious faith and optimism overwhelms his good sense.

The “invisible hand” passage from the *Lectures on Kant* which was quoted a little earlier has been noticed by other commentators as well (e.g Greengarten, 1981: 42-3). However, although Greengarten does refer to it, he fails to recognise just how problematic it is in the context of Green’s more developed theory. Green’s two arguments concerning the status of ultimately beneficial actions do not fit together very easily. In adopting the ‘invisible hand’ approach, he accepts that agents may unintentionally promote human well-being. However, with the ‘good intentions’ line which justifies citizenship, he argues that there must always be some motive to do good for good consequences to follow. In this way, the latter claim excludes the former. Which line should be favoured? The second is Green’s later thought and the one which best accords with the argument that he values public service understood in any very straightforward sense. Nevertheless, it is far less satisfactory than the first argument at the philosophical level, although at least one commentator has accepted the idea (MacKenzie, 1929: 355n1). The claim that only good

motives have good consequences is, as Bertrand Russell puts it in the marginalia of his copy of the *Prolegomena to Ethics*, simply an “arbitrary assumption”.<sup>25</sup> Sidgwick makes the same judgement as Russell (Sidgwick, 1902a: 46 ; as do Fairbrother, 1900: 178 ; O’Sullivan, 1987: 167-8).

The other approach - ‘the invisible hand’ argument - is more plausible when it comes to explaining some if not all social improvements. It can easily be understood as pursuing some form of common good. Yet, the idea that actions can be good - can be for the Common Good - without intending to be so does not fit easily with Green’s endorsement of the Kantian requirement to act out of reverence for the moral law.<sup>26</sup> To be consistent with the remainder of his ethics then, Green’s conception of public service must include the requirement that the citizen is determined to action by the very idea of duty in itself. This means that the structure of his argument logically commits him to the conclusion that the action of an artist or scientist “who ‘lives for his work’” (Green, 1890a: 123) cannot ultimately be of moral value in any straightforward sense. If public service has true ethical worth, it must be performed out of reverence for the moral law.

Green’s conception of “the Common Good” has also been attacked in a different way. It has been argued that this Evangelical strand of Victorian thought undervalues the pursuit of what are on at least one level purely private goals as a means of self-development and hence as a personal duty (Richter, 1964: 129-35 ; Hammond, n.d.: 207-8). Counter to this objection, both Nicholson and Gaus point out that Green does include some types of purely personal development in his conception of the Common Good (Green, 1906: 290, 370-1, 380-1 ; Nicholson, 1990: 81 ; Gaus, 1994: 417). This more sympathetic reading is not implausible, given that Green focuses upon the concept of “eudaimonia” which he defines as “the full exercise or realisation of the soul’s faculties in accordance with its proper excellence, which was an excellence of thought, speculative and practical.” (Green, 1906: 254) However, his treatment remains ambiguous and his acceptance of the intrinsic value

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<sup>25</sup> Russell’s copy is a third edition (i.e. 1890) and is held in the Special Collection of the J B Morrell Library at the University of York. It is signed ‘B Russell. Trin. Coll. Camb.. July 1893’. For other interesting views on this claim of Green’s, see Lamont, 1934: 208-11 ; Lewis, 1948: 30-3 ; Lewis, 1962b: 129-9 *passim*. In his hurry to condemn Bosanquet for committing this error, Hobhouse implies that Green does not argue this as well (Hobhouse, 1918: 17-8).

<sup>26</sup> Kant himself was clear that moral development can result from non-good actions as his writings on history show (e.g. Kant, 1991a). Also, see O’Sullivan, 1987: 157-8.

of these goals does appear reluctant on the few occasions when he does give it, as can be shown now (see also Lewis, 1948: 41-7).

Looking at the ‘artist and scientist’ passage quoted earlier, it appears that ultimately Green portrays their efforts as having true value only when they are understood to help the other people. Elsewhere, he repeats this argument even more forcefully (Green, 1906: 370). He argues that it is only as the artist or scientist conceives of his personal development as having some wider social benefit that he can gain the highest degree of true and permanent self-satisfaction. He considers the duty of the musician in times of social and political instability. He concludes that the question which must be asked when assessing the correct course of action is “[h]as he [i.e. the musician] talent to serve mankind - to contribute to the perfection of the human soul - more as a musician than in any other way? Only if he has will he be justified in making music his main pursuit.” (Green, 1906: 381) This implies that the highest worth of personal development for the citizen is found in his contribution to the development of the human race (also Green, 1986e: 270). The truly moral agent must ask:

‘Does this or that law or usage, this or that course of action - directly or indirectly, positively or as preventive of the opposite - contribute to the better being of society, as measured by the more general establishment of conditions favourable to the attainment of the recognised virtues and excellences, by the more general attainment of those excellences in some degree, or by their attainment on the part of some persons in higher degree without detracting from the opportunities of others?’ (Green, 1906: 371, slightly misquoting himself from Green, 1906: 354)

In part, Green makes little of the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding potentials because of his belief that developing one’s own talents necessarily entails developing the talents of everyone with whom one identifies one’s being. At a certain level, this is perfectly understandable given the strength and depth of human social embeddedness in Green’s thought. All potentials require articulation in order to be pursuable by the agent. To articulate anything, one must have a conceptual framework and this presupposes socialisation and social living, as was established at the very beginning of this chapter. Nonetheless, one can accept all of this without supporting the further substantive claim that the moral agent can *only* actualise his true good by performing his role

as a citizen - in other words, by directly aiming to realise the highest potentials of all other members of his social groupings.

If this is indeed what Green is arguing, then Richard Bellamy is correct to portray the Common Good entailing as the identification of “self-realisation with self-determination, and both with self-abnegation”<sup>27</sup> in the sense that only the individual’s capacities for helping others are given proper recognition by Green’s theory. Other idealists have noticed this problem as well (Bosanquet, 1927b: 174-81). Indeed, if this truly is Green’s position, he is not being honest enough to his Kantian and Hegelian roots which were set out in the preceding section of this chapter (see also Barbour, 1908: *passim* ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 56-7 ; Gaus, 1983: 105). The ideal community is a community of fully developed rational beings - a Kingdom of Ends. Therefore, it is based upon mutual recognition between fully developed agents. Only when everyone is and is understood to be fully developed and morally equal can anyone gain full positive freedom. For this reason, it is a conceptual requirement that all members of this kingdom fully realise all of their truly human potentials. Consequently, the individual should seek to develop himself as well as other people. Bernard Bosanquet saw this clearly (Bosanquet, 1927b: 174-81 ; also see Nettleship, 1889: cxlvii-cxlix). The development of the agent’s character (the greater practical embodiment of his nature) requires him to perform actions which purely cultivate his own self as well as those actions which serve the development of other people. These are “inherent aspects of the whole, divergent only in finite application” (Bosanquet, 1927b: 176).

One of the most penetrating and persuasive discussions of this whole issue is presented by Peter Gordon and John White (Gordon et al, 1979: 32-5 ; also see Cacoullos, 1974: 116-8). They note the force of Green’s support for public service as the realising process of eudaemonic development, but argue that “Green puts more emphasis on the vocation of social reformer than on the vocation of scholar or artist only because of the age in which he lived” (Gordon et al, 1979: 35). They follow this by quoting the following passage from the *Prolegomena*:

It is no time to enjoy the pleasures of eye and ear, of search for knowledge, of friendly intercourse, of applauded speech or writing, while the mass of

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<sup>27</sup> Bellamy, 1992a: 92 ; see Green, 1889c: 37-8 ; Green, 1906: 302, 376-7, 380 ; also Richter, 1964: 255-9 ; Mabbott, 1967: 73n1 ; Germino, 1972: 266-7 ; O’Sullivan, 1987: 160-1 ; Simhony, 1993b: 234-7.

men whom we call our brethren, and whom we declare to be meant with us for eternal destinies, are left without the chance, which only the help of others can gain for them, of making themselves in act what in possibility we believe them to be. (Green, 1986e: 270 ; see also Green, 1906: 273-6)

Gordon and White recognise that in the end Green does not settle this matter unequivocally in the *Prolegomena* (Gordon et al, 1979: 273-6), however, they provide a very good analysis and important textual support for an interpretation of Green's position which stresses the miserable conditions in which many agents find themselves. On this view, it is simply self-indulgent and immoral (as well as ultimately self-defeating) to focus upon one's personal development when millions of people live in such wretched conditions. Green is stressing the importance of prioritizing the alleviation of misery over the purely personal development of those who are a lot more fortunate already.

## 8. Conceptual Confusion and Authoritarianism.

Several other objections have been made to Green's theory of the Common Good. Firstly, John Horton argues that Green's notion of the common good is "conceptually confused." (Horton, 1992: 75)<sup>28</sup> He writes:

Goods can be common in the sense that different people hold the same things to be valuable but they are not common in the sense that one person's good is the same as that of another. ... [Consequently,] Green fails to recognise the possibility of genuine conflict between an individual's personal interest or good and the common good. (Horton, 1992: 75-6)

Horton gives the example of health. This can be a 'common good' in the sense that many people wish to be healthy. However, as Horton recognises this is not the sense in which Green uses the phrase. Next, there can be "public goods" in the economic sense. Their

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<sup>28</sup> Attack made by Carritt, 1928: 61-4 ; Plamenatz, 1938: 29-33, 68-73 ; Prichard, e.g. 1949: 69-74 ; Richter, 1964: 254-9 *passim* as well. Also, see Cacoullos, 1974: 123-44 *passim*. For a reaction to Prichard specific formulation of this objection, see Nicholson, 1990: 64-7. Prichard's objection to Green's derivation of the common good is supported by Monson, 1954: 81-6. On Plamenatz's attack, see Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 93-9 *passim*.

provision is either conceptually or usually merely practically non-excludable and non-rival. One person's consumption does not noticeably affect the potential consumption of another and one cannot provide the good for one person without providing it for another *ceteris paribus*. Street-lighting and clean air are frequently given as examples. Again, Horton recognises that this is not the sense in which Green uses the term "common good". For Green, the common good is necessarily common. It is part of its very nature that it must be pursued by people as members of a group or more specifically of a community. For Green then "any apparent conflict between personal interest and the common good", as Horton notes, "must be illusory - the claim becomes a metaphysical one" (Horton, 1992: 76). However for Horton it is a claim "with some potentially sinister implications." (Horton, 1992: 76) In short, the individual could be 'forced to be free'.

Horton's argument has three stages then. Firstly, the claim that Green presents an incoherent view of the *common* good. Secondly, the claim that to sustain this view, Green must implicitly deny the possibility of any real conflict between the common good and the individual's true self-interest. Thirdly, this means that the individual's judgement about his own true good should be subordinated to that of his 'society'.

In responding to this argument, three issues are especially important. The first is that Green's whole idea of "a common good" is conceptually confused. The second is that of possible conflict between purely personal self-interest and the common good. The third is the allegation of potentially justifying authoritarianism. In response to the first issue, it can be seen that Horton misunderstands the nature of Green's conception of "the Common Good". A common good is common and a good in the sense that it is the practical embodiment of shared set of substantive normative judgements - in brief, a concrete, living culture. Furthermore, it has some substantive elements which Green believes are already evident - such as public service. As has been shown, such elements are "common" in the sense the citizen should direct his efforts to the development of others and in doing so he realises his own true good. This idea is certainly not conceptually confused.

Turning to the second objection, Horton argues that Green places too much emphasis upon public service. Achieving some private goals are of value independently of any role they play in the lives of other people. It may well be that the individual's consciousness requires determination by social norms and in this way it could be said that all goals are founded on a shared conception of the good. Yet, this does not mean that all goals must aim to secure a common good in the sense that Green uses the term. The whole



status of Green's adherence to the idea that securing the Common Good is the true goal of human action is thrown into question.

It should be apparent from the previous section that this attack rests upon an understandable misinterpretation of Green's conception of "the Common Good". Green objects to the pursuit of purely selfish development in the face of others' suffering. He does not object to self-cultivation *per se* and neither does he overlook it.

Horton's third criticism represents the latest formulation of Isaiah Berlin's famous charge that Green's theory is in danger of sanctioning what is in reality illegitimate repression of the individual by society. Answering Berlin simultaneously answers Horton. Berlin alleges that Green puts forward a "metaphysical doctrine of the two selves - the individual streams versus the social river in which they should be merged, a dualistic fallacy used too often to support a variety of despotisms." (Berlin, 1969a: xlix(n)) Similarly, Michael St. John Packe alleges Green held that "[a] man had no significance apart from the group or society of which he happened to be a part" (Packe, 1954: 403). From this, Packe concludes that "[t]he era of the beehive state was dawning, and the freedom of the individual was going out of fashion." (Packe, 1954: 526n8) Similar views have been supported by many other commentators.<sup>29</sup>

It must be admitted that Green's contention that public service forms a necessary part of the Common Good does indeed smack of collectivism at times. For example, in a speech to the Oxford Auxiliary of the UK Alliance on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1874, Green advocated fighting for stronger liquor legislation through the use of "a great social resolution which would be called the tyranny of the majority"<sup>30</sup>. This was not the only occasion upon which he expressed such thoughts publicly. Indeed, he used this sort of argument frequently, and especially when addressing issues of temperance and land reform and when attacking the Conservative Party.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, in the *Prolegomena*, he portrays

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, Sabine, 1915: 174-7 (but not Sabine, 1973: 638) ; Chin, 1920: 155-8 ; Laski, 1949 *passim* ; Ulam, 1951: 38-9, 69 ; Richter, 1964: 202-5, 224-5, 255-9 ; Greaves, 1966: 19 ; Germino, 1972: 266-7 ; Kemp, 1972: 236-7 ; Greenleaf, 1983: 29, 124-42 ; O'Sullivan, 1987: 182-3.

<sup>30</sup> As reported in the *Oxford Chronicle*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1874.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Green's speeches to the Oxford Reform League, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1867, reported in the *Oxford Chronicle* on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1867 ; the Oxford Auxiliary of the UK Alliance, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1877, reported in the *Oxford Chronicle* on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1877 ; public conference of the UK Alliance, reported in the *Oxford Chronicle* on 4<sup>th</sup> February

the ideal as “[t]he idea of a society of free and law-abiding persons, each his own master yet each his brother’s keeper” (Green, 1986e: 271). Even if he is merely being polemical in these cases, they do give ammunition to those who wish to portray him as a dangerous collectivist. What is more, his attitude towards nationalism and conquest may cause some disquiet. It is worth examining Green’s attitudes to these last two types of phenomenon for they highlight facets of his wider position which are crucial when exposing the error of the claim that his theory can potentially justify authoritarianism.

Green argues that the difficulties which face those who wish to promote a “community of all men” are of the same kind, but of different degree to those which beset the creation and maintenance of any community, whether it be “the family, the tribe, or the urban commonwealth” (Green, 1986e: 216 ; see Green, 1986a: 122, 157-75 *passim* ; Gibbins, 1992: *passim*):

The prime impediment, alike to the maintenance of the narrower and to the formation of wider fellowships, is selfishness : which we may describe provisionally ... as a preference of private pleasure to common good. (Green, 1986e: 216)

The essence of his argument is that selfishness manifests itself in ways which harm the stability of the particular social system in which the agent lives and that one way in which this selfishness is manifest is self-aggrandizement. Given the link between group membership and self-understanding, often the individual attempts to increase his own self-respect by belittling members of other groups. This manifests itself as - for example - the worst forms of nationalism and racism (Green, 1986a: 171-3). Hence, Green writes:

The effect of these has often been to make it seem a necessary incident of a man’s obligation to his own tribe or nation that he should deny obligations towards men of another tribe or nation. (Green, 1986e: 216)

However, he goes on to argue that nationalism can have beneficial consequences as well.

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1882 ; Oxford Liberal Associations, reported in the *Oxford Chronicle* on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1882. See also Green, 1986a: 118.

This is the dangerous move when trying to avoid offering a potential justification for authoritarianism. He argues that bringing together many peoples under a single legal system has often produced a sense of community between them. Certainly, he recognizes that all wars result from human error and he is highly sceptical of anyone who claims to be using conquest to further human moral development (Green, 1986a: 157-75, esp. 163-9). Yet, his argument does echo Hegel's controversial discussion of war (Hegel, 1967: 324-9, 334-9, 351R ; but see Routh, 1938 *passim*). Both philosophers claim that by living under the same system of rights and obligations, individuals come to share legal and moral standards - in short, to share a determinate common good. This process of unification is facilitated by the commonality of the source of the creation and maintenance of all societies - that is, by the universal possession of the form of the eternal consciousness (Green, 1906: 217). The interaction of people from different cultures tends to produce an adjustment of the various manifestations of human nature. The common basis of all societies helps to push man towards the ideal community and hence towards the possibility of a common human society based on mutual respect for men as individual human beings.

In response, it should be conceded that it is possible that conquest might encourage useful merging of some communities under certain circumstances.<sup>32</sup> However, unless one is very careful, it seems that this argument could be used as an intellectual support for coercive regimes such as apartheid-based South Africa and the former Soviet Union.

As a preliminary to exposing the error of this charge, it must be clarified exactly what is objectionable about conquest. From a liberal perspective, it is - crudely - the inherent disregard for the wishes of the governed. On the other hand, conquest is valuable if it brings people together in the sense of increasing the size of the community with which they identify themselves. With this in mind, it can now be established that the structure of Green's argument makes the allegation impossible to sustain for at least two reasons, of which stem from Green's often-overlooked adoption of relational rather than holistic organicism (see also Simhony, 1991a). In brief, the reasons are, firstly, - as has been shown already - Green insists upon the personal nature of moral worth and development, and attacks the idea of 'transcendent' moral progress. In other words, he rejects the idea of moral progress in entities such as 'the nation', 'the world-spirit' or God. His criticism of

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, it may occur more benignly as with the European Union at present. Green anticipates such an organisation in Green, 1986a: 119, 170, 174. Also, see Routh, 1938.

Hegel's theory of the State (simplistic as it is) highlights this point and so will be examined here. Secondly, Berlin's attack fails to take proper account of Green's insistence on the moral significance of personal conscientious identification with social norms and values. These two points must be examined in turn.

Given his form of idealism, Green's theory could not be coherent if he held that society is a "river" into which "the individual streams ... should be merged". As was demonstrated earlier, his model of a nation (and a society) is of "an aggregate of individuals ... who are held together and personally modified by national ties and interests which they recognise as such." (Green, 1906: 184). Here, the vital ideas are the denial of the existence of a transcendent collectivity and that the individual must identify consciously and freely with these "national ties and interests" for the nation to exist in any real sense.

It is important to recognise that this first idea entails the conclusion that moral perfection cannot realise itself "in some impersonal Humanity" (Green, 1906: 181 ; but see Green, 1906: 352) "The spiritual progress of mankind is thus an unmeaning phrase, unless it means a progress of personal character and to personal character." (Green, 1906: 185) Green is emphatic in his denial of the claim that there can exist a transcendent world-, or national-, spirit. "A 'national spirit' is not something in the air ; nor is it a series of phenomena of a particular kind ; nor yet is it God" (Green, 1986e: 184). It exists only in the minds of individual moral agents who freely identify themselves with the concept and life of a particular nation (Green, 1906: 324). If individual human beings do not actualise the common good in and for themselves, it is just not actualised (Green, 1906: 182). This indicates why Carritt is wrong to argue that, for Green, "there is only one self, which is the human race, past, present, and future ; you and I are not selves."<sup>33</sup>

This point is reflected also in his attack on Hegel's theory of the state (Green, 1986d: 4-6). First a note on terminology. Hegel's definition of 'the state' is far closer to the ancient Greek understanding of the *polis* than to the English conception of the 'political' state. (However, it is used by John Ruskin as well (Ruskin, 1900: 17, 34, 37).) For Hegel, Green argues, the state is:

a society governed by laws and institutions and established customs which

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<sup>33</sup> Carritt, 1935: 134 ; see also Sidgwick, 1902a: 55-6 ; Brett, 1913: 439 ; Greaves, 1966: 19 ; Norton, 1976: 54-7 ; against Norton in particular, see Gaus, 19-21.

secure the common good of the members of the society - enable them to make the best of themselves - and are recognised as doing so. (Green, 1986d: 4)

For the most part, Green accepts Hegel's usage (e.g. Green, 1986a: 132-5, 141-2).

Moving to more substantive issues. For Hegel, "the well-ordered state" perfectly expresses the true will of its members. Therefore, in following its social norms, each member becomes free (that is, autonomous). Green supports Hegel up to a certain point (Green, 1986d: 5-6). He argues that Hegel is correct to stress the distinctively human need for a social framework in which to live - everyone must be situated to some degree to be able to act meaningfully. The state is a moralising system and, therefore, helps its members to obtain their true good. However, he notes as well that no 'empirical' state is perfect. This means that customs and institutions can and do cause a great deal of suffering. He argues that this is not fully appreciated by Hegel.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Hegel's theory has taken its affirmation of the moral worth of the state too far:

To an Athenian slave, who might be used to gratify a master's lust, it would have been a mockery to speak of the state as a realisation of freedom ; and perhaps it would not be much less so to speak of it as such to an untaught and under-fed denizen of a London yard with gin-shops on the right hand and on the left. (Green, 1986d: 6)

There is insufficient space here to assess the validity of this critique of Hegel's theory of the state (see Nicholson, 1995). What is important is that Green believes Hegel's conception of the perfected state seriously under-emphasises the suffering actual states cause in practice. Most importantly for the present purposes, in part at least Green is criticising Hegel for allegedly not taking into account that the state only exists as the form of certain types of interrelations between individual human beings. In Green's eyes, Hegel idolises the state to such a degree that he undervalues the humans for whom - and, therefore, in whom - it exists.

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<sup>34</sup> Green, 1986h ; Hobhouse, 1918: 24, 118-9 ; see also Bellamy, 1984: 35-6 ; Vincent et al, 1984: 12 ; Kloppenberg, 1986: 395-6.

The claim that individual human beings are ultimately the only moral agents in the world accords fully with his earlier theory of man's moral nature. The drive for inner peace can only be satisfied when the individual lives a coherent life, a life which is a self-conscious practical expression of perfected human nature. The universality of human nature is the reason for the moral ideal to equate with the Common Good. It is the reason for the perfected human life to be founded on the practical recognition of the duty to respect persons, to respect their common humanity in practice. Only to the extent that actual human beings recognise in practice the social groups who exercise coercive power over them to be external manifestations of their own highest essence as moral agents do these groups possess true moral worth. It is for precisely this reason that the individual simply cannot be subordinated to a "social river" in the manner which is alleged by Berlin and which - in Green's eyes at least - is entailed by Hegel's conception of the state. No such river can exist for Green.

The second response to Berlin's attack is to note that the very structure of Green's position necessarily entails that social norms can only have value to the extent that the individual freely identifies himself with them. As he writes in his manuscripts, "Slave, as a slave, can't be moral." (MS15) The agent's "'will is autonomous,' [when it] conforms to the law which the will itself constitutes" (Green, 1986d: 22). A purely externally-imposed command has no intrinsic moral worth (Green, 1906: 325) Green expresses this point most forcefully in his essay *On the Different Senses of 'Freedom'*:

The [moral] law, merely as law or as an external command, is a source of bondage in a double sense. [1] Presenting to man a command which yet it does not give him power to obey, it destroys the freedom of the life in which he does what he likes without recognising any reason why he should not ... ; it thus puts him in bondage to *fear*, and [2] at the same time, exciting a wish for obedience to itself which other desires (*phronema sarkos* [desires of the flesh]) prevent from being accomplished, it makes the man feel the bondage of the *flesh*. (Green, 1986d: 2, emphasis in original)

In the first instance, the agent does not identify with "the law" (existing as social norms in the present case) in such a way that he can conceive of it as a true claim of duty because he does not honour it for its own sake. In the second instance, he is led to feel his

own imperfection more clearly, thus, heightening his feeling of self-alienation. The imposition of rules onto the individual's life is therefore a powerful source of his inner disharmony. This is crucial for present purposes because the rules governing an individual's life only have moral value if they further his moral development. The moral development of the individual equates with the increasing harmonisation of his inner life. Consequently, any attempted imposition - of the type feared by Berlin (and Green himself) - must be morally wrong (Green, 1986a: 100).

The specific path of the citizen's development depends on the particular manifestation of the human essence in the specific individual. The increased self-harmonisation which this entails can be achieved only by allowing the contradictions within the agent's character to "work themselves out" gradually. Consequently, this "working out" of the contradictions within the agent's inner life can only be successful if the underlying principle of the agent's consciousness - as expressed in his conscience - is allowed a truly free reign. The details of the future steps in this path are unknowable until the citizen has actually progressed along them. There is no way in which an external authority, including the state, can claim better knowledge than the citizen about the details of his future progress. In this way, 'social guidance' of the individual to a truly 'free' life is an impossibility as it rests upon a necessary self-contradiction. All that can happen is that individuals are forced to perform outward acts whilst still feeling inner disharmony - "all that a purely external authority can impose is a command enforced by fear." (Green, 1906: 325 ; see also Green, 1986a: 10-9 *passim*) This is not what Green means by 'autonomy' or 'true freedom'. Indeed, he states explicitly that "of course there can be no [true] freedom [that is, autonomy] among men who act not willingly but under compulsion" (Green, 1986b: 199). For Berlin's criticisms to be valid, Green must be asserting that the citizen is bound to the rules of 'his' society whether or not he identifies with them. Yet, it can be seen that this is precisely what he is arguing against. Green's theory necessarily rejects the dualism which Berlin ascribes to him (Cacoullos, 1974: 112-22 *passim*). Ian Bradley has gone as far as to argue that "Green had invoked the idea of the common good of society not as a rationale for collectivism, but a spur to a more strenuous individualism." (Bradley, 1980: 220) Bradley's interpretation may rely on a rather strange use of the term "individualism", but his underlying point is valid (see Vincent et al, 1984: 27 ; Kloppenberg, 1986: 186-7, 189). For all of these reasons, Berlin's very influential attack must fail.

Where does this analysis locate Green's social theory in relation to Simhony's category of "relational organicism"? It will be remembered that its first feature is that the mutual interdependence of the whole and parts "is a non-reductive relationship" (Simhony, 1991b: 520). The Hegelian phenomenology of mutual recognition which has been shown to underlie Green's theory is obviously crucial here. The individual receives a sense of his own identity through his perception of the practical and intellectual recognition which he gains from the other members of his community. It is worth reemphasizing the link between this idea and its epistemological foundations at this point. D C Phillips has gone as far as to argue that "organicism is, in a sense, the theory of internal relations writ large." (Phillips, 1970: 420 ; see also Kloppenberg, 1986: 351-2) In the course of his *Lectures on Logic*, Green argues that:

Our crude notion of the antithesis between what is real and what is thought gives way before the consideration that all reality lies in relations, and that only for a thinking consciousness do relations exist. (Green, 1890b: 16)

In precisely the same way, society is 'real' only in the relations between individuals and these relations only exist for a thinking individual. In other words, social norms exist only in the attitudes and beliefs of concrete human beings. They are embodied in the conceptual frameworks which the latter possess as (partial) determinations of the eternal consciousness. The part's place within the conceptual framework is one of its defining characteristics in the two senses required by relational organicism. Firstly, its nature is partially defined by its relationship to the other parts. Secondly, its nature is partially defined by the nature of the whole system which these parts interrelate to form. In this manner, both Green's epistemology and his social and ethical ontology necessarily entail a non-reductive relationship of the type which is internally related to Simhony's concept of relational organicism. Furthermore, it can be seen that they entail the second feature which is the "dual aspect" condition. Green agrees with Bradley that society "cannot live *except* in its many members. Just so each of the members is alive but *not apart* from the whole which lives *in it*." (Bradley, 1927: 79, quoted in Simhony, 1991b: 521, emphasis added by Simhony) This represents the reconciliation of the dual aspects in the manner detailed by Simhony's third "salient feature" and establishes conclusively that Green does indeed present a relational model of society.



## 9. Conclusion: The Problem of Social Fragmentation.

A final objection to Green's theory of the common good must be faced as a prelude to the next chapter. It stems from the collapse of the subject/object distinction entailed by his epistemological theory. One consequence of this collapse is that, to varying degrees, specific individuals will understand the linguistic and other social structures in which they are raised in different ways to everyone else in that society. Unfortunately, these differences seem to make the notion of a common good highly problematic. If everyone experiences the world differently, how can they possess anything in common? If everyone's world is a slightly different expression of the human essence, how can we make sense of the concept of a *common* good? Green's answer to this question is rooted in his argument that:

[Each man] conceives them [the other members of his society], like himself, as having objects which it is their vocation to realise, ... and which form part of one great social end, the same for himself as for them. (Green, 1906: 237)

He is concerned with the individual's personal perception of the common end. This is a consequence of his form of idealism. These perceptions will tend to be most similar between those people who have had similar experiences. As he puts it in an undergraduate essay on *The Duties of the University to the State*, "Men cannot read the same books without in some measure thinking the same thoughts, nor can they fix their thoughts on the same ideals of intellectual excellence without feeling somewhat of their assimilating powers." (Undergraduate Essays: Notebook 1) People raised in the same society tend to have similar experiences. Consequently, in practice there will tend to be a broad consensus within each community. Certainly, if experiences vary too greatly within a group of people who are nominally 'a community', then the common goods will not bind the citizens together with sufficient force to ensure social stability. If a society becomes too unstable, its members will not be able to act with a degree of effectiveness which is sufficient for valuable self-expression and development. More importantly, as a community exists only to the extent that individuals understand themselves to be sharing allegiances, it must disappear where influences vary too greatly. This is a conceptual and not an empirical point. There must be a relatively narrow consensus between the individuals' judgements about which ends they should pursue for their individual conceptions of the general rules of right conduct to form a coherent social system. In modern terminology, there must be a relatively large overlap

between the conceptions of the good life for members of the society to adhere to the same system of right, duties and obligations.

For essentially these reasons, Horton claims that “the idea of the common good ... is either impossible to determine or non-existent.” (Horton, 1992: 74)<sup>35</sup> There is an element of truth in this objection. On his own terms, Green is being overly optimistic when he ascribes a common good to many societies. However, this is an empirical dispute. His is a typical late nineteenth century, middle-class, progressive, ‘Oxford’ image of Britain. He sees the nation as in essence ‘unifiable’ - that is, as in essence one nation. Horton is quite correct to question the plausibility of this portrayal. It is not that Green failed to recognise the divisions and conflicts in his society, it is merely that he underestimated their depth and their subsequent importance for his theory. Unlike for example Rousseau, Green fails properly to take into account that a valuable community expresses what can be termed an intimacy of its members (e.g. Rousseau, 1968: 113).<sup>36</sup> Such intimacy tends to diminish as the size of the group increases. Consequently, the common good becomes less obvious and frequently it becomes less real (Vincent et al, 1984: 165).

However, Green’s theory of the common good is not damaged by this fact. In reality, the problem is with the claim that the societies in which we live are societies in the sense which Green believes is important for human self-realisation. In reality, the concept of the Common Good forms the basis of a powerful approach to social criticism because it enables us to question whether or not a particular society is one in which the citizen find a significant sense of personal identity from his interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, the nation-state is not the only group with which the individual can identify. Indeed, Green himself stresses that, in practice, the most significant influences upon the self-understandings of many agents are their memberships of numerous other groups. In this way, the individual’s life is a network of community memberships. One just has to remember the examples of the individual’s “chief interests” given earlier (Green, 1906: 228). They included family life (Green, 1906: 228), church life (Green, 1906: 232) and developing “the sanitation of a town” (Green, 1906: 237). These are all localised interests of concrete citizens (cf. Green, 1906: 299). Of necessity, they are communal

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<sup>35</sup> Also see Sidgwick, 1902a: 71-77 ; Rogers, 1922: 243-6 ; Carritt, 1928: 64-5 ; Richter, 1964: 234-6, 259-60 ; MacIntyre, 1967: 247.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard Bosanquet fails to an even greater extent than Green (Bosanquet, 1920: 267-74 *passim*).

activities and as such are necessarily structured by the particular common goods of the various communities (Green, 1986a: 38-9). Furthermore, they are very mundane and parochial in many ways. Nevertheless, they remain fundamental to the agent's self-understanding. Together they constitute a large and indispensable aspect of his moral life. It is for this reason that Green believes they help to form the most important aspects of the agent's everyday moral life. In reality, the very 'ordinariness' of these relationships helps his theory to overcome Horton's criticism. The problem which Horton highlights is really significant only in relation to very large groups such as a nation. It is far easier to identify a common good amongst a small group with which one's everyday life is obviously bound up.

The implications of this line of argument can be brought out in the following manner. Green believes that the individual will probably be a member of many separate groups, with his identity being framed within the complex network of such interrelating and conflicting identifications (Green, 1906: 299, 309). The significance of the particular identifications will vary for the individual - for example, he may understand himself more in terms of membership of a group defined on the basis of gender rather than cultural membership. There is no necessary reason to prioritise the agent's identification with one group simply because it has the largest membership or the greatest power over other groups. One can think here of the case of an agent feeling his identification with and allegiance to a disempowered group more strongly than his identification with the oppressing or marginalising group or organisation. The practical moral life of an imperfect agent is, thus, a complex balancing of the many duties incumbent on him due to his identification with many separate groups each of which possesses its own common good. It is with this idea of "balancing" that the discussion arrives at the main subjects of the next chapter - Green's theory of conscientious action, social criticism and progress. The citizen's allegiances and the duties which arise out of them are made known to him and weighed through his conscience.

The criticism may be made that the citizen is reduced to the status of an existentialist free chooser. This would be a grave problem for Green given his insistence upon the social embeddedness of the moral agent. However, such a problem does not arise because he recognises that the conscientious individual is a socially-embedded being who also seeks to satisfy himself as a rational agent. Hence, he seeks to be conscious of the world in all its complexity as a fully coherent system. The imperfection of his present consciousness and

the social forms with which he imperfectly identifies his own true good conflicts with this need for coherence and expresses itself as the impulse for what could be large scale even revolutionary social, political and economic change. On this reading, conscience becomes an 'inner oracle' through which the agent tries to judge, revise and reconcile the competing claims of his various social memberships and his drive for self-cultivation. All of this is summed up by Green himself as follows:

No individual can make a conscience for himself. He always needs a society to make it for him. A conscientious 'heresy', religious or political, always represents some gradually maturing conviction as to social good, already implicitly involved in the ideas on which the accepted rules of conduct rest, though it may conflict with the formulae in which those ideas have been hitherto authoritatively expressed, and may lead to the overthrow of institutions which have previously contributed to their realisation. (Green, 1986e: 321)

Of course, the problem with conscience being the oracle for progress is that oracles are notoriously ambiguous. It is with this thought that the discussion moves on to examine Green's conception of conscientious action and social criticism in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### *CONSCIENCE, SOCIAL CRITICISM AND PROGRESS*

#### 1. Introduction.

It has been established that mere acquiescence to social or legal norms is a deficient form of human action (Green, 1986a: 6). Man must follow rules upon which he has critically reflected upon, and which he has accepted freely and adopted as his own. In this way, Green's discussion of conscience and social criticism completes his theory of morality the earlier parts of which were explored in the previous two chapters of this thesis.

Very little developed critical work has been carried out in the areas covered by this chapter. Where it has been commented upon, the reaction has generally been negative. For example, Henry Sidgwick states that he could find no explanation of Green's method of conscientious social criticism within Green's writings and that this is a major problem with Green's thought (Sidgwick, 1902a: 114-5). Even though this assessment has attracted some notable supporters (e.g. Schneewind, 1977: 408-11), the present chapter will demonstrate that Sidgwick's criticism is misplaced. Green tells us enough about the formal conditions of social criticism and its substance to make his theory tolerably complete. That Sidgwick did not find what he wanted is probably a sign that he was trying to find more detail in Green's writings than the subject-matter allows of. Having defended these areas of Green's thought, the chapter turns to some of the least convincing parts of his corpus - his writings on progress. The discussion concludes with an assessment of the implications of accepting the spiritual determinist line of Green's theory of the will, which was introduced in chapter two. In this way, the path is prepared for a discussion of Green's theory of politics in chapter five.

For the majority of this chapter, I will work upon the assumption that Green is adopting the neo-Aristotelian line which was outlined in the second chapter. It should be remembered that on this reading, an agent is responsible for his actions as he can make a voluntary choice between a variety of options for action. These options are determined by the current state of his character and the state of his character is determined in turn by the courses of action which he decided to pursue in the past. As the final section shows, the spiritual determinist line holds that a man's actions are simply the 'automatic' result of the interaction of his current character with his current circumstances. There is no possibility of voluntary choice in that the agent could not have acted otherwise than in fact he did. This

undermines the notion that a man is morally responsible for his actions and profoundly affects Green's theory of conscientious agency, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter as well.

Green distinguishes between conscientious criticism of moral norms and of legal statutes (Green, 1986a: 4-5). The latter is dealt with in the next chapter and the former is dealt with here.

I begin my exploration of Green's theory of conscientious agency by recapping on the role of self-alienation which was outlined in the course of the previous two chapters.

## **2. Self-Alienation as the Motor of Reform.**

Man is not really mere man, though he may think himself so. He is always something potentially, which he is not actually; always inadequate to himself; and as such, disturbed and miserable. (Green, 1889c: 29)

In order to actualise his true good, the moral agent must be aware that he is acting in accordance with his highest essence. Therefore, each agent needs to identify himself with rules of conduct which he understands as reflecting this essence. When a human is living fully in accordance with his true nature - i.e. when he is fully autonomous - those beliefs and activities through which he believes his true good can be gained - his "chief interests" (Green, 1906: 228) - form a network of goods which interrelate to create the outer (or practical) life that reflects the demands of his inner (or intellectual) life (Green, 1906: 228).

The need for self-conscious conformity to a self-imposed law ensures that it is not enough for the individual to live merely in accordance with conventional morality. For a conventional action to be truly valuable, the agent must perform it because he freely identifies his own true good with the particular social maxims which guide his behaviour (Green, 1986d: 25). Mere acquiescence does not constitute autonomous - and therefore morally valuable - action.

Unfortunately, no human being can ever become perfect. The animal aspect of human life makes it impossible for any agent to recognise fully and express his essence in practice (Green, 1906: 288). Consequently, no society can ever be perfect. No agent will ever be brought up in a way which perfectly coheres with his inherent nature and, therefore, no one will ever feel an abiding satisfaction in the life which their social environment

prompts and allows them to live. Within such an imperfect individual (and hence an imperfect society), there will tend to be clashes between those roles or virtues according to which he is expected - and expects himself - to live (Green, 1906: 247). One consequence of the resulting disharmony is the agent's search for an object which is truly desirable:

there arises a quest for some definite and consistent conception of the main ends of human achievement. Is there some one direction, common to all the forms of activity esteemed as virtuous, which explains and justifies that estimation? (Green, 1906: 249)

Green believes that undertaking to answer such a question leads the conscientious citizen to a clearer comprehension of the incoherences within the existing scheme of virtues in his society. Given man's need for harmony in his life, he cannot fully identify with such a fragmentary scheme of virtues and practices. For this reason, the individual reacts against his socially-inspired norms.

However, no matter how extreme this break with convention is, the moral agent must always be in his very essence part of a society, for - as has been stated already - social norms play a vital part in the determination of our essence. Conventions and conventional activities are the embodiment of determinations of the human essence in previous generations. Hence, the drive to add coherence to social norms is "a reconciliation of reason with itself" (Green, 1986d: 25). It is with this thought in mind that Green concludes his analysis of Hume's moral philosophy with a warning that:

an 'ideal' theory of ethics tampers with its only sure foundation when it depreciates respectability ; ... there is no other genuine 'enthusiasm for humanity' than one which has travelled the common highway of reason - the life of the good neighbour and honest citizen - and can never forget that it is still only on a further stage of the same journey. (Green, 1885b: 64)

However, as was stated earlier, before the individual manages to conceive of a reformed morality with which he can identify himself, "there is apt to occur a revolt against conventional morality." (Green, 1986d: 24) This rejection of previously accepted norms could have a number of moral consequences, two of which are highlighted by Green.

Firstly, the individual's moral growth may be stunted by his lack of a social structure in which to operate and with which he identifies himself (Green, 1986d: 24). Indeed, this seems inevitable given the importance of a sympathetic communal context which was outlined in the previous chapter. Secondly, the individual may come to understand more fully "the spirit underlying the letter of the obligations laid on him by society" (Green, 1986d: 24). The latter is a vital stage in true moral progress, given the need for self-conscious identification with the universal laws which should guide one's conduct as a rational being. As he says in his undergraduate essay on *The Force of Circumstances*, "The very essence of a true reformer consists in his being the corrector and not the exponent of the common feeling of his day." (Green, 1889a: 10) Recognition of imperfection throws into question in the agent's mind the feasibility of reconstituting social values so as to introduce a systematic order of living for individuals and communities corresponding to the idea of the unity "of the capabilities, of the thinking and willing soul." (Green, 1906: 251) The agent should come to recognise that every person should live his life as:

his articulation, and application to particulars of life, of that principle of an absolute value in the human person as such, of a like claim to consideration in all men, which is implied in the law and conventional morality of Christendom, but of which the application in law is from the nature of the case merely general and prohibitory, while its application in conventional morality is in fact partial and inconsistent. (Green, 1986e: 215)

The problem now is how to decide precisely what to do.

### **3. The spiritual determinist Conscientious Action.**

The individual's conscience is reason in him as informed by the work of reason in the structure and controlling sentiments of society. (Green, 1906: 216)

The most important question for a conscientious moral agent to ask of his conscience is "Was I in this or that piece of conduct what I should be?" (Green, 1906: 307) To answer this question, the agent must consider whether or not he has honoured the duties



incumbent upon him given his particular social roles and attachments. This calls for engaged critical reflection on his social connections. It is a practical and not a merely abstract question. By asking this and by being honest with himself in his answer, the individual is brought to a clearer understanding of his common goods and therefore his duty (Green, 1906: 197, 279, 306-7 ; Green, 1986a: 3). In this way, his conception of the ideal form of virtue will become clearer and more powerful in his mind and actions. Indeed, the attempt to rectify any situation which one believes to be evil will tend to bring the agent to a clearer comprehension of the truly good life (Green, 1906: 307). This brings us back to the quote which ended the previous chapter:

No individual can make a conscience for himself. He always needs a society to make it for him. A conscientious 'heresy,' religious or political, always represents some gradually maturing conviction as to social good, already implicitly involved in the ideas on which the accepted rules of conduct rest, though it may conflict with the formulae in which those ideas have been hitherto authoritatively expressed, and may lead to the overthrow of institutions which have previously contributed to their realisation. (Green, 1986e: 321)

The conscientious attitude:

is no other than the sense of personal responsibility for making the best themselves in the family, the tribe, or the state, which must have actuated certain persons, many or few, in order to [produce] the establishment and recognition of any moral standards whatever. (Green, 1986e: 309)

The true citizen - the true moral agent - must engage in social criticism, then. This is true loyalty to his fellows - seeking to discover the higher spirit of the conventions which he shares with them (Green, 1986g *passim*). Green is clear that an agent can only go "a certain distance, in the detail of conduct which [any ideal] requires, beyond the conditions of the given age." (Green, 1986e: 268). Rightly, Green is emphatic that there can be no non-situated Archimedean point from which to assess the validity of given norms (or any other intellectual construction, such as a work of philosophy). All that is available is either an

internal critique or a criticism of one set of social norms (work of philosophy and so on) from the basis of another. This belief forms the basis of Green's epistemology and in particular his understanding of the growth of knowledge. Hence, in his manuscripts, he argues that:

In order to get [a] notion of distinct properties, (and so conceive the thing) we must analyze the confused image. The continued analysis gives us [a] more and more determinate conception. (MS11, emphasis in original)

This applies to moral knowledge as much as to non-moral knowledge.

Green clarifies his procedure of social criticism in his greatly underrated piece on *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (see also Green, 1906: 301). He argues that the Socratic method of induction proceeded by drawing out the underlying rationale of commonly-held beliefs so as to gain the truth. Then he writes, "[i]ncidentally, as applied to morals, the method had a far higher value. It was the correlative of the Socratic doctrine of innate moral ideas". He continues, with a revealing change of tense:

and the method has a practical value, as the doctrine [contains] a practical truth. The truth of the doctrine lies in the fact that an unconscious always precedes a conscious morality; that men act on moral principles, embodied in law and custom, which have never distinctly become part of their individual consciousness. The value of the method lies in its power, as a process of self-examination, to awaken in a man the consciousness of the law on which, under higher guidance than his own, he has already been acting, and thus to transform it from an outward to an inward law, to be obeyed not on authority but in freedom, not under the limitations of local or temporary enactment, but in the open atmosphere of reason. (Green, 1889d: 58 ; cf. Green, 1906: 301, 317-9)

This method requires the individual to examine critically the particular beliefs and values which he holds by asking himself whether or not they cohere with his other beliefs and values. Where they do not, he should reform them so that his beliefs form a more integrated system. Only when the system is fully integrated will the agent realise his true good and so

gain an abiding satisfaction of his abiding self.

It is best to think about this process in terms of the Kantian distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. The coherence of analytic propositions can be assessed using simply the principle of non-contradiction. However, to assess the coherence of synthetic propositions, one must rely upon other criteria. The question is, which ones? There are no criteria against which to judge one's beliefs and values which can be truthfully called 'objective' in the sense of being demonstrably true in a manner which is essentially separable from the existing modes of human reasoning, except the formal criterion of non-self-contradiction. As was noted in the previous chapter, Green argues that "Language presupposes thought as a capacity, but in us the capacity of thought is only actualised in language." (Green, 1986e: 183) To a large extent, language is a social construction. For Green, the criteria which one should apply when engaging in social criticism are derived from the modes of reasoning which are embodied in the conceptual frameworks of the individual's consciousness which in turn arise out of the interaction of the human essence as it is expressed in the particular individual with the concrete social influences faced by that person. Hence, this social criticism - which forms a necessary aspect of conscientious agency - constitutes a manifestation of the interaction of reason as found in the human mind with reason as it is embodied in social institutions (Green, 1986d: 24-5).

Moreover, this is not simply a process of harmonisation between one's determinate consciousness. It has been established that Green's conception of human nature includes a fundamental attachment to the idea of a craving for the satisfaction of certain higher needs - the law of the human's being. Consequently, social criticism is an effort to move towards a situation where the agent attains his true good. For this reason, social criticism - and therefore conscientious action - proceeds from the clash of inherent human drives with the modes provided for their expression by current social institutions and practices. It constitutes the drive to reform presently imperfect institutions in such a manner that they foster a more adequate expression of the agent's most basic (sc. the most truly human) spiritual needs. Only in this way can men continue, in Green's very Hegelian phrase, "to reject what is temporary and accidental in [their social frameworks], while retaining what is essential" (Green, 1906: 279), which is a necessary aspect of social criticism. Only in this way can they "disentangle the operative ideas from their necessarily imperfect expression" (Green, 1906: 319).

To understand this method in greater depth, consider Green's discussion of

perplexities of conscience. What does Green believe one should do when (apparently) faced by conflicting duties? It is rarely recognised that he does in fact give two incompatible responses to this difficulty. Firstly and most famously, he argues that the inability to discern one's duty is not a mark of an ultimately confused moral situation:

There is no such thing really as a conflict of duties. A man's duty under any particular set of circumstances is always one, though the conditions of the case may be so complicated and obscure as to make it difficult to decide what the duty really is. (Green, 1986e: 324)

There is always really only one proper way to act but humans may have difficulty working out what it is. For Green when in this mood then, perplexities of conscience arise from conflicts between the commandments of differing authorities which are held in reverence by the agent (Green, 1906: 314). When bewildered in this way, "[h]owever disposed to do what his conscience enjoins, the man finds it difficult to decide what its injunction is." (Green, 1906: 321) In fact, the proper way to act - and therefore the agent's duty - is to follow "the course which contributes most to the perfect life" (Green, 1906: 324). Green claims that by bearing this end in mind, "the soul ... can harmonize all the authorities" (Green, 1906: 327) which appear initially to have a claim on him.

Green sees no problem with this approach in the context of modern Christendom as he believes that its "higher moral culture" has developed to such an extent that there will always be a determinate answer to all moral perplexities (Green, 1906: 354, 372). This a very large and indeed overly-optimistic assumption (Lewis, 1948: 30-5 ; Lewis, 1952: 85-9). There is a long way to go from possessing an abstract formula to discovering one's particular duty in a concrete situation. More is needed to overcome the problem of the perplexity of conscience. Indeed, it was shown in the previous chapter that although Green disagrees with Berlin and holds that ultimately all true values are in harmony with each other, at the practical level he is led to accept the inevitability of conflicts of values which arise from human imperfection. These clashes will be present as long as humans are imperfect, and humans will always be imperfect. Consequently, Green must accept value pluralism and genuine perplexity as an endemic feature of human life. He does realise this in other places in his writings on the perplexity of conscience (Lewis, 1948: 35-6 ; Lewis, 1962b: 128-33 *passim*) and the discussion must examine these passages next.

In this second mood, Green accepts that there *can* be genuine perplexities of conscience. He argues that where one's conscience is unclear about whether to follow the norms of one's society or to perform some other course of action, the former should tend to carry more weight. In other words, if in doubt, one should trust the morality of one's society to be the better course to take. By satisfying the prescriptions and expectations of our social positions "we can seldom go wrong ; and when we have done this fully, there will seldom be much more that we can do." (Green, 1906: 313) Of course, this is not to say that where the agent feels that he should do something other than follow social norms, it is right for him to do anything other than follow the inner conscientious demand. It is just that purely as a 'rule of thumb', social expectations should be followed by the perplexed moral agent. They should not be followed by anyone who feels that they should be a 'reformer' in the particular case.

To act as a moral agent, the individual must be self-critical. He must question his motives so as to ensure that he is acting out of a sense of duty - that is, according to the disinterested dictates of his conscience - and not out of some self-serving attempt to evade what he really believes to his most dutiful course. Green is emphatic about this. The conscientious citizen should assess the worth of his competing desires and hence the worth of his subsequent motives:

it is not by the outward form ... that we know what moral action is. We know it, so to speak, on the inner side. We know what it is in relation to us, the agents ; what it is as our expression. Only thus indeed do we know it at all. (Green, 1906: 93)

Only by reflecting dispassionately on his motives can he assess his own moral worth accurately. It is imperative for the successful execution of this enterprise that he does not attempt to provide non-moral redescriptions of his actions in order to make it appear that they have not acted (im)morally (Green, 1906: 93). The initial evidence from which one assesses one's motives must not be reinterpreted in the light of the theory that subsequently is produced to explain it. In other words, the evidence should guide the theory and the theory should not alter one's understanding of the evidence.

To this end, Green argues that it is imperative to utilize the concepts and viewpoint which represent "the expression of that experience which is embodied, so to speak, in the

habitual phraseology of men, in literature, and in the institutions of family and political life." (Green, 1906: 94). The moral value of one's motives (thus interpreted) tends to be reflected in their contribution to the attainment of the "ideals of [the] permanent good" which are current at the time of action (Green, 1906: 95). The "ideas and ideals of permanent good" to which Green refers are the one's which constitute "the standard of social expectation on the part of those whom [the agent] recognises as his equals." (Green, 1906: 98) These standards express what is likely to be the highest stage of the eternal consciousness' development currently present in one's world. The most reliable Archimedean point from which to assess one's probable motive for any particular act is socially-given, then.

However, this seems to present certain difficulties for Green's theory. Firstly, it appears to be a highly collectivist position with conservative implications. On the least sympathetic reading, the individual seems to be morally required to abdicate his powers of self-assessment in regard of his general principles of psychology and value.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Green appears to be arguing that there is only one theory of human motivation current in society at any one time. This is highly simplistic. He may be assuming that there are a number of positions which cluster together tightly enough so that the moral agent can treat the resulting common ground as the Archimedean point. Green is vague here but the essential points to be made in his defence are as follows.

Firstly, the ideal is always for the individual to judge his actions according to his own general theory of human motivation. That is, he should disregard the fact that he is trying to assess his own motivation in the present case and that consequently it is he himself who will suffer or enjoy moral blame or praise for the action. Now, given the formative influence of one's self-understanding on the nature of one's actions, it is vital for the agent to understand how he believes himself to act in general - the theory of his personal psychology. Only from this viewpoint can he properly understand the motives which issued in the specific actions. The problem which most greatly concerns Green is that the agent will tend to be biased in judging his own actions. A disinterested expression of one's psychological make-up must be found if at all possible. Given the social nature of the individual's character, Green argues that the external expression of that view of personal psychological motivation which is closest to one's own self-understanding is most likely to be found in those

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<sup>1</sup> Sabine, 1915: 174-5 ; Rogers, 1922: 246-8 ; Crossman, 1958: 196-7 ; Jenks, 1977 *passim* ; Bellamy, 1990b: 147-8.

influences which helped to form one's character. Hence, using a phrase that Green uses in a slightly different context a little later, one should assess the nature of one's motives from the basis of the psychological theory current among the social group made up of "those whom [one] recognises as ... [one's] equals." (Green, 1906: 98) Nevertheless and importantly, this is merely a 'rule of thumb', and the individual always retains the right to accept or reject it as his conscience dictates. Hence, Green avoids sanctioning collectivism and conservatism by insisting that the agent's conscience always has priority over social judgements (see also Harris, 1988-9: 560-2).

The second objection is that this approach overstates the homogeneity of social judgements of personal psychology. This brings us back to the reformulation of Green's theory which was undertaken at the end of the previous chapter so as to take account of social fragmentation. Looking at the original version of Green's theory first, the objection fails to understand the limited nature of the 'society' to which the conscientious man should look for guidance. The citizen should look for his conscience reflected in the judgements of those people in whom he recognises himself. He should only be concerned with those whom he judges to be 'like himself'; in other words, "those whom he recognises as equals." On the 'unreformulated' view, this is likely to be a far more restricted and hence more homogenous group than the objection must assume to really bite.

Unfortunately, the situation is not so simple when we turn to a world which is characterised by social fragmentation. This was the situation sketched at the end of the previous chapter and the situation in which most of us now live. The individual will probably be a member of many different groups each with its own particular common good and each with its own *prima facie* claims on the agent (Green, 1906: 299, 309). Moreover, these disparate social claims may well be added to by "some demand of the self-realising spirit which has not found expression in a recognised rule" (Green, 1906: 311). The conscientious agent must balance all of these claims. Unfortunately, they need not be mutually compatible as we are constrained to live in an imperfect world. It will be remembered from chapter three that Green's monism only performs its harmonising role fully within a perfect world. Such a world is just not available to humans in any temporal existence they could ever lead. Values are almost certain to clash irreconcilably in any world human beings can know. As I have argued before in this thesis, this is one sense in which Green (rightly) believes that we are 'condemned'.

Consequently, it is an unfortunate truth that the second objection stands. The claim

that socially-given standards and theories of psychological motivation provide a standpoint from which the perplexed agent can engage in self-criticism and social criticism does rest upon an over-optimistic assessment of the harmony and homogeneity present within the individual's social life. In fact, even without the reformulation, Green himself recognises the existence of this problem and defends his position by arguing that

[h]owever insufficient such safeguards may be, it remains the case that self-reflection is the only possible method of learning what is the inner man or mind that our action expresses ; in other words, what that action really is.  
(Green, 1906: 94)

All the agent can do, then, is to act in that way which he believes will probably bring about the greatest eudaemonic development of mankind. In facing this problem, Green avoids the temptation to give easy but false answers and comfort. For example, in a speech to the Cowley-Road Mutual Improvement Society in 1877, Green is reported to have “begged” the audience “to cultivate reverence for the facts, and to think once, twice, thrice, and a great many times before they trusted their own judgement on any subject whatever.”<sup>2</sup>

The previous chapter faced the question of the vagueness of the moral (and therefore the social) ideal in Green's thought. It was established there that certain formal conditions must hold - for example, that the ideal is non-competitive and rests on a Kantian respect for persons. Showing respect here means fostering self-realisation:

the end is that full self-conscious realisation of capabilities to which the means lies in the self-conscious exercise of the same capabilities - an exercise of them in imperfect realisation, but under the governing idea of the desirability of their fuller realisation. (Green, 1906: 195)

Green's justification of his Kantianism was examined in chapter three. It was established that the inherent logic of social relations implies (whether or not this is recognised) that rationality is a quality possessed by all humans as social beings. The drive

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<sup>2</sup> Cowley-Road Mutual Improvement Society, 22nd October 1877, as reported in the *Oxford Times* of 27th October, 1877.



for consistency in their lives tends to push humans to respect this rationality in their dealings with each other. For this reason, the moral good is a common good - it exists as our "interests in the development of our faculties, and in the like development of those for whom we care." (Green, 1906: 234) In this sense "[human] society is founded on the recognition by persons of each other, and their interest in each other *as persons*, i.e. as beings who are ends to themselves" (Green, 1906: 190, emphasis in original) Only by respecting the capacity for agency and therefore promoting self-realization in others can the individual gain an understanding of himself as a being who is also worthy of respect (Green, 1906: 190). Even so, this prerequisite is still not very helpful when one comes to deciding what it means in practice to "[b]e a person and respect others as persons". (Hegel, 1967: 36) The necessary features of the moral ideal are not given very much real content by this requirement (Muirhead, 1908: 30-1).

One of the main causes of this vagueness is the individuated nature of human self-expression. Although everyone should have the opportunity to realise their personality and that of their fellows, "it does not follow from this that all persons must be developed in the same way." (Green, 1906: 191) The object sought as the true good "will vary in different ages and with different persons, according to circumstances and idiosyncrasy." (Green, 1906: 239) If different individuals perceive their moral goods in different ways, what sort of a guide can Green's call to always respect persons be?

In reality, this vagueness is not something which worries Green very greatly (Green, 1906: 337, 352, 376-82). The nature of the moral good is imperfectly realised in the world. That is demonstrated by the contradictions present in our lives (Green, 1906: 195). This, together with the complexity of all moral situations, undermines the validity of those approaches to ethical theorising which seek a set of moral commandments. Hence, a moral command is only properly understandable in relation to its time.<sup>3</sup>

To clarify this point, Green considers the case of two individuals who face precisely the same circumstances and who then have to decide whether or not to tell the truth even though they realise that evil consequences will also follow if they do so. He assumes that one lies whilst the other tells the truth and asks, 'who is better?'

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<sup>3</sup> Green refers to Maine's influential works on this subject occasionally (e.g. Green, 1986a: 84, 88). Indeed, Maine held a chair at Oxford (1869-78) for some of the time that Green was a lecturer at Balliol College. See Harris and Morrow, 1986: 329n3.

it would be impossible for the moral philosopher to say which action were the better or the worse of the two ; because he would not know in regard to either that spiritual history [of the formation of their respective characters] upon which its moral value depends. (Green, 1906: 316)

The specific form taken by the moral ideal is fundamentally dependent on the context of the action and the agent, and this context can only be assessed by the agent when he is either in the particular situation or looking back on it (Green, 1906: 308). Attempting to set down a "timeless" moral system would be effectively to ignore the fundamental importance of the contextual nature of morality.

Theorising about how one should act in hypothetical moral situations is useless as well. Only by following one's conscience in actual situations will moral progress be achieved (Green, 1906: 196, 308, 327):

A judgement of the sort we call intuitive - a judgement which in fact represents long courses of habit and imagination founded on ideas - is all that the occasion admits of. (Green, 1906: 320)

John Horton has argued that ultimately Green's theory of the common good cannot overcome "the fact of disagreement" (Horton, 1992: 74). Indeed, Green does go as far as to state that the spirit of moral norms "speaks with many voices according as men have ears to hear" (Green, 1906: 301). In essence, Horton argues Green cannot satisfactorily answer the question "How are we to decide what is in the common good?" (Horton, 1992: 74) As it stands, it appears that Horton is correct.

Let us take one of the hardest possible cases - the conscientious slave owner versus the conscientious slavery abolitionist (see also Lewis, 1962b: 131-3). Both believe as a matter of conscience that their particular cause is right. What is to be done? The first course of action may be to carry out an internal critique of the two positions. Which is the more coherent on its own terms? The intersubjectivity/Kantian arguments which were presented in the previous chapter push towards the abolitionist line. Yet, the logic of Green's own thought means that he must accept at least the possibility of a 'pro-slavery' case being put forward which - on a 'pro-slavery' logic - is at least as coherent as his neo-Kantian line if not more so. A pro-slavery activist may claim this is so with, for example, Aristotle's

defence of natural slavery (Aristotle, 1957: Iiii-vii). Certainly, for Green the inability to choose on the grounds of coherence can only occur in an imperfect world. Nevertheless, we as humans are condemned to imperfection forever. For this reason, it appears that we can never be assured of the truth of even our most coherent beliefs.

Furthermore, given that we do live in an imperfect world, the coherence test does not trump all other possible tests. Conscience retains its place of preeminence. The discussion has not progressed at all then, for the slave owner can simply respond to the more coherent anti-slavery line (if it is more coherent) that his conscience tells him that slavery is a morally better state than non-slavery under certain circumstances at least.

It is because of difficulties such as these that Green downplays the link between the philosopher and the practical citizen (Green, 1906: 196, 327 ; see Fairbrother, 1900: 185-7; Thomas, 1987: 370-1). "Moral philosophy as [Green] conceives it can take one only so far", Nicholson argues:

... it cannot lay down in advance how the ideal should be applied in specific circumstances. That is a matter of practical judgement, and is subject to pragmatic considerations. (Nicholson, 1990: 79)

To ask the moral philosopher to provide the moral good (and, hence, the common good) with content independently of the full details of a moral situation, as for instance Lewis seems to want (Lewis, 1948: *passim* ; Lewis, 1962b: 131-3), is utopian and futile (Green, 1906: 317). The desire for commandments, which moral philosophers themselves have encouraged, must be resisted. "One is sometimes, indeed, tempted to think that Moral Philosophy is only needed to remedy the evils which it has itself caused." (Green, 1906: 311)

What the moral philosopher can do, however, is to prescribe a 'negative' condition of moral action (Green, 1906: 316-7) He should try to bring the agent to consider whether or not his proposed course of action truly appears to him to be dutiful, or alternatively whether or not it is motivated essentially by selfish considerations. Furthermore, he should attempt to clarify the claims which the agent feels by exposing any vagueness, incoherences and possible foundations which are present or implicit (Green, 1906: 322). Even so, it remains the agent himself who must decide how he should act (Green, 1906: 316). All the philosopher can do is try to help him gain a clearer and more critical understanding of himself and his beliefs. This limiting of the role of philosophy to that of interpretation

extends into all of its branches. For example, in the manuscripts, Green writes:

The metaphysician, as he is told depreciatingly but with truth, adds nothing to the sum of existing knowledge. ... Penetrating the intelligible world, he seeks to disentangle its elements, and to 'put them together' again no longer as a material grown {"*presented*" written above "*grown*"} fr[om] without, but as the complex realisation [of] the organised body of the spirit which contemplates them. (He is not a mathematician or chemist, a physiologist or psychologist, but he re-adjusts (or ought to readjust) the processes pursued by all in a new order of unity and necessity, as successive determinations of the Divine spirit, whose thought 'he thinks after Him') ... The ridicule w[hic]h the assertion of such an office excites is a witness to its difficulty and remoteness fr[om] ordinary interests. (MS4)

As a philosopher - rather than as "a man or a citizen" (Green, 1906: 327) - the agent should not attempt to recommend 'better' courses of action. Indeed, as a philosopher, he should not even attempt to make any active contribution to the direction of the moral development of those around him - to aid the "'moral dynamic'" - or even try to make others want to develop themselves (Green, 1906: 327). Such active involvement is his duty as a member of the human race and not as a philosopher. "His immediate business as a philosopher is not to strengthen or heighten this aspiration much less to bring it into existence, but to understand it." (Green, 1906: 327) Nevertheless, he cannot impose this realisation upon another agent, even when he is fulfilling his role as a "man or a citizen" or preacher (Green, 1906: 313) Certainly, the knowledge which he can give them - the case he can make for acting in a certain manner in the particular circumstances - can awaken their obedience. Yet, such obedience arises only when the man has a character which is receptive to the claim and this means only when the agent's essence has been determined in a certain way over the course of the life which he has lived to that point. Once again, the neo-Aristotelianism in Green is coming to the fore.

Ultimately then, the agent must rely upon his honest conscientious convictions. This

is one reason why his own epitaph<sup>4</sup> - which also serves as the theme of his lay sermon on *Faith* (Green, 1889p) - is so appropriate. It is an unavoidable conclusion of his methodology that "we walk by faith, not by sight." In a manner of speaking, this is the source of Horton's criticism and so his attack can be rephrased - Green provides little way to adjudicate between people whose faiths contradict each other.

If faith and conscience are the ultimate guides in matter of belief and value, what are the implications for "the fact of disagreement" (Horton, 1992: 74)? As has been stated already, moral conversion is the proper task of the man, citizen or preacher - and not of the moral philosopher. Poetry and polemic as well as reasoned argument persuasively put are all methods of attaining consensus. Nevertheless, in the end there are few theoretical limits on the types of action which can be used to pursue the cause of humanity. The agent must use whatever method his conscience deems most appropriate in the circumstances. This may mean war or literature, legislation or quiet personal example.

To conclude this section, one more issue should be mentioned. Even though Green stresses that conscientious action is the essence of moral agency, he is very aware that such concern can be harmful or self-indulgent when carried to the extreme. For example, the overly-conscientious individual may be so busy with "a kind of devotion to great objects or to public service" that he is apt to ignore the question of whether or not there is some other course of action that would be better able to achieve the ends which he believes should be brought about (Green, 1906: 297). Often those who act without reflecting on the abstract ideal of virtuous action can achieve more of their moral objects and achieve them in a better manner than those who constantly concern themselves with their motives and the philosophical (or quasi-philosophical) basis of their ethical judgements. For this reason, Green attacks the latter for being people

who pride themselves on conformity to a standard of virtue (which cannot be the highest, or they would not credit themselves with conforming to it), and who so hug their reputation with themselves for acting conscientiously that in difficult situations they will not act at all. (Green, 1906: 297)

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<sup>4</sup> Green is buried in St. Sepulchre's Cemetery, Oxford, just inside the walls when coming from the Walton Street entrance.

Certainly, being aware of one's motives to some extent is an essential aspect of a truly moral action (Green, 1906: 298, 305, 322-5). The truly moral agent must ask whether or not he did his duty to the best of his ability, paying proper regard to the "circumstances and effects" of his action (Green, 1906: 305). Hence, the criticism applies only in extreme cases. Recognition of the true nature of one's motives is bad only when the agent is being self-indulgent. Green's essential point is that the conscientious moral agent should ask himself whether or not he has done the best that he could in the past and at present. Furthermore, he should do so from the motive of honestly wanting to perform his duty.

To my mind at least, Green's refusal to make the world seem an easy place for a good man to live in, is to be applauded rather than seen as an avoidable fault with his thought as the commentators mentioned earlier seem to believe (see also Lindsay, 1941: xviii-xix).

#### **4. The Problems with Green's Theory of Progress.**

Green believes that, over time, the conscientious citizen tends to move towards a more adequate practical recognition of the Common Good (see Muirhead, 1908: 68-74 ; Bevir, 1993: 655-7). This process of development translates into a progressive widening of the group of people whom the individual understands to be his fellows and hence a widening of that group "towards whom and between whom accordingly obligations are understood to exist." (Green, 1906: 206 ; 206-17)

From the metaphysical argument which was presented in the previous chapter, it can be seen that it is misleading to describe Green as presenting an evolutionary theory of ethics in the manner alleged by Thakurdas (Thakurdas, 1978: e.g. 222). The moral ideal is not necessarily defined in terms of the end which as a matter of fact humanity is moving towards (see also Rodman, 1964: 10-1). This reverses the logical structure of his argument from that presented by Thakurdas in many ways. Indeed, it is fortunate that he does not present an evolutionary justification, given the seriousness of the problems faced by his belief in progress. It is these problems which must be considered next.

Both Paul Harris and Richard Bellamy reject the view that Green saw progress as inevitable - a view which is supported by, for example, H D Lewis.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in 1877,

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<sup>5</sup> Harris, 1988-9: 559-60 ; Bellamy, 1990b: 136 ; Lewis, 1948: 36-41 ; Lewis, 1952: 84. Also, see Hallowell, 1950: 282 ; Benn et al, 1959: 60 ; Richter, 1964: 114, 253, 262 ; Germino, 1972: 272 ; Kloppenberg, 1986: 32 on this issue.

Green did make a speech in which he stated that

society by an *inevitable process* was becoming more and more democratic, and in the future he thought the question whether it should be a healthy democracy depended upon whether they could cure the people of the national habit of drunkenness.<sup>6</sup>

The import of this passage is slightly unclear for Green sees “democracy” but not “healthy democracy” as “inevitable”. Despite this, he does at least refer to an “inevitable process” here. More concretely, a belief in inevitable progress is evident in his discussion of how to identify the individual's morally-relevant community and idea of the true good (Green, 1906: 206-18 *passim*) and in his assessment of the relative worth of Greek and modern virtues (Green, 1906: 246-90 *passim*). In believing in the presence of this tendency, he was reflecting a widespread Victorian attitude (Green, 1906: 186-7). He argues that man always tends to progress towards an ideal of conduct which nonetheless he will never fully embody.<sup>7</sup>:

The whole moral life is, in fact a process in which, though it be sometimes like a stream that seems to run backwards, man, as an unrealised self, is constantly fusing the skirts of the alien matter that surrounds him, and fashioning the world of his desires to a universe adequate to himself.

To the individual man, no doubt, the absoluteness of his limitations never wholly vanishes. The dream that it can do so is the frenzy of philosophy (Green, 1889d: 86)

A belief in the march of progress is found in two of his greatest intellectual ancestors as well - Kant (Kant, 1991a) and Hegel (Hegel, 1956). Unfortunately, Green's philosophical position makes belief in the tendency of people to progress a little peculiar (see Harris, 1988-9: 560 ; also O'Sullivan, 1987: 138-9). Nevertheless it is a belief which he does hold.

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<sup>6</sup> Speech to the Church of England Temperance Society, Merton College, Oxford, 30th October 1877, as reported in the *Oxford Chronicle* of 3rd November, 1877 (p. 6). Emphasis added.

<sup>7</sup> Lancaster misses this last clause in Lancaster, 1959: 225-6.

To understand the nature of the problem, one must return to the heart of his theory of human agency and the will.

Green argues that part of becoming more self-aware is gaining a more developed understanding of one's essential nature and the attractions of attaining its enduring satisfaction. As this happens, the agent's desire to realise this state in the world will tend to become stronger. In this way, the desire to seek what at least appears to be a better state becomes "a [more powerful] moving influence in him" (Green, 1906: 180).

There is a second way in which the extension of the area of the common good tends to increase the individual's moral development (Green, 1906: 208). The rejection of claims that, in essence, obligations spring from ideas of, for example, gender or social status in favour of the idea of the obligation to all humans as rational beings, acts as a spur to moral progress because it frees the agent to realise his truly human potentials.

Faculties which social repression and separation prevent from development, take new life from the enlarged co-operation which the recognition of equal claims in all men brings with it. (Green, 1906: 208)

This thought grounds Green's call for a (limited) extension of the franchise.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the value of social living, the decline in support for ideas of social supremacy and the need for elite rule will tend to be offset by an increase in "the capabilities implied in social self-adjustment" (Green, 1906: 208). This entails the decline of the agent's antagonism towards other humans as increasingly he finds that his conception of the good life coincides with theirs. In part, this means that the greater social self-adjustment enables the individual to feel greater affection and hence have greater respect for his fellow human beings. As was emphasized in the previous chapter, precisely how this is expressed in practice will depend on the specific social context of the growth.

Recognising this universality is vital for the moral agent then as it "is the source of the refinement in his sense of justice." (Green, 1906: 212) Firstly, it will incline him to consider the morality of each of his actions purely on the grounds of the universalised claims of justice and not on the basis of the morally arbitrary relationships which he has with those

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<sup>8</sup> For example, see Green's speech to the Loyal Wellington Lodge of Odd Fellows on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1868 as reported in the *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette* on 29<sup>th</sup> February 1868. Also, see chapter five of this thesis.



people who are affected by his actions. In essence, he will not favour his friends, relations or countrymen simply because they are his friends, relations or countrymen. Similarly, he will not disadvantage his enemies simply because they are his enemies. Secondly, a "refinement of his sense of justice" will lead the moral agent habitually to consider what course of actions are required of him by considerations of justice. This forms the agent's "habit of practical justice, ... it is his constant and uniform state" (Green, 1906: 212). It is "the negative principle of all virtue" (Green, 1906: 212) in that it bars him from acting unjustly although it does not necessarily ensure that he fulfils all of the positive claims on him.

Paul Harris has made a fundamental objection to Green's theory of progress (Harris, 1988-9: 558-9 ; also made by Schneewind, 1977: 411). He asks,

If the moral quality of an action depends on the conscious motive from which it was done and if we can never really know the motives of other's actions, how then can we say that one person's action is morally better or worse than another's? And if we cannot make this kind of judgement, how can we tell whether or not there has been moral progress of the large-scale kind that concerns Green? (Harris, 1988-9: 558)

Harris details two strategies which Green adopts to answer such a potential objection. The first concerns Green's understanding of the sense in which there *is* moral progress and the second concerns how observers of society can ever know that there has been such progress.

Firstly, progress occurs through the development of social institutions - that is, through the gradual extension of the area of the common good as well as through its better articulation in social practices and expectations. Harris objects that - on Green's own terms - it is not enough that individuals perform actions which in essence merely coincide with the outward acts required by duty. To be morally valuable, the act must be performed for the sake of duty. Consequently, Harris argues that for Green social progress must entail that agents (or rather generations of agents) become more dutiful over time. He concludes that "Green's argument is plainly unsatisfactory" (Harris, 1988-9: 559) as what should be important is the actual and not the potential motive - the agent's conscious and not merely his potential motive of acting for duty's sake. The former may be implicit in the latter, but

just being implicit in this sense is not sufficient to make an action morally valuable.

As it stands, this first criticism is not particularly effective. Assume that the moral agents alive today are just as dutiful as those who were raised in previous epochs. There is still moral progress if societies come to be based on a more inclusive conception of the moral community and a more refined scheme of rights and duties. Moral development does not manifest itself simply in an increase in the number of dutiful people in the world as Harris seems to assume Green believes. It is important what they conceive their duty to be and to whom they understand it to be owed.

In with this first objection, Harris mixes another objection which is developed more fully as his second criticism. He argues that the structure of Green's theory of the will precludes him from ever having a reasonable assurance of any other agent's true motives (Harris, 1988-9: 559). As a result, we must judge an action's worth by assessing the worth of its consequences. However, the worth of these consequences is determined solely by the act's tendency to promote actions which proceed from a better will. The initial problem simply reappears. Harris concludes that to judge an agent's motives "[i]t may be that we are reduced to intuition and self-reflection, but they hardly seem adequate bases for these judgements" (Harris, 1988-9: 559).

This is the more important of the two attacks. In considering it, the first thing to notice is that at times Green states explicitly that he does *not* conceive of progress in terms of a growth in the desire to perform one's duty. He takes the strength of such a desire to be relatively stable over the course of human History. For instance, he argues that "according to his lights the Greek might be as conscientious as any of us." (Green, 1986e: 206 ; see also Green, 1906: 271) Instead, in these moods, he argues that progress is manifested only as the general widening of the agent's perception of his morally-relevant community and in the growth of a clearer conception of his duties. Consequently, the result of the calculation which Harris believes Green's theory requires him to make is actually not as controversial as Harris believes it is.

However, Green is not consistent about this, as the analysis earlier in this chapter established. In other words, at times Green does place a lot of emphasis on the refinement of the agent's sense of justice when describing the manifestations of progress. Considering Green in these moods, if Harris was arguing that one can never gain a *reasonable* idea of a person's motives - for example, not even in actual cases which we directly witness for ourselves -, then his objection would be highly implausible. On the other hand, if he is

merely arguing that the calculation is open to such a degree of error that one should not base a theory of progress upon it, then his attack is much more telling. A theory of History covers epochs by definition, and we cannot have the necessary intimate experience of those epochs in which we do not live our own daily lives. Hence, it becomes a lot harder - if not simply impossible - to assess whether or not individuals' wills coincide with the claims of our highest nature more now than they did in earlier ages. Green himself used this criticism against over-ambitious historians in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (Green, 1986a: 111-2). He should have used it against himself as well.

There are other reasons for being sceptical about Green's belief in History. It was noted earlier that Green's belief in progress is founded upon his argument that man is in essence a manifestation of the eternal consciousness under the limiting conditions of an animal form. This animal form prevents him from ever becoming a perfect moral being (Green, 1906: 215-6). Man is condemned forever to be an imperfect expression of his own highest essence. He is always "of the flesh" to some degree. Green believes that these animal limitations can be overcome to some extent - there can be some moral development. There just cannot be complete human perfection. In itself, this does not mean that Green's optimism is misplaced. Humanity may tend to progress at least for the present. We can develop until we reach a state just less than absolute perfection. Green believes that this is the stage Jesus reached (Green, 1889m: 219). Unfortunately, he lacks solid philosophical grounds for his belief that generally there will not be net moral degeneration. Hence, the grounds of his optimism about History are not secure.

This can be established as follows. In his review of Principal Caird's *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Green writes:

[the development of] our actual knowledge remains a piecemeal process. We spell out the relations of things one by one ; we pass from condition to condition, from effect to effect ; but, as one fragment of the truth is grasped, another has escaped us, and we never reach the totality of apprehension through which alone we could know the world as it is and God in it. This is the infirmity of our discursive understanding. If in one sense it reveals God, in another it hides him. (Green, 1889g: 145)

This process affects moral as well as epistemic development. As chapter two established,

they are interrelated anyway. Progress can occur only if God (s.c. the agent as a perfect expression of his own highest essence) is revealed to a greater extent than He is hidden. If He is hidden more than He is revealed, man will *regress*. Human conduct will fall even shorter of the ideal and beliefs will be even farther from the truth than they were before. Green offers no argument in support of his assertion that there will tend to be a 'net uncovering' of the ideal. Without such an argument, Green's optimism about the future must be unwarranted. All he has is faith. As one critic has noted "Green, is really arguing from the *idea* of good to the *actuality* of a preeminently human impulse towards good. ... [This is merely a sign of] Green's incurable optimism" (Hoover, 1973: 556, emphasis in original; see also Hoover. 1973: 564-5).

There is a further reason to be sceptical. If one adopts what is nowadays the most common reading of Green's theory of the will - the neo-Aristotelian line - ultimately, human progress must be at the whim of individual choices. There is no strong philosophical reason to believe that a person who can act voluntarily will necessarily tend to chose a path of progress. Evil actions and regression are just as likely.

It is with this thought that the present discussion takes an even more radical turn. It must be asked, what are the implications for Green's theory of conscientious action and social criticism of adopting the other - spiritual determinist - conception of the will?

## **5. The Spiritual Determinist Theory of Moral Development.**

Chapter two established that when following his spiritual determinist line, Green attacks the view that an agent can be drawn in one direction by "a calm still voice", and in another by irrationality, by aspects of his animality. In these moods, he argues that positing the existence of such a dualism fundamentally misunderstands the nature of moral agency. The crucial assumption of the dualist is that the rationally-guided will is something essentially separable from the desires experienced by the agent. This assumption underlies the 'determinist'/'indeterminist' debate and this is what makes the whole debate futile. On the other hand, stating that the "will is merely the strongest desire" neglects the necessity of the action of the man's consciousness on the desires that he experiences (Green, 1906: 145). As Green writes, it masks the "self-distinguishing and self-realising consciousness, through which, as a transforming medium, these influences must pass before they can take effect in a moral action at all." (Green, 1906: 145) It is in this way that the agent's will is fundamentally an expression of his consciousness as it acts 'automatically' in the

circumstances it faces and in essence creates (e.g. Green, 1906: 303, 311 ; Green, 1986a: 131, 165). Bernard Bosanquet expresses this thought very clearly when he writes that “[i]n short, then, all logical activity is a world of content reshaping itself by its own spirit and laws in presence of new suggestions” (Bosanquet, 1927a: 333). Green’s support for such a view underlies his assertion that:

The idea of the good ... is an idea, if the expression may be allowed, which gradually creates its own filling. ... Acting in us, to begin with, as a demand which is ignorant or what will satisfy itself, it only arrives at a more definite consciousness of its own nature and tendency through reflection on its own creations - on habits and institutions and modes of life which, as a demand not reflected upon, it has brought into being. (Green, 1986e: 241)

Such a position raises the issue of voluntarism which formed the focus of the second chapter of this thesis. A more detailed answer is needed to the question if a human cannot consciously choose how to act (in the manner the spiritual determinist line entails), how does he come to express his nature through his will? The answer is that the agent's knowledge of the world 'activates' the desires which are inherent in his nature. Consequently, the development of a human's consciousness is the progressive actualization of his true or universal nature. It is the progressive activating of the spiritual desires which properly express his abiding nature as an embodiment of the eternal consciousness.

Consider the following case. An agent tries to understand the world as it is presented to him - for example, through the scientific, religious, and moral theories of his social groupings. This is an act of intellect. In that these theories are never completely coherent - either they never manage to fully explain the agent's observations of the world or they fail to do so without contradicting another part of the theory - the agent feels them to be unsatisfactory. He wishes to alter the theory in order to avoid such incoherences. This is a non-voluntary response and it tends to be progressive (in Green's eyes at least).

Turning to the normative realm next. By definition, the fully autonomous agent must recognise himself as desiring a collection of objects which are interrelated in such a way that he conceives of each particular desire as part of a totally coherent system of desires and motives which express the highest essence of man. The growth mechanism of this system in an agent who becomes less imperfect is clarified when Green writes:

Every step in the definition of the wanted object implies a further action of the same subject, in the way of comparing various wants that arise in the process of life, along with the incidents of their satisfaction, as they only can be compared by a subject which is other than the process, not itself a stage or series of stages in the succession which it observes. At the same time as the reflecting subject traverses the series of wants, which it distinguishes from itself while it presents their filling as its object, there arises the idea of a satisfaction on the whole - an idea never realisable, but for ever striving to realise itself in the attainment of a greater command over means to the satisfaction of particular wants. (Green, 1906: 85)

This process is described by Green as a growing consciousness of oneself as a being

which unites successive wants in the idea of a general need for which provision is to be made, and holds together the successive wants and fillings as the connected but distinct incidents of an inner life (Green, 1906: 90)

For the agent to possess a coherent view of the world then, he must recognise its inseparability from the action of his consciousness. Furthermore, he must recognise that "we only find unity in the world because we have an idea that it is there, an idea which we direct our powers to realise." (Green, 1906: 149) Humans feel a need to understand the world as being a coherent environment in which to live and it is a central contention of the spiritual determinist line that they construct its coherence through a non-conscious act of will and therefore intellect. As long as the agent recognises that the objects in which he habitually seeks his self-satisfaction do not bring him lasting satisfaction, he has the possibility of reform and hence remorse. This brings him "both the inchoate impulse to realise the conception [of being better], and the possibility of its realisation." (Green, 1906: 110) Again, it appears that reform is not voluntarily sought but arises out of an impulse in man which is an expression of his nature (not his choice). However, his belief in the tendency of humanity to progress is no more secure if one adopts the spiritual determinist rather than the neo-Aristotelian line because of the penultimate attack given above. In other words, "as one fragment of the truth is grasped, another has escaped us" (Green, 1889g: 145) and he has no sound philosophical reason for believing that progress is ever likely, let

alone that it is a tendency.

A second difficulty for Green is that if - of the two approaches - the determinist line is most in harmony with the main thrust of the rest of his philosophy - including of course his epistemology - then it radically alters the import of his theory of conscientious action. Remember Henry Calderwood's objection which was quoted in the second chapter of this thesis:

A philosophy which accounts for all things by 'the action of a free or self-conditioned and eternal mind,' has by its own structure created a difficulty in the way of shaping a theory of personal obligation ; for an injunction to conform to law seems as unmeaning in a nature which is the 'reproduction of an eternal consciousness,' as in a 'being who is simply the result of natural forces'. (Calderwood, 1885: 81)

What becomes of Green's call to consult one's conscience? Or to judge one's actions by the standards of one's social group when faced with a perplexity of conscience? Or to pursue the common good? In short, what becomes of his injunction to become a conscientious citizen when the very structure of his argument precludes the agent from acting in any way except that in which he is pushed automatically by the interaction of his nature and circumstances? Moreover, if the agent cannot chose (voluntarily) to act otherwise than in fact he does, in what sense can he be held responsible for anything? Again, the most fundamental aspect of these points have been dealt with at some length in the second chapter. Adopting this line, 'all' that is lost from what is currently the favoured reading of Green's thought is the idea that conscientious action is voluntary in the sense that the agent could have acted otherwise than in fact he did. Nevertheless, there is no way to overcome these conclusions which will not require even more profound alterations to be made to the remainder of Green's thought from his epistemology 'up'. This is a very big 'all' for Green and probably for many of his supporters. It alters fundamentally the nature of his moral and political thought from the way he understood himself and the way in which generally he is read now.

## 6. Conclusion.

Kenneth R Hoover has argued that:

[t]he assumption of automatic progress is essential to Green's idealism, but not to the defence of liberal values. The potential for progress rather than the historical reality of progress is the crucial point in the justification of liberal values. (Hoover, 1973: 564-5)

Now, the last point is true as long as by "[t]he potential for progress" is meant that liberalism must possess an attainable standard of conduct for it to be a viable moral and political theory. However, Hoover's first point - to the extent that it is intelligible at all - simply does not hold water. There is no plausible reason why "automatic progress" must be assumed for Green to have a viable idealist philosophy. Rejecting any belief in the inevitability of - or even the mere tendency for - moral progress does not invalidate his argument. What it does do is move him closer to Aristotle and away from Hegel, in the sense that it means societies can become better *or* worse over time rather than always tending to progress over time. Consequently, progress is something we must work for and not wait for. This gives another reason for characterizing Green as an "English Aristotle".<sup>9</sup>

Green is very clear that the lack of abstract commandments means that the conscientious agent faces great difficulties when attempting to act well. To help to resolve some of these problems, he believes that one must look to the political realm. As Ritchie puts it,

Green's view of Ethics is completed by his view of Politics; because he conceives that the function of the State is to make it possible for men to realise themselves, which they can only do by attaining a good that is a common good. (Ritchie, 1896: 141)

It is with this thought that the discussion moves on to examine Green's political philosophy in the next chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> MacCunn, 1907: 253 ; the phrase recurs in Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 196 ; see Nettleship, 1889: lxx-lxxii *passim*.



## CHAPTER FIVE:

### *RIGHTS AND THE STATE*

The real function of government ... [is] to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible, ... [with] morality consisting in the disinterested performance of self-imposed duties (Green, 1986a: 18)

#### 1. Introduction.

Green's *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* has been variously received. Rex Martin describes it as "perhaps the finest book in the philosophy of rights written to date." (Martin, 1986: 104) John Bowle argues that it offers "the most valuable, closely reasoned, and practical case for Victorian humanism." (Bowle, 1954: 275) On the other hand, Geoffrey Thomas characterises it "as one attempt, not itself of privileged importance but rather partial and at times precarious, to draw out the political implications of an ethical theory." (Thomas, 1987: 363) A J Ayer saw it has "a respectable but hardly an inspiring work" (Ayer, 1969: 240). More fundamentally, Craig Smith argues that the text is inherently confused and was probably corrupted by its original editor, R L Nettleship (Smith, 1981). Although Harris and Morrow have established that the text has not been corrupted to any major extent (Harris et al, 1985 ; see also Wempe, 1986: 175 ; Nicholson, 1987: 116-7), this has not altered the fact that the assessments made by Martin and Bowle are in the minority in recent evaluations of the *Principles*.

This chapter begins with an examination of the general principles of Green's philosophy of rights. Particular attention is paid to his theory of recognition and the role which it plays in the ontology of moral and legal rights. It is established that Green's theory necessarily precludes certain entities from ever possessing moral rights. From this basis, his theory of the state is outlined and examined. Special attention is paid to keeping open the possibility of justifying a multicultural state on the basis of Greenian principles. This task is important given the attention paid in the previous chapters to the social fragmentation which is characteristic of the modern age. Green's defence of democratic social and political institutions is examined as is his conception of legitimate state intervention. This raises the question of the causes of social change and his theory of civil disobedience. Following that, it must be asked - even allowing for the defeat of Berlin's objection in chapter three - whether or not Green's political philosophy is ultimately in danger of justifying

authoritarianism.

It will be seen in the course of this chapter that between Green's ethical and his political philosophy, "the distinction was rather one of form and method than of matter and substance." (Conybeare, 1889: 773) At the same time, there is great deal of truth in Nettleship's observation that "the lectures on *The principles of political obligation* form in some degree an illustrative commentary on the *Prolegomena to ethics*." (Nettleship, 1889: cxlix)

I do not always examine in depth Green's discussions of specific "private rights". To a certain extent, this is because Green's thought is self-consciously time-bound when it comes to such determinate rights, duties and obligations (see e.g. Green, 1986a: 1, 102). In part also, this strategy has been adopted because the logical heart of these areas has been examined earlier in this thesis anyway. For example, in many ways "the right to life and liberty" (Green, 1986a: 148-56) has played a central role in the argument since chapter two. "The right of the state to punish" (Green, 1986a: 176-206) was examined very briefly in chapter three and receives some attention in this chapter as well as do rights within the family (Green, 1986a: 233-46). Green's consideration of war (Green, 1986a: 157-75), on the other hand, is not examined in this chapter although it was mentioned to a certain extent in the third. Of the remaining areas - i.e. the state's role in the promotion of morality (Green, 1986a: 207-10) and the right to hold private property (Green, 1986a: 211-32) - the former receives notable attention in this chapter and the latter forms the focus of the next chapter.

Most of this chapter is premised upon the neo-Aristotelian strands of Green's writings on the will as set out in chapter two of this thesis. Green does seem to be working with this conception throughout his political writings - although I have cast doubts upon whether or not this is consistent with the more fundamental levels of his philosophical system. Only in the last section of this chapter do I change this assumption and examine the implications for Green's political philosophy of adopting the spiritual determinist theory of the will.

The discussion begins with an examination of the formal structures of rights, duties, obligations and the state. It will be established that Green's theory is coherent for the most part, once the proper role of his conception of "distinctively human action" is correctly appreciated.

## 2. Rights and Recognition.

Green's political thought presupposes his theory of "distinctively human action". The latter is that type of action which expresses the higher nature of man (sc. the eternal consciousness). This higher nature is only present in the world - ultimately - in personality and therefore in individual human minds. Importantly, Green has established that expression of this nature and its links to the animal form of human life relies upon the existence of a sympathetic context. In the social sphere, such a context is framed by deep attachments to institutions such as the family and specific political movements, with such institutions existing primarily within the minds of their participants (Green, 1986a: 25). These claims have significant implications for Green's political philosophy. In particular, they are fundamental to his theory of rights, duties and obligations and to his theory of the state. It is to the first of these - the theory of rights, duties and obligations - that the discussion must turn now.

We must begin with some definitions. Green thinks of 'a right' in essentially the same way that Kant defines "ein Recht"; that is, "a title ... to coerce others through [one's] mere will to do or omit something that is otherwise indifferent to freedom" (Kant, quoted in Mulholland, 1990:5). Also, at least in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, Green draws a distinction between a duty and an obligation.<sup>1</sup> The former is a moral imperative and necessarily refers to the inner motivation of the agent, whereas performance of the latter is amoral in essence and refers to the outward performance of the act only (Green, 1986a: 10). Conceptually - if not always in practice - the latter can be enforced through legal sanctions, whereas the former cannot. One cannot have an obligation to perform one's duty because that would require the agent to force himself to act from a certain motive - that is out of a sense of duty. However, all that can be enforced is the performance of "external acts" (Green, 1986a: 10). These are deeds which are carried out intentionally - that is, the agent wills to perform them - but not necessarily for the sake of duty. In essence, such deeds are only the performance of "certain motives of the bodily members which produce certain effects in the material world" (Green, 1986a: 13). For this

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<sup>1</sup> For interesting and concise discussions of this distinction see Conybeare, 1889: 776-7; Milne, 1962: 125-7; Harris, 1986: 128-9 and Wempe, 1986: 56. Green is adopting a distinction which - with various differences of terminology - is used by many other philosophers. For example, see Locke, 1991: 18-9; Spinoza, 1958: chapter XVI; Kant, 1991c: 218-21.

reason, the law should not be concerned to produce acts which are carried out from the agent's sense of duty (Green, 1986a: 137). The most it can hope to achieve is the occurrence of the same consequences which would follow from a dutiful action. As Green puts it, the law "has nothing to do with the motive of the actions or omissions, on which, however, the moral value of them depends." (Green, 1986a: 13). It is necessary because it is better that some outward acts or omissions are performed out of fear of punishment rather than not being performed at all (Green, 1986a: 16). In this way, Green succeeds in maintaining a distinction between moral and legal rights (although both Prichard and Thakurdas miss this (Prichard, 1949: *passim* ; Thakurdas, 1978: 31)). In what follows, it will be clear whether I refer to duties or obligations or both from the particular context.

It is an important aspect of Green's justification of reciprocal rights and duties that without living under such a system, the individual would face severe hindrances to his own moral development. "[T]hey arise out of, and are necessary for the fulfilment of, a moral capacity without which a man would not be a man." (Green, 1986a: 30)

that I may have a life which I can call my own, I must not only be conscious of myself and of ends which I present to myself as mine; I must be able to reckon on a certain freedom of action and acquisition for the attainment of those ends, and this can only be secured through common recognition of this freedom on the part of each other by members of a society, as being for a common good. (Green, 1986a: 114)

Rights are a "negative" condition of man's self-perfection. However, they are more than this. Without a system of rights and duties which corresponds to the conception of a common good which the ruled identify as their own true well-being, there could be no society and without a society there could be no determinate persons.

A right is a power of which the exercise by the individual or by some body of men is recognised by a society either as itself directly essential to a common good or as conferred by an authority of which the maintenance is recognised as so essential (Green, 1986a: 103)

Space must be secured for the self-expression of human nature by concrete individuals

otherwise these individuals would not possess moral personalities.

A number of points arise here. Firstly, this justification logically entails that the most basic right which an individual can possess is the right to live a positively free life (Green, 1986a: 148-56). Indeed, this is a precondition of all other rights in the sense that other rights are of no use without the basic right to self-determination (Green, 1986a: 155). Secondly, Green's claim that the capacity for being determined to action by one's own conception of a common good is the basis of all rights forms the foundation of his attack on the 'natural rights' tradition of Spinoza, Hobbes and Locke.<sup>2</sup> His attack is very revealing in relation to his own positive position and so is worth examining briefly here.

For these social contract theorists, certain rights are possessed by every human irrespective of the right-holder's cultural background and are made known to him through the exercise of his (non-historically conditioned) reason (Green, 1986a: 113). Consequently, the specifics of a person's upbringing do not fundamentally affect either his rational understanding of these rights or the legitimacy of his claim to hold them.

Green does not reject this approach for the reason put forward by Prichard and implicitly supported by Lancaster - that is, because he holds that individuals have rights and obligations only at the state's behest (Prichard, 1949: 57-66 ; Lancaster, 1959: *passim*). Indeed, it should be clear, especially given Green's moral theory, that this must rest upon a very twisted reading of Green's text.<sup>3</sup> The natural rights tradition is rejected by Green because it fails to appreciate "the development of society and of man through society." (Green, 1986a: 113) The natural rights tradition is fundamentally flawed because it is based upon a view of the higher essence of man as essentially separable from his society and its norms. In this manner, it neglects the situated nature of every human consciousness and life for which Green argues so strongly throughout his writings. In this sense, natural rights theorists present a theory which is defective in that it leaves "out of sight the process by which men have been clothed with rights and duties" (Green, 1986a: 113). The natural rights theorists try to apply rights, duties and obligations which have arisen in one cultural setting within a different setting. Consequently, these rights, duties and obligations stand

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<sup>2</sup> Green, 1986a: 7-31 *passim*, 32-63, 113, 178-9, 214-6 ; see Spinoza, 1958: 125-43 *passim* ; Hobbes, 1991: 91-111 ; Locke, 1988: 4-15 ; see also Milne, 1962: 127-33 *passim* ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 83-7 ; Cacoullos, 1974: 14-5 ; Greengarten, 1981: 52-5, 58-60 ; Martin, 1986 ; Wempe, 1986: 178-83 *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> See Cacoullos, 1974: 75-6 for another attack upon Prichard's reading.

in different relations to the remainder of the cultural framework. Therefore, they change their nature from that which they possessed in their original context. As a consequence, they change their moral entailments.

Despite his rejection of the 'natural rights tradition', Green does believe that there is a sense in which a certain system of rights and duties is 'natural' to each person as a human being.

There is a system of rights and obligations which *should be* maintained by law, whether it is so or not, and which may properly be called '*natural*', ... because necessary to the end which it is the vocation of human society to realise. (Green, 1986a: 9, emphasis in original)

The perfect society - which has been shown to be a kingdom of ends - would allow all of its members to be and live as fully human beings; that is, as beings which fully express their inherent nature and so act in a distinctively human manner. The system of moral rights and duties upon which this society would be based is 'natural' in Green's eyes because it must be perfectly matched to such truly human needs.<sup>4</sup> Both the system and the needs are structured by the underlying framework of a truly human consciousness - the eternal consciousness - and express a vital moment of the objective manifestation of the Common Good. The system constituted by those rights and duties coheres fully with the requirements of a kingdom of ends in the manner detailed in chapter three of this thesis (Green, 1986a: 138).

It should be noted in passing that there is something paradoxical about extending Green's moral argument regarding the gradual perfecting of the system of reciprocal rights and 'claims' to the political realm in the manner Green does. This is frequently missed. Natural rights and duties can only fully exist - in the sense of being understandable by the moral agent and habitually guiding his conduct - when he has fully realised his essence. Therefore, they must be 'fences' around perfect individuals to protect them from interference from other perfect individuals. However, if individuals are fully developed, then no one will need to be protected by legally-enforced claims - by obligations. Certainly, morally-binding rights and duties will exist as guides to action, but perfect moral agents will

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Ulam misses this point in Ulam, 1951: 36.

respect them fully out of a sense of duty and not from a fear of legal punishment. In this way, legal rights and obligations are not necessary when man has realised the end which it is his vocation to realise. Hence, there are no truly natural rights which need recognising in law. At one point in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, Green does seem to recognise this implication, but he neither emphasizes it nor traces out its further implications nor holds to it in the remainder of his writings (Green, 1986a: 189 ; see Brinton, 1962: 216-7). In his defence, it should be noted that, as we are all imperfect at the moment and are likely to remain so forever, such an objection is of little practical importance.

Green clarifies the nature of the social embeddedness of rights, duties and obligations when he claims that:

It is not in so far as I can do this or that that I have a right to do this or that, but so far as I recognise myself and am recognised by others as able to do this or that for the sake of a common good, or so far as in the consciousness of myself and others I have a function relative to this end. (Green, 1986a: 38)

In other words, a system of rights and duties/obligations is truly legitimate only to the extent that it is recognised as being that system which best serves the agent's attainment of his telos. It was established in the third chapter of this thesis that this telos is an end which the 'rights-recognising-and-claiming agent' perceives as being common to both himself and the other members of those communities with which he identifies himself (Green, 1986a: 25). In short, to possess a conception of his telos which is sufficiently determinate to derive rights and duties, the individual must be socialised within the moralising institutions of a community.

Remembering Green's use of Hegel's theory of intersubjectivity, the process of the growth in recognition of one's own worth presupposes one's practical recognition of the worth of the persons with whom one forms a community (Gaus, 1983: 190-1). Logically entailed in this act of recognition is the recognition that respecting others is a claim from duty (Green, 1986a: 26-31). It is in this manner that possessing rights entails that one also recognises one's duties to others (Green, 1986a: 21). This completes Green's attack on the natural rights tradition. He argues that - as well as all its other faults - the latter places far too much emphasis upon rights and largely ignores the other side of the equation.

Furthermore, the natural rights tradition implies that claims can be made against society. On Green's view, the fact that rights and duties exist only to the extent that they are recognised as forming part of a reciprocal system means that "[t]he fact of [the agent's] not consenting [to be bound by any particular duty within this system] would be an extinction of all right on his part." (Green, 1986a: 138) For the individual to claim a right against society would require him simultaneously to deny the very basis on which he could possess any rights at all (Cacoullos, 1974: 118-20).

This point must be emphasized. The legitimacy of every specific right is derived from the relationships in which it stands to a specific conception of the common good which structures its society, and this good only exists for a person who is embedded within a society. The closer the good is to embodying the Common Good, the closer the system of rights and duties is to Green's system of natural rights and duties. Claiming any right implies recognition of the worth of one's fellows and hence the common good which binds one to them (Green, 1986a: 25). It is this insight which leads Green to the important conclusion that:

in truth there is no ... natural right to do as one likes irrespectively of society. It is on the relation to a society - to other men recognising a common good - that the individual's rights depend, as much as the gravity of a body depends on relations to other bodies. A right is a power claimed and recognised as contributory to a common good. A right against society, in distinction from a right to be treated as a member of society, is a contradiction in terms. (Green, 1986a: 99)

Rex Martin concludes his excellent article on Green's critique of the natural rights tradition with this point.:

Without it [i.e. social recognition] the rightholder would lack the proper understanding of his claim (that it was justified and that engaging the cooperation of others was justified too). Without it duties would not be in place, or could not be called on; nor would second parties conceive their conduct as normatively directed. Without it there would be no *guarantee* to an individual of what was justifiably claimed as his due and he could not



count on getting what was claimed. (Martin, 1986: 118-9, emphasis in original)

Of these reasons, the first is in many ways the most fundamental. Possessing a sense of one's personal identity presupposes the actualisation of one's intersubjective self-consciousness. As Sabine puts it, "the heightening of a sense of individuality is possible only with an increased sense of the social significance of such individuality." (Sabine, 1915: 173)

It is a necessary consequence of Green's metaphysics that rights exist only to the extent that they are claimed by individuals as serving the society's common good and are recognised by the other members of society as doing so (Green, 1986a: 139 ; see also Hegel, 1967: 207).

There can be no right without a consciousness of common interest on the part of members of a society. Without this there might be certain powers on the part of individuals, but no recognition of these powers by others as powers of which they allow the exercise, nor any claim to such recognition, and without this recognition or claim to recognition there can be no right. (Green, 1986a: 31)

These aspects - the claim and the recognition - are the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of a right and duty. Once again, this reflects Green's idealism - as he puts it a little later, "[t]here is no right but thinking makes it so - none that is not derived from some idea that men have about each other." (Green, 1986a: 136) When rights and duties are properly conceived, social recognition is founded "on the conception of the individual as being what he really is in virtue of a function which he has to fulfil relatively to a certain end, that end being the common well-being of a society." (Green, 1986a: 38).

So that this point is not obscured, it is important to counter Thomas' claim that, for Green:

A right is power which enables the agent to fulfill the requirements of a lifeplan. For moral ontology what thus grounds a right is not dependent on recognition as its necessary condition: ... But in the context of a morality of social roles, only such powers as can be ascertained as necessary or

appropriate to a practice have any relevance to moral or political discourse. Moral epistemology enjoys thereby a degree of separation from moral ontology. (Thomas, 1987: 355)

This line is essentially the one which Hobhouse states Green does not - but should - pursue (Hobhouse, 1918: 119-20). Thomas' interpretation is not necessarily in conflict with the line pursued by Rex Martin. However, it is not what Green thought (and also there is no reason to believe that it is how Martin interprets Green). Certainly, a right is validated by its place in a system which aims at - and in part constitutes - a common good. Yet, to the extent that this claim is not recognised by the group whose common good it serves and partially constitutes, it is not a right. Recognition is a necessary aspect of the ontology and not just the epistemology of rights. Copleston writes, "[t]he point is that 'right' is, so to speak, a social term." (Copleston, 1966: 175n2). It is a social entity as well for Green. Hence, the quote from Green given by Thomas in support of his reading - i.e. " 'A right is a power' " (Thomas, 1987: 353) - must be completed with what Green writes immediately afterwards:

A right is a power of which the exercise by the individual or by some body of men is recognised by a society either as itself directly essential to a common good or as conferred by an authority of which the maintenance is recognised as so essential. (Green, 1986a: 103)

Hence, Thomas is a misreading of Green's position. Ann Cacoullos misinterprets Green as well when she argues that:

The factor of social recognition which, according to Green, renders a power of action into a right or action is not a mental attitude, such as an opinion or intellectual realization. To recognise a power or a claim is *to act* or behave in ways appropriate to the contents of the demand. (Cacoullos, 1974: 95, emphasis in original)

In expressing the idea thus, Cacoullos is in danger of overstating the distance between thought and action in Green's philosophy. She should make it more clear that the nature

(in the relevant sense) of an action is internally related to the motives of the agent performing it, and so necessarily depends upon the significance which that action has for him. Cacoullos' interpretation borders upon behaviouralism and that is definitely inappropriate for Green as an idealist.<sup>5</sup>

The claim that recognition forms a necessary aspect of the ontology of a right has occasioned much confusion and criticism in other parts of the literature as well (e.g. Lewis, 1952: 79-89 *passim* ; O'Sullivan, 1987: 182-8 *passim*). For instance, Plamenatz interprets the role played by recognition in Green's theory of rights and duties as implying that "men ... ought not to have [rights] unless their governors or the majority of their fellow men are of the opinion that they should have them." (Plamenatz, 1938: 90 ; see also Lewis, 1962b: esp. 121-5) He comes to this interpretation in spite of all the passages in Green's writings which explicitly contradict the claim. He even quotes one such passage without grasping the clear tension with his reading. Green writes:

If the common interest requires it [i.e. a particular law], no right can be alleged against it. Neither can its enactment by popular vote enhance, nor the absence of such vote diminish, its right to be obeyed. (Green, 1986a: 99)

At first sight, the second sentence here seems to imply that the legitimacy of rights does not stem from the people. It is a short step to Plamenatz's assertion that rights exist primarily at the behest of the sovereign. However, in context and as the first sentence quoted establishes, it is clear that Green is not objecting to the idea that people themselves determine - in some fundamental sense - the nature of rights. What he is arguing against is the view that rights spring from the arbitrary wills of individuals (in the manner alleged by social contract theorists such as Hobbes, Spinoza and - on Green's reading - in one mood Rousseau). Rights are justified by the higher and permanent needs of determinate agents. They are legitimated solely upon this basis. What Green is in fact asserting is that rights are powers secured to individuals by the concrete recognition (no matter how inchoate) of the

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<sup>5</sup> Although there is insufficient space to deal with this point in depth, it should be noted that Cacoullos' analysis is generally perceptive but ultimately contains many flaws (Cacoullos, 1974: 86-106 *passim*). For the most part, these flaws stem from a failure to appreciate the exact nature of Green's epistemology and his conception of the Common Good and the interrelationships between the two.

needs for certain relations to obtain between specific determinate individuals in order that they may act in a distinctively human manner. Hence, in reality none of the passages quoted by Plamenatz establish that Green believes that the legitimacy of rights and duties is based upon the subjective wills of the majority nor the government in the manner Plamenatz implies (Plamenatz, 1938: 90-1). Instead, they are based upon the higher interests of concrete human beings.

In another passage, Plamenatz makes it clear that even if his first objection stands, he regards Green's position on the existence of natural rights as absurd (Plamenatz, 1938: 94-7). He argues that:

if these powers ought to be recognized [as Green argues] it follows also that they ought to be possessed, for it is only because they ought to be possessed that they ought to be recognized. Moreover, if they ought to be possessed, it is clear that the possession of them would be either itself good or else a means to the good. In either case, their want of recognition, making it impossible for their potential possessors to exercise them, diminishes or, at least, prevents the increase of what is good. It is clear, then, that this want of recognition is productive of evil, or else a hindrance to the good, in spite of the fact that no one is wronged, since no one is deprived of his rights. This paradoxical conclusion, at which we must necessarily arrive, if we start with the supposition that there exist powers which should be rights and yet are not, appears to be false. (Plamenatz, 1938: 95-6)

Throughout this passage, Plamenatz demonstrates his own failure to appreciate the nature of the link which Green posits between philosophy and practice. Understanding this link is a crucial step in gaining a proper understanding of why recognition is entailed by the ontology of rights. Certainly, Green does argue that specific rights ought to be accorded to all humans when those individuals are fully developed. This is his conception of teleologically 'natural' rights. However, the legitimacy of this 'ought' depends upon the practical context. More particularly, it depends upon the nature of the determinate entities between whom the relationships - implied by the possession of particular rights - exist. Quite simply, different partially determinate humans have different requirements in their search for self-realisation. The nature of the rights which should be granted to determinate

individuals depends upon their specific present imperfections in the sense that different systems of rights, duties and obligations will suit different determinate humans.

It can be seen that only if his supporting argument goes through is Plamenatz justified in arguing that suffering 'evil' or being hindered in one's pursuit of the good is the only situation which can be seen as being 'wronged' (retaining Plamenatz's use of that word). Implicitly, Green rejects this assertion and rightly so. There are many ways in which one can suffer evil without necessarily having one's rights violated.

Ultimately, even Plamenatz himself recognizes that his criticism is based upon a terminological difference, for in his next paragraph he accuses Green of "a misuse of ordinary language" (Plamenatz, 1938: 96). He makes this accusation even though Green wrote sixty years before Plamenatz made his criticism. Once again, Plamenatz's method pushes him to rip text from its context. It must be asked to what extent it is realistic to assume that the "ordinary language" of the mid- to late-Victorian era was comparable to "ordinary language" at the beginning of the Second World War. Indeed, one must question the extent to which it is ever useful to think in terms of "ordinary language" at all in this specific manner in philosophical discourse.<sup>6</sup> In Vincent's words, "much of the time ordinary language reflects confused and half-baked theories and consequently needs to be critically understood." (Vincent, 1987: 341)

That an individual has no moral rights or duties against society does not mean that he cannot criticise the existing system of rights and duties under which he lives in the manner Plamenatz and his fellows alleged (e.g. Prichard, 1949: 57-66 ; Lancaster, 1959: *passim*). It has already been established at length in chapter four that Green is at pains to argue no actually existing system is perfect and that - if he is able - the individual has a duty to remove any defects which he believes to be present in his world (Green, 1986a: 9). The standard of perfection which ideally should guide the individual in constructing and implementing plans for social reform is his conscientious assessment of the tendency of the system of rights and duties to further the attainment of human perfection in the form of beings who have a habitual tendency to act in a distinctively human fashion (Green, 1986a: 20). As has been insisted, the determinate nature of such perfection is inextricably linked to the understanding of the moral world which the particular individual has gained from his society. Consequently, every individual has a duty to seek recognition for a system of rights and

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Cacoullos does this very well in Cacoullos, 1974: 147-8.

duties which is based upon what he believes to be a more coherent conception of the common good (Green, 1986a: 100, 119). In a sense, therefore, any revision of existing norms must be a modification of conventional morality.

This line of reasoning leads Green to argue that where rights, duties and obligations which are at present granted to and placed upon the individual by his society are based upon contradictions and incoherences within the society's attempt to attain its common good, the individual must seek to be given rights, duties and obligations which society does not yet recognise. The mere fact that the agent does not like a particular moral claim (or obligation) which is made upon him is not sufficient justification for not complying with it (Green, 1986a: 99). The individual must conscientiously believe that the (alleged) moral claim is detrimental to the attainment of the Common Good. It is significant that Green's position presupposes the Hegelian argument from intersubjectivity. Green argues that "rights have no being except in a society of men recognising each other as *isio kai homoioi* [equals]. They are constituted by that mutual recognition." (Green, 1986a: 139, emphasis in original ; repeated Green, 1986a: 148) This means that a system of rights and obligations can possess different strengths of claims on the individuals living under them. The more fully the system approaches the 'natural' system, the stronger its claim and therefore the less leeway the person can have for conscientious objection. Consequently, the force of the agent's moral duty, political obligation and therefore the legitimacy of the constitution vary as well. (Green, 1986a: 132) This point will be returned to when Green's theory of resistance is examined in greater depth in the penultimate section of this chapter.

One consequence of this conclusion is that the agent's recognition that the same right must be possessed by all of those rational agents with whom he comes into contact becomes a necessary condition of possessing a fully valid right (Green, 1986a: 138):

every moral person, is capable of [and ought to possess] rights ; i.e. of bearing his part in a society in which the free exercise of his powers is secured to each member through the recognition by each of the others as entitled to the same freedom with himself. (Green, 1986a: 25)

It should be emphasized once again that this is a logical consequence of Green's metaphysical argument. A moral agent is, by definition, a person who understands himself as a being who is capable of sharing an absolutely desirable end with fellow moral agents.

To favour his own attainment of the end which they all share as moral beings at the expense of a similar attainment by his fellows would represent a contradiction in the person's act of willing (Green, 1986a: 138).

It is from this basis that Green attacks the denial of moral (and legal) rights to slaves. It is important to be clear about this argument because Prichard ignores it in his highly influential polemic against Green and this has caused many misunderstandings of Green's position.<sup>7</sup> He is emphatic that "[s]lavery ... implies the establishment of some regular system of rights in the slave-owning society. The slave, especially the domestic slave, has the signs and effects of this system all about him." (Green, 1986a: 114) The slave is at least partially aware of his own power as a social, creative and self-realisable being, and of the social system in which he lives and which grants rights and obligations to non-slaves on the basis of their (the non-slaves') capacities for self-realisation (Green, 1986a: 140). The legal duties and the actual daily treatment of the slave by other slaves and non-slaves implies recognition of his capacity for rational agency and, therefore, also implies the existence of moral rights for him. The slave cannot help but feel a contradiction in his life (no matter how inchoate that feeling actually is). For this reason, any society which upholds the institution of slavery "is violating a right, founded on that common human consciousness which is evinced both [1] by language which the slave speaks and [2] by actual social relations." (Green, 1986a: 140)<sup>8</sup> Firstly, the ability to communicate through language is evidence of self-consciousness because, as Green puts it, "[l]anguage presupposes thought as a capacity, but in us the capacity of thought is only actualised in language." (Green, 1906: 183) This point was made in chapters two and three. Secondly, only people (sc. agents) are capable of taking part in social relationships (Green, 1906: 182-3 ; Green, 1986a: 25-31). These considerations should form foundational moral considerations for all actual human social relationships. Furthermore, Green argues that the capacity to live as a member of a community entails that one has a claim to be respected by every other moral agent.

Membership of any community is so far in principle membership of all communities as to constitute a right to be treated as a freeman by all other men, to be exempt from subjection to force except for prevention of force.

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<sup>7</sup> Prichard, 1949: 58-9 ; supported by Richter, 1964: 244-5, 263-5 ; Simmons, 1979: 38-9.

<sup>8</sup> Also, see Nettleship, 1889: xliii-xiv.

(Green, 1986a: 140)

It may appear strange for Green to take this line given his insistence upon the role of practical recognition in the ontology of rights and at least one commentator has missed this aspect of his argument (Milne, 1962: 129-30). Why should one's membership of culture A create rights against, and duties towards, members of culture B? To answer this question, one must firstly properly understand Green's claim that rights and duties can be implicit (Green, 1986a: 104, 139-47 *passim*). The key idea here is that there can be implicit recognition that someone is a person (sc. a being capable of moral action). Recall the example of the slave. The slave feels alienated because he is aware of his capacity to act in a purposive manner. However, he has this capacity fully respected neither by others nor by himself. In other words, the master is acting in a self-contradictory manner when he uses the slave as a purposive tool. Indeed, the very phrase 'purposive tool' - when used in this sense - is oxymoronic. There are two competing logics at work in the institution of slavery then. Firstly, the master gives the slave orders and, therefore, must (at the very least implicitly and inchoately) recognise the slave as a purposive being - that is as a being with the capacity to act in a distinctively human manner. Secondly, the master treats the slave as a tool and this entails an implicit denial of his capacity for agency. The master's action embodies two mutually incompatible visions of the slave, then. In one, the slave has the capacity to be an autonomous agent and, in the other, he is merely a tool. Both master and slave possess an at least partially inchoate recognition of the contradiction which this situation embodies. It is on the basis of the former claim that the slave has an implicit right to be accorded equal respect by everyone, including the master.

The force of Green's position on this issue has not always been fully appreciated even by his more sympathetic commentators. For instance, Peter Nicholson has argued that for Green:

A man may have a 'valid' claim to a 'real' right, but if it is not recognised *as a legal right* then it is not a 'full' or 'actual' or 'explicit' right but merely 'implicit'. (Nicholson, 1990: 85, emphasis added)

Nicholson is correct when he argues that a full or explicit right can only exist where the valid claim is given legal recognition. However, an implicit right does not exist only where a) a



person is accorded a moral right by the self-conscious recognition given to him by the other members of his society and b) this claim does not receive legal recognition as well. The slave, for instance, has an implicit right which arises from his awareness that the very logic of his actions and social relationships entails that he is a purposive being. As a purposive being, he is capable of pursuing a common good. In other words, it is not merely that the master must be conscious that the slave can pursue a common good (and is therefore a moral being) as Nicholson implies. The master may recognise this purposive capacity and still fail to fully recognise the moral implications of that capacity. Yet, the fact that he does - in some sense - recognise that the capacity for purposive agency is the mark of a moral agent in other contexts, means that the slave has an implicit right to equal treatment by the master.<sup>9</sup> It is in this way that membership of any one society gives the agent an implicit right to equal treatment by all other humans (Green, 1986a: 151). Any person who is capable of (self-conscious) social interaction and who is at least implicitly recognized as such, has a *prima facie* right to equal treatment.

### **3. Entities which Cannot Possess Rights.**

From this examination of the philosophical foundations of Green's theory of rights, it should be clear that certain sorts of entity can never possess rights or duties, due to the very logic of his position. This necessary implication has occasioned much criticism. In this section, I examine these exclusions.

The most obvious types of entity which cannot possess rights include the natural environment, animals, the irredeemably severely mentally disabled and the irredeemably severely insane. They are all excluded because they are inherently incapable of self-realisation - that is, of making themselves positively free. These categories must be considered in turn if the central problem with Green's theory is to become clear. Firstly, the environment is not a purposive agent (unless one believes in some form of mysticism) and so cannot possess any rights or duties itself (Green, 1986a: 208). Certainly, people may have a right and even a duty to protect their natural environment. However, the validity of

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<sup>9</sup> Certainly, the importance of this point of difference between myself and Peter Nicholson should not be over-emphasized as he insists upon the significance of "implicit social recognition" (Nicholson, 1990: 89) in other areas of Green's theory of rights (Nicholson, 1990: 87-9). The disagreement concerns Green use of the term "implicit rights" alone. Cacoullos misses Green's argument on implicit recognition and, therefore, implicit rights (Cacoullos, 1974: esp. 86-106 *passim*).

such a right or duty can only be derived from the need for such an environment to exist as a precondition of the self-realisation of persons and - for Green at least - this means humans and God only. No matter how important it is to people, Nature as such cannot possess rights or duties (Rodman, 1973: 573-86 *passim*). It is interesting to note that this judgement is reflected in Green's own aesthetic appreciation of the environment. Nettleship writes, "Nature appealed to his imagination ... as the sympathetic background to human life and the kindred revelation of a divine intelligence." (Nettleship, 1889: xviii)

Essentially, the same conclusion holds in the case of animals. Green makes two claims which merge into one another in this regard. Firstly, he argues that animals do not possess the capacity of self-consciousness and so cannot be moral entities (Green, 1889e: 112). Elsewhere, he makes the less controversial claim that animals cannot possess rights or duties in human societies because humans are precluded from communicating with them and, therefore, we cannot recognize them as capable of pursuing a common good in the morally relevant sense. Importantly, in part this means that we have no reason to think of them as purposive agents (Green, 1986a: 139, 208 ; Lewis, 1952: 86n2 ; Rodman, 1973: 581). They cannot form part of our ethical community and - even if they are capable of moral action - we cannot form part of their's. In both cases, animals fail to meet the (interconnected) conditions which any rights-holder must by definition fulfill. An animal is akin to "a thing" (Green, 1986a: 156, 158). For example, in the course of his discussion of punishment, Green argues that:

The whipping of an ill-behaved dog is preventive, but not preventive in the sense in which the punishment of crime is so because (1) the dog's ill-conduct is not an intentional violation of a right or neglect of a known obligation, the dog having no conception of rights or obligations, and (2) for the same reason the whipping does not lead to an association of terror in the minds of other dogs with the violations of rights and neglect of obligations. (Green, 1986a: 187 ; see also Green, 1986a: 200)

Green's position in relation to animals is far less plausible than it is in relation to the environment. Rodman is correct to note the significance of Green's failure to mention the "animal-protection legislation" which was passed at the same time as the other measures referred to in his *Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract* (Rodman, 1973:

582). This omission seems indicative of the fact that Green is simply “not interested” in animal rights (Green quoted by Wallas ; repeated in Clarke, 1978: 14 and Harris et al, 1986: 336n1). Their exclusion may be the result of an unfounded judgement about the capacities of animals. For instance, MacKenzie and especially Rodman are less sceptical than Green about ascribing some capacity for purposive agency to animals (MacKenzie, 1929: 212n2, 394-6 ; Rodman, 1973: 582-3). Both commentators recognise - as Green did himself - that, on the logic of his theory, if a certain species of animal could be shown to have the capacity for purposive action, then its members must have at least some rights, duties and obligations (Green, 1986a: 213). However, the crucial fact is that Green denies that they have any such capacities.

The most objectionable implication of Green’s theory of rights arises within his treatment of the irredeemably and severely insane and the irredeemably and severely mentally disabled. For Green, they are in precisely the same situation as animals because they are inherently incapable of purposive action (Green, 1986a: 199, 206, 208, 246). As in the case of animals and the environment, this is significant because it necessarily entails that they are incapable of possessing rights, duties and obligations. It is perfectly understandable that some commentators balk at this sort of suggestion regarding the moral status of the insane and the mentally disabled.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Green himself was uneasy about excluding them from the sphere of moral consideration. For instance, he writes:

We treat life as sacred even in the human embryo, and even in hopeless idiots and lunatics recognise a right to live - a recognition which can only be rationally explained on either or both of two grounds: (1) that we do not consider either their lives or the society which a man may freely serve to be limited to this earth, and thus ascribe to them a right to live on the strength of a social capacity which under other conditions may become what it is not here; or (2) that the distinction between curable and incurable, between complete and incomplete, social incapacity is so indefinite that we cannot in any case safely assume it to be such as to extinguish the right to live. Or perhaps it may be argued that even in cases where the incapacity is

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Benn et al, 1959: 98 ; Barry, 1965: 311 ; Rodman, 1973: 581-2 ; O’Sullivan, 1987: 184-5.

ascertainably incurable, the patient has still a social function (as undoubtably those who are incurably ill in other ways have) - a passive function as the object of affectionate ministrations arising out of family instincts and memories - and that the right to have life protected corresponds to this passive social function. (Green, 1986a: 154)

Unfortunately, this is grasping at straws to a very large extent. Reason (1) is invalidated if one rejects Green's claim that there is an afterlife where these 'entities' will become purposive agents (Rodman, 1973: 581-2). Similarly, the "passive social function" reason fails to establish that "the patients" - as opposed to those who care about them - have rights. This is precisely because the patients - using Green's words - "are not affected by the conception of the good to which they contribute." (Green, 1986a: 208) If there really could be a passive social function which confers rights and duties, then also there would be no reason why rights and duties are not possessed by much-loved teddy bears. Green recognises this as his use of "perhaps it may be argued" indicates (see Nicholson, 1990: 87). In fact, reason (2) - that it is too dangerous to preclude the severely insane and mentally disabled from having rights - is the most forceful explanation which Green could present on the basis of his general theory. Even so, this is a purely pragmatic justification and as such will be insecure under certain empirical conditions.

All four of these instances highlight the limitations of a moral theory which arises out of basing one's thought upon self-realisation in the manner Green does. These limitations are justified in some cases (such as the environment) but not in others (animals, the mentally disabled and the insane). In essence, the problem is that for an entity to be able to realise itself, it must have some capacities to realise. Quite simply, some groups which many people regard as possessing at least some inherent claims to moral consideration do not possess these capacities. This is a serious problem for Green and - although this has not always been recognised in the literature (Cacoullos, 1974: 73-4) - it is ultimately unsolvable within the fundamental structure of Green's argument. He is simply not able to argue consistently, for example, that cruelty to animals or the severely disabled is morally wrong in itself if he bases his theory upon the value of distinctively human action.

Having examined Green's theory of rights and duties in some detail in itself, it must now be placed within its fully political context.

#### 4. The State and Cultural Diversity.

It is so far as a government represents to them a common good that the subjects are conscious that they ought to obey it, i.e. that obedience to it is a means to an end desirable in itself or absolutely. (Green, 1986a: 98)

Once a community has developed beyond a certain size, legal enforcement of the system of rights and corresponding obligations which echo its system of moral rights and duties becomes a vital aspect of its ordered scheme of social living (Green, 1986a: 134, 152-3, 178-80). It can be seen, then, that political life is possible only once the individual is capable of feeling attachments to a large-scale group. The institutions in which such a citizen has been raised are the outcome of a lengthy historical process. Initially the family was the largest community with which an agent could feel his moral well-being to be bound up. Then, it was the tribe, and only after that could the state become a feasible organ for structuring group activities in the manner that the family and the tribe had done. (The ultimate moral community is the whole human race, as was established in the fourth chapter.) Indeed, once this stage has been reached, the existence of the state becomes a necessary condition for man's moral development. At that point, as Harris puts it, "their rights must be secured by a body capable of reconciling all claims to rights within society." (Harris, 1988-9: 542). This raises the question of sovereignty and political obligation.

Green presents his theory of sovereignty, and hence political obligation, as a reconciliation of the theories of John Austin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Green, 1986a: 84 ; Austin, 1954: Lecture VI *passim* ; Rousseau, 1968: esp. pp. 69-78). Firstly, Green argues that an essential aspect of being the sovereign is that one is the person who is habitually treated as the sovereign (sc. the authoritative body wielding supreme coercive power in the territory governed). He is influenced by Austin here (Austin, 1954: Lecture VI, esp. 197-9). If the sovereign failed to receive such habitual obedience, he would lack the capacity to act and hence could not be the supreme (sovereign) power in a territory (Green, 1986a: 113).

This idea has been grossly perverted by Prichard (Prichard, 1949: 61-6). He seems to wilfully neglect the obvious fact that Green goes on to argue that the Austinian condition of habitual obedience is inadequate if it is supposed to be the sufficient basis of (legitimate) sovereignty (Green, 1986a: 84). Indeed, given his theory of distinctively human action, Austin's position must be inadequate for Green. He argues that "[s]o long as [Austin's]

view is retained, no satisfactory answer can be given to the question by what right the sovereign compels the obedience of individuals.” (Green, 1986a: 137) Austin sanctions the actions of a sovereign even when they are obeyed simply out of fear. However, for Green fear cannot be the foundation for a legitimate moral and hence a legitimate political order. “To represent [fear] as the basis of civil subjection is to confound the citizen with the slave” (Green, 1986a: 119). Every legitimate social relationship is made binding by his own belief that it will facilitate his performance of distinctively human actions by actualising the common good, as has been established in the course of this thesis (Green, 1986a: 84 ; Conybeare, 1889: 776 ; Mehta, 1973). Subordinating one’s immediate self-determination to the authority of a particular person or group for any reason other than to actualise such a mode of living must be illegitimate, for this reason. This is Green’s most fundamental objection to Austin’s theory.

To overcome the inadequacy of Austin’s theory, Green turns to the Rousseauian conception of “the general will” (Green, 1986a: 84 ; also see Lancaster, 1959: 208-10 ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 90-3). As was established in chapter three, this idea is equivalent to Green’s conception of “the common good”. He refers to it as “that impalpable congeries of the hopes and fears of a people bound together by common interests and sympathy, which we call the general will.” (Green, 1986a: 86) Every association, including every society, must possess a telos or else it is merely a collection of individuals and not a community in the morally relevant sense.

This reiterates the fact that the fundamental legitimacy of any system of rights and obligations and therefore of any state or sovereign springs from the nature of man’s consciousness and capacity for agency. This is something which Rousseau recognised to a limited extent. However, by using the contract idiom, Rousseau misrepresented the nature of each person’s need for community (Green, 1986a: 116). In relation to political obligation specifically, Green concludes that the sovereign is not legitimate simply because most people tend to think that he is or even because he serves their “private wills” as Rousseau calls them (Rousseau, 1968: 62-4, 72-4). He is legitimate only because the citizens habitually believe him to be so based upon their conscientious assessment of the requirements of the common good. Monro misses this point (Monro, 1951: 350-5). Habitual obedience is a necessary but not also a sufficient condition of full legitimacy. However, it must be habitual obedience which is motivated by the honest belief that generally the state enables its citizens to actualize the common good. In many ways, Monro’s own ‘reformulation’ of Green’s theory

is identical with what Green does argue in reality (Monro, 1951: 353).

The existence of the state makes feasible forms of living which were previously inconceivable but still inherently valuable. It facilitates the agent's living of a distinctively human life. Indeed, Green defines the state as "a body of persons, recognised by each other as having rights, and possessing certain institutions for the maintenance of those rights." (Green, 1986a: 132). This is highly reminiscent of Hegel's treatment of "the state" (Hegel, 1967: especially, 257-320). Green is aware that his usage is alien to the British tradition of classical liberalism,<sup>11</sup> yet he insists that some term is needed to express the idea denoted by his alternative use of "the state":

A word is needed to express that form of society, both according to the idea of it which has been operative in the minds of the members of the societies which have undergone the change described [i.e. from tribal to political], an idea only gradually taking shape as the change proceeded, and according to the more explicit and distinct idea of it which we form in reflecting on the process. (Green, 1986a: 133)

This interpretation of Green's conception of the state has been missed by at least one important commentator (Thomas, 1987: 333-41 *passim*). Thomas implies that Green conceives of the state in the classical liberal sense, where the state is seen simply as a set of coercive institutions under political control. Of those commentators who have appreciated Green's real position, not everyone has welcomed his expansion of the term beyond its classical liberal usage (e.g. Richter, 1964 248-50 ; Sabine, 1973: 666-7). Richter argues that emphasis upon full realisation and hence practice in the concept of the true state, together with the imperfection of any actual world in which humans could live, leads to "a systematic ambiguity about all Idealist uses of the concept of the state which Green did not escape." (Richter, 1964: 250) However, this allegation is unfair. The issues presupposed by this objection - in particular, that only the ideal political society is *properly* termed 'the state' - are implicit within Green's writings and if he does refer to some actual political societies as states, such "ambiguities" as can be found are not significant or really very confusing. Throughout, he is emphatic that the state is the form which society takes to maintain a

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<sup>11</sup> However, it is used by Tories such as John Ruskin as well (Ruskin, 1900: 17, 34, 37).

“settled, impartial, [and] general” system of rights, duties and obligations (Green, 1986a: 182). In other words, Green is clear that a state is truly a state (and the sovereign is a sovereign) “only [when it] exists as sustaining, securing, and completing” rights which arise out of social relations and the common good which binds them together (Green, 1986a: 134).<sup>12</sup> Certainly, there are “so-called states” which are merely “an aggregation of individuals or communities under one ruling power” but it is clear that these are not included in Green’s conception of “a true state” (Green, 1986a: 161). Hence, there is no real bite to Richter’s objection.

Green argues that it “is virtually conditional upon [being] the superior being” that the members of the community believe it to embody their general will (Green, 1986a: 84)

[T]he ultimate power of exacting habitual obedience from the people ... [is based on] a common desire for certain ends - specially the ‘*pax vitaeque securitas*’ [‘peace and security of life’] - to which the observance of law or established usage contributes, and in most cases implies no conscious reference on the part of those whom it influences to any supreme coercive power at all. (Green, 1986a: 84)

This claim can be expanded. The sovereign may be related to the common good either intrinsically or instrumentally. The former applies when the citizens believe that the intrinsic nature of the common good requires obedience to the sovereign. This could have applied in the case of a royalist in the English Civil War. In the latter case, the agent does not have this special attachment to, for example, a monarch, but believes that the good of his community tends to be best served by the actions of a particular person or group of people. Such a person or group is instrumentally linked to attaining the common good.

It can be seen then that, for Green, society is prior to the state in at least two senses. Firstly, temporally - early societies (families and tribes) had no state, whereas modern ones tend to. Secondly, conceptually - the definition of “a state” necessarily entails the concept of “a society”. The state is “for its members the society of societies - the society in which all their claims upon each other are mutually adjusted.” (Green, 1986a: 141) This is fundamental because it is only through this coordination of the different spheres of the

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<sup>12</sup> Chin misses this point in Chin, 1920: 158-9.



individual's life with the spheres of his fellows' lives that the individual can realise his capacity to lead an autonomous life (see also Pant, 1977: 36-8):

The state is for him [i.e. the member of the state] the complex of those social relations out of which rights arise, so far as those rights have come to be regulated and harmonised according to a general law, which is recognised by a certain multitude of persons, and which there is sufficient power to secure against violation from without and from within. The other forms of community which precede and are independent of the formation of the state do not continue to exist outside it, nor yet are they superseded by it. They are carried on into it. They become its organic members, supporting its life and in turn maintained by it in a new harmony with each other. (Green, 1986a: 141)

A crucial point here is that a state is a relational organisation and, as such, each part can only gain its highest good if all of the parts do so as well. Consequently, the highest good can only be attained through co-operative action aimed at the eudaemonic development of every member of society. The members of the different 'sub-societal' associations must recognise, therefore, that they share certain concerns - possess a societal common good - with those individuals who are not members of their particular association but who are members of their state.

It is vital to bear this point in mind so as to head off objections such as the one made by Bhikhu Parekh that "[a]lthough Green saw the great value of the citizen's sense of political obligation, he did not explore its nature and basis, integrate it into his formulation and analysis of the problem of political obligation, and ask how citizens can cultivate and express a 'higher feeling of political duty'." (Parekh, 1993: 248 ; quoting Green, 1986a: 122) In reality, Green did all of these things at very great length in the *Prolegomena*. Ironically, the form of political obligation which Parekh argues for (i.e. centring on the active fostering of a vibrant community of truly equal citizens) is precisely what - in the end - motivates all of Green's moral, political and religious thought.

Green is clear that - for the most part - ("so-called") states (like societies) were not formed originally to serve the common good (Green, 1986a: 125). However, his fundamental point is that a perfected state exists only where there is a sense of community

amongst those being governed and where the governed see the state - and therefore the sovereign - as serving the best interests of the community (Milne, 1962: 133-6). One consequence of this need for popular, conscientious and habitual faith in the system is that the state will always be limited in its ability to act by the political influence of these “[social] ties derived from a common dwelling-place with its associations, from common memories, traditions and customs, and from the common ways of feeling and thinking which a common language and still more a common literature embodies.” (Green, 1986a: 123) Pragmatically, when the state is not perceived as contributing to the common good of society, or acts contrary to its customs, its position is precarious and its actions will tend to be ineffectual. In the present context, this indicates that merely accepting a person or body as the legitimate sovereign is not enough to sustain the political union in practice. If passive obedience remains the total extent of the individual’s attachment to the sovereign and its laws,

the result is still only the loyal subject as distinct from the intelligent patriot, i.e. as distinct from the man who so appreciates the good which in common with others he derives from the state ... as to have a passion for serving it - whether in the way of defending it from external attack or developing it from within. (Green, 1986a: 122)

What is required to ensure the existence of a strong and enriching community is that each citizen actively contributes to the collective life of the state which best serves and embodies their common good (Green, 1986a: 122). Only in this way will they be able to act from the pure motive of performing duty for its own sake. Only in this way will they come to habitually act in a distinctively human manner and gain an abiding satisfaction of their abiding selves. In short, public service is central for moral development and life and in itself forms an indispensable aspect of the true good.

It should be remembered that chapter three highlighted the increased heterogeneity which marks modern societies. The ensuing apparent fragmentation of determinate higher interests present within these societies seems to pose serious problems for Green’s theory of political obligation and his associated call for greater public service for the common good. In short, it raises the question of whether or not Green is committed to arguing that modern culturally-diverse societies can meaningfully be called ‘states’ in his understanding of that term.

It has been established that each “so-called state” is merely “an aggregation of individuals or communities under one ruling power” (Green, 1986a: 161). However, the fact that many different cultural groups coexist under the rule of one government does not mean that Green’s theory necessarily entails a degree of cultural homogeneity which is - and must remain - absent in most modern societies. To defend this contention adequately, one must enter the arena of the multiculturalism debate.<sup>13</sup> For the moment, there is only room for the most brief and abstract discussion in support of the claim that a Greenian common good can exist under these circumstances.

A good starting point for this discussion is with Bhikhu Parekh’s conception of minority groups within a culturally-diverse society:

there are territorially dispersed but culturally distinct groups who wish to preserve their ways of life. They include such groups as immigrants, indigenous ethnic minorities and religious communities. ... [T]hey neither demand to be left alone nor seek political autonomy. For the most part, they seek the cultural space to lead and transmit their ways of life and an opportunity to make their distinct contributions to the collective life. ... These groups wish to participate as equal citizens in the collective life of the community, but they also wish to preserve their way of life and demand recognition of their cultural identities. (Parekh, 1994: 200, 201)

For such a society to possess a Greenian common good, its members must conceive of their own association as being intrinsically part of the wider society, which - in its political manifestation - forms the state. This would be a manifestation of the situation which Green describes in his *Lectures on Kant*, when he writes “[n]either [particular interests nor “the sense of common interest”] would be what it is without the other, but in the state neither retains any separate reality.” (Green, 1890a: 62 ; see also Greengarten, 1981: 51-2) How - indeed, whether or not - this can be achieved depends upon the whole context of the concrete individual’s life. It is a matter of practice far more than a matter of theory. In Green’s terms, this is one manifestation of the fact - as was indicated in chapter four - that

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<sup>13</sup> The only article which I have found which purports to focus directly upon Green’s thought in regard to multiculturalism is Rich, 1987. Unfortunately, in the end it does not deal with these issues in significant depth.

philosophy cannot provide all of the answers. Only the most abstract considerations can be set out in advance of actual situations.

It may be objected that such a path is not open to Green because of his argument that a common good can only exist within a culture and not between many different ones.

On this reading, a multicultural society which has attained a certain level of political organisation can be at best one of the “many so-called states” in the sense that it is merely “an aggregation of individuals or communities under one ruling power” (Green, 1986a: 161). In short, it may be alleged that his theory presupposes the existence of a nation and that necessarily this implies the presence of a culturally homogenous community of a type which - of necessity - a multicultural society cannot accommodate (Green, 1986a: 182). Indeed, Bellamy notes that “Green’s approach to social reform increasingly served a conservative purpose, that of so structuring society that only certain types of conduct brought success.” (Bellamy, 1990b: 148) Nevertheless, it will now be established that, given the nature and strength of Green’s arguments in favour of freedom of speech, action, association and so on (arguments which are at one level very Millian), it is very hard to support the idea that the trend which Bellamy identifies was a natural consequence - or even a justified application - of Green’s principles.

Certainly, such an objection is important. Green did not live in a multicultural society of the type which typifies many modern Western states and to which Parekh refers in the quote given above. Nevertheless, the differences between his situation and our own should not be overstated (Cacoullos, 1974: 98-9). Firstly, he explicitly states that the imperfections of his present society will tend to be overcome as new rights, duties and obligations begin to arise out of

the claim for recognition on the part of families and tribes living on the same territory with those which in community form the state but living at first in some relation of subjection to them. (Green, 1986a: 135)

This describes perfectly the situation of many disadvantaged cultural groups in the West today.

Secondly, it is important to note that there were diverse groups within Victorian British society. This fact is important within Green’s undergraduate essay on *Legislative Interference in Moral Matters* (Green, 1986h). Although he does not mention them here,

the most significant in political terms were the Catholics. They formed a group which attracted much popular suspicion amongst the Protestant majority. Green himself had no great love of Catholicism. Primarily, he objected to its tendency to hinder the individual's tendency to seek his moral guidance from his personal conscience. Furthermore, he objected that Catholicism encouraged its adherents to look to "an ecclesiastical power external to the state under which they live, [and so] are necessarily in certain relations alien to that state" (Green, 1986a: 167).<sup>14</sup> A group which is 'alien' in this manner cannot ally itself completely with the society amongst which it lives and so cannot partake fully of that society's common good.

Importantly however, Green does not argue that Catholics are wholly incapable of sharing such a common good. In fact, the only significant political problem caused by the presence of Catholics in his society is this allegiance to the Pope as a political (broadly understood) power. Consequently, it seems that a Catholic can be as much of a citizen as a Protestant can, so long as he pays the same habitual obedience to the state over the Vatican. In more general terms, Green believes that a person is a full member of the state as long as he prioritises the well-being of his society over all other allegiances. In precisely the same manner, there is no problem in accommodating, for instance, a modern British Muslim who owes his primary allegiance to the British state (still retaining Green's terminology). The Muslim is perfectly capable of perceiving the other members of the state as his fellows - that is, of sharing a common good with them. He can still be a member of the particular sub-culture and understand himself as primarily British and structure his actions to serve the common good of the British state.<sup>15</sup> The crucial point is that - to use Parekh's words - such persons could "seek the cultural space to lead and transmit their ways of life and an opportunity to make their contributions to the collective life" (Parekh, 1994: 200). They would be a true 'patriot' in Green use of that term - i.e. someone who seeks to foster a vibrant society which in turn fosters the good life for all members of society by prompting the free play of his fellows' higher capacities in a situation of what is still certainly - on one very important level - cultural diversity.

Indeed, there are reasons to be optimistic about the possibility of creating such a

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<sup>14</sup> Again, Green does not refer to Catholics explicitly in this passage.

<sup>15</sup> I use the example of 'the British state' here for ease of exposition. 'The European Community' may also serve as a good example eventually.

Greenian multi-ethnic society. Firstly, all of the participants share a nature which is fundamentally the same because they are all manifestations of the eternal consciousness under animal limitations (Green, 1986i *passim*). As Green writes in his manuscripts,

The constructive action of reason upon sense in [the] moral life of mankind is a gradual process. A formal unity pervades it, but its results (a) {*page torn: 'in'*} diff[eren]t ages and nations (b) in diff[eren]t ind[ivida]ls of [the] same age and nation, vary greatly. (MS10a)

Muirhead argues in a slightly different context that “while the forms of civilisation with which we are dealing are manifold, it is the same human will that is working in all.” (Muirhead, 1908: 110)

The second reason for being optimistic about the possibility of constructing a multicultural community based around a shared conception of the good is that in this context, we are - by definition - dealing with people who *want* to make valuable contributions to the collective life. Hence, they must already value and respect the other forms of life of the other groups which together constitute the state. Such a desire is necessary feature of the Parekhian conception of cultural pluralism presently under consideration. Other types of cultural group may well seek formal political independence and, in those cases, one must be far more sceptical about the prospects of ever discovering or producing a common good for the society as a whole. Nevertheless, it is definitional of the cultural groups under consideration that they possess the desire to form a culturally pluralistic society.

To reiterate the fundamental point then - and to conclude this section - it is definitionally the case that there is a sufficiently strong perception of commonality between members of the state so that each individual cares and respects all other members of the state (Green, 1986a: 122-3). However, there does not need to be a complete identity of interests for such sense of a common good to exist (Vincent et al, 1981: 29) What is required is a “collective life” which every citizen values and wishes to contribute towards if the state is to fulfill its “true end ... as the sustainer and harmoniser of social relations” (Green, 1986a: 143). This requires that all claims within the state must be successfully adjusted in the sense that - at the very least - they must be harmonised to such an extent that a reasonably stable and enriching social, political and economic system is produced. (Again,

what classes as 'reasonably stable and enriching' is a practical matter rather than a purely theoretical one.)

"[T]he true state" must operate with impartiality in the sense that it finds "its primary function ... [in] maintaining law equally in the interest of all, ... [not] in the interest of [particular] classes" (Green, 1986a: 121). For the state to serve a purely sectional association - including a particular cultural group - within the society at the expense of the common good would be for it to undermine its own legitimacy and so to remove the validity of its claim to be called "a true state". Ann Cacoullos sums up Green's position very well when she writes:

To recognise another as an equal is to respect his ability to secure a well-being for himself. ... Rights, for Green, reflect not a homogenous society but one where there is mutual respect among persons. (Cacoullos, 1974: 99)

The citizens of such a kingdom of ends live a distinctively human life. From this, Green concludes that the primary function of the sovereign - the furtherance of the common good - essentially translates into the impartial maintenance of that system of rights and obligations on which the particular society is based.

It is not ... supreme coercive power, simply as such, but supreme coercive power exercised in a certain way and for certain ends, that makes a state; viz. exercised according to law, written or customary, and for the maintenance of rights. ... The office of the sovereign, as an institution of such a society [whose members recognise each other as possessing rights], is to protect those rights from invasion, either from without, from foreign nations, or from within, from members of society who cease to behave as such. (Green, 1986a: 132)

At the very minimum then, to be properly so called, the state must uphold the common good in a disinterested manner so that every member of society gains equally from his activity within the political union. This means that the state must do its best to provide everyone with the spaces which they personally need to develop their particular talents and capacities (Green, 1986a: 166). This is a mark of its legitimacy. However, it has been

established already that different individuals identify with the community through their performances of different roles within that community, at any level below that of (unattainable) perfection. This means that there can - indeed, probably always will - be a variation of status between different members of society. Consequently, although everyone must be treated equally, there should be different treatment for different individuals at the level of practice. Again, Green's theory coincides with many of the recent debates concerning multiculturalism. The most important point to keep in mind at present is that what Green excludes from his model is different treatment on the grounds of factors which are irrelevant to the individuals' highest attachment to his society.

Returning to the question of political obligation with which this section began, it can be seen that, given states fulfil this function to varying degrees in practice, there can be degrees of sovereignty and, therefore, degrees of political obligation.<sup>16</sup> The extent of sovereignty and political obligation should be assessed in particular cases by applying two criteria:

The essential thing in political society is a power which guarantees men rights, i.e. a certain freedom of action and acquisition conditionally upon their allowing a like freedom in others ... [and which does so] impartially or according to a general rule or law. What is the lowest form in which a society is fit to be called political, is hard to say. The political society is more complete as the freedom guaranteed is more complete both in respect [1] of the persons enjoying it and [2] of the range of possible action and acquisition over which it extends. (Green, 1986a: 91)

The first criterion - the number of people ruled or the extension of the area of the common good - refers to Green's belief that the extent of our actually-recognised moral community varies and yet ultimately we are all part of one common human society (Green, 1906: 206-17). However, in practice the second criterion - the area of political activity - is more fundamental. He gives the example of a nomad horde which may be "as numerous as a Greek state", but which secures very few rights and obligations for its members (Green, 1986a: 91). The limited scope of legitimate legal rights and obligations makes its claim to

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Lancaster misses this point in Lancaster, 1959: 223-5.



possess political authority weak. Certainly, borderline cases may well remain where legitimacy is 'almost' attained:

We only count Russia a state by a sort of courtesy on the supposition that the power of the Czar, though subject to no constitutional control is so far exercised in accordance with a recognised tradition of what the public good requires as to be on the whole a sustainer of rights. (Green, 1986a: 132)

Moreover, the Russian case highlights the fact that the extent of a sovereign's legitimacy is indicated the means by which its position is maintained and its will is enforced (Green, 1986a: 132). For example, when force or its threatened use becomes the strongest support for the sovereign's position, its rule is illegitimate. The need for force is an indication either that the sovereign is no longer enforcing the general will effectively, or that the people do not identify themselves with the view of the common good which it is enforcing (Green, 1986a: 93). In either case, the sovereign must be changed, dissolved or it must reform itself.

## **5. Participatory Democracy and State Intervention.**

This powerful perspective on the state provides the philosophical basis for Green's justification of localised and limited government. In relation to "the local option", he argues that claims must be understood by the agent as attaching to identifiable individuals if they are to carry the significance and weight in his mind which is required of moral rights and duties (Green, 1986b: 202 ; Richter, 1964: 348-9, 366-8). This is one consequence of the argument that concrete rights and duties can spring only from concrete social relationships. It will be remembered that this point underlies Green's reaction against claims that duties can be owed to an impersonal Humanity. Once again, his emphasis is upon practice.

Popular local government (sc. "local and customary administration" (Green, 1986a: 93)) tends to be better at maintaining that concreteness. Hence, decentralisation encourages the intimacy of rights-holder and duty-ower which is necessary for a common good to command and receive the citizens' habitual obedience. Green does concede that whether or not in practice participation is a precondition of rule which is in accordance with the common good and whether or not in practice it is a precondition of "'civil sense', that appreciation of common good ... is a question of circumstances which perhaps does not

admit of unqualified answer.” (Green, 1986a: 119) Nevertheless, in the context of his own time and circumstances he holds firmly to the idea that political decisions should be made by those who are likely to be affected by their outcomes.<sup>17</sup> In February 1868, he made a speech in favour of parliamentary reform to the Wellington Lodge of Odd Fellows saying:

We said, and we were much derided for saying so, that citizenship only makes the moral man; that citizenship only gives that self-respect, which is the true basis of respect of others, and without which there is no lasting social order or real morality. If we were asked what result we looked for from the enfranchisement of the people, we said, that is not the present question; untie the man’s legs, and then it will be time to speculate how he will walk. (Green quoted in Nettleship, 1889: cxii)

Yet, in his own time he does not push this line on active citizenship to its apparently logical conclusion by advocating participatory democracy for every member of the state. Indeed, he does not even call for an immediate extension of the franchise to the whole adult population of the country. For instance, at an Oxford Union debate on 15th May 1858, Green and John Nichol proposed the motion:

That it is the undoubted right of every Englishman to possess the suffrage, and that, as the time has not yet arrived to carry this principle into effect without serious danger, every means should be taken, by liberal development of education, to bring it about.<sup>18</sup>

Green’s point is that even though full enfranchisement is the ultimate goal, it would be foolhardy to widen the vote to the whole adult population before they are ready for such responsibility. Instead, he advocates (with great vagueness) the creation of a decentralised liberal democracy based around a Parliament containing a House of Lords which has been reformed in such a way as to make it a truly representative institution and not merely a force

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<sup>17</sup> Conybeare resists this move (Conybeare, 1889 *passim*).

<sup>18</sup> From *The Debates of the Oxford Union*, Oxford, 1895 cited in Harvie, 1976: 118. Also see Richter, 1964: 328-9.

for vested class interests (Richter, 1964: 343-4, especially 344n).

This call is best understood as a result of his acceptance that there are constraints which the animal form of human life places upon the realisation of human nature, then. A perfect man would be capable of full democracy, but an imperfect man must trust others to make decisions on matters which he is unable to fully comprehend. With these conditions in mind, he writes:

The size of modern states renders necessary the substitution of a representative system for one in which the citizens shared directly in legislation, and this so far tends to weaken the active interest of the citizens in the commonwealth, though the evil may be partly counteracted by giving increased importance to municipal or communal administration. (Green, 1986a: 119)

Such animal imperfections have many other consequences as well. For example, they result in serious tensions between the need for personal contact in the creation of a real feeling of duty and the internationalism inherent in the fundamental human need to respect all persons, irrespective of their race, gender and so on. It is this thought which explains Green's scepticism about the possibility of a legitimate World-State ever coming into existence (Milne, 1962: 147-8 ; Mabbott, 1967: 83-4). Certainly, he is at pains to argue that such a World-State is not conceptually impossible (Green, 1986a: 175 ; see Nicholson, 1990: 77-8). However, he is clear also that it is unattainable in practice. A true community of all mankind - a cosmopolitan polity - will probably remain more of an abstract idea rather than a fully realised part of the determinate fabric of the consciousness and hence lives of actual citizens.<sup>19</sup>

The principles at work here mean that Bellamy is in a sense too pessimistic when he writes:

The social and political changes wrought by the industrial revolutions and the creation of a mass electorate rendered this idealized conception of

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<sup>19</sup> For discussions of Green's theory of international relations see Routh, 1938 *passim* ; Nicholson, 1976. For Green on democracy, see Lindsay, 1941 *passim*.

notable politics [i.e. one based upon disinterested and well-informed decision-making by a political elite for the common good] an anachronism. *The radical belief that it could simply be extended through increased popular participation to include the entire citizen body has proved an illusion.* (Bellamy, 1992a: 4, emphasis added)

In context, this passage implies that the empirical failure to attain the ideal - even its unattainability in practice - undermines the normative status of the ideal itself. However, in an important sense, the value of the ideal is independent of its attainability in practice. Green's ideal remains a kingdom of ends founded upon mutual service for the common good. The only changes which could alter that would be changes in the highest essence of man. Given this is not claimed to have happened, Green's political philosophy continues to offer a valuable normative standard against which to judge those political forms which do exist in practice.

The second aspect of Green's vision of the nature of the true state to consider here is his claim that a legitimate government should restrict its area of activity (see especially Green, 1986a: 207-10 ; also Muirhead, 1908: 87-91 ; Wempe, 1986: 156-60). The fundamental consideration for the sovereign when deciding which particular areas to 'enter' - practically which particular laws to make and enforce - is the idea that the legally-enforced system of rights and obligations should be framed in accordance with the need for the moral development of humanity and the impossibility of forcing it upon humans. This last clause is pivotal within Green's political philosophy because it entails that obligations can be said to be "at once distinguished from the sphere of moral duty, and relative to it." (Green, 1986a: 10) As Ritchie puts it, "The direct legal enforcement of morality cannot be considered expedient or inexpedient: it is *impossible*. The morality of an act depends on the state of the will of the agent, and therefore the act done under compulsion ceases to have the character of a moral act." (Ritchie, 1896: 147, emphasis in original ; see also Ritchie, 1896: 147-51)

Nevertheless, Green is a realist in that he recognises the need for certain acts to be performed even when the agent's motives are not the highest ones he could have. In these cases, the state should always operate on the understanding that

[t]hose acts should be a matter of legal injunction or prohibition of which the

performance or omission, irrespectively of the motive from which it proceeds, is so necessary to the existence of a society in which the moral end stated can be realised[,] that it is better for them to be done or omitted from that unworthy motive which consists in fear or hope of legal consequences than not to be done at all. (Green, 1986a: 15)

For example, recalcitrant parents should be forced by the threat of legal sanctions to provide for the upbringing of their children, even if they comply only due to the fear of legal punishment (Nicholson, 1990: 165-71). This is one manner in which politics should be shaped by morality.

The law can attempt to produce these acts by using at least one of two methods then. Either it can use “(1) threats of pain, and offers of reward”, or “(2) the employment of physical force” (Green, 1986a: 14). Exactly which of these two methods will best achieve the state’s goals is dependent upon the essentially contingent practical circumstances of the concrete situation. In considering which method to adopt, the just legislator should bear in mind at least two general points (Green, 1986a: 16). Firstly, no action which is motivated by a sense of duty should be changed into an action which is motivated by a fear of legal punishment. Secondly, those actions which tend to promote a net increase in the performance of dutiful actions should be encouraged through law. However, Green fails to notice, in all likelihood, that these two considerations will conflict in practice. It may well prove necessary to prevent some dutiful actions as an unavoidable attendant of a plan which on balance encourages the performance of other dutiful actions. Indeed, it is difficult to envisage any state action which will not be likely to prevent any other particular dutiful action from being performed. Hence, the claim should be moderated solely to the position indicated by the second condition. No law should be made which would represent in practice a net impediment to man’s moral development. Some laws can be passed which will not affect the motive of the particular agent (Green, 1986a: 209 ; Green, 1986b: 203). Mabbott misses this important point (Mabbott, 1967: 61-9 *passim*).

Whilst these conditions do not highlight any positive requirements of law beyond the most abstract, Green argues that they do rule out certain forms of legislation. As he puts it, “the enforcement of the outward act, of which the moral character depends on a certain motive and disposition, may often contribute to render that motive and disposition impossible” (Green, 1986a: 10).

For clarification, he considers three concrete instances of illegitimate restrictions which the state has imposed upon its citizens. Firstly, there are “legal requirements of religious observance and profession of belief” (Green, 1986a: 17). In all probability, he is alluding to the requirement to sign the Thirty Nine Articles in order to gain certain university appointments. Such laws tend to debase religious practices, and hence to hinder the believer’s moral development (see Locke, 1991: 17-20). Secondly, there are laws which tend to hinder the development of the individual’s “self-reliance ... [that is,] the formation of a manly conscience and sense of moral dignity” (Green, 1986a: 17). Thirdly, there are laws which close certain avenues via which the individual could pursue his moral development. One example here is the (second) Poor Law, which - in his eyes and in the eyes of the Royal Commission which investigated it at least<sup>20</sup> - hindered the individual’s ability to exercise his capacity to care for his relatives and friends (Green, 1986a: 17).

What binds all of these instances together is Green’s belief that the state can only allow all of its citizens to promote their own moral development by removing the hindrances to the realisation of their higher capacities. State interference in these three areas will impair the citizen’s ability to make the best of himself and to help others to make the best of themselves (Green, 1986h). This does not mean that the state should restrict itself to the role of a ‘nightwatchman’ (Green, 1986h: 308). As Sturt puts it,

The main thesis is simply the truth (which needed enforcement more at that time than now) that the state is not only a liberty-and-property defence association, but a moral institution in the highest sense of the term. (Sturt, 1906: 222)<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, Green’s emphasis on the moral imperative for state action under certain circumstances is a “logical conclusion of ... [his] philosophical position” (Ulam, 1951: 38) as well as being his most valuable contribution to the development of liberal political philosophy (Greenleaf, 1983: 124-37 *passim*). The essential point is conveyed in the famous passage where Bernard Bosanquet writes “[t]he State is in its right when it forcibly hinders

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<sup>20</sup> See Richter, 1964: 330. Lewis finds this particular judgement hard to comprehend (Lewis, 1952: 69-70).

<sup>21</sup> On the same point, see Vincent et al, 1984: 34 ; Thomas, 1987: 333-63 *passim* ; Vincent, 1987: 333-5.

a hindrance to the best life or common good. In hindering such hindrances it will indeed do positive acts.” (Bosanquet, 1920: 178)

Green’s position can be clarified by making a distinction between those forms of action which tend to enable members of society to develop as moral agents - which can be called *state intervention* - and those type of action which tend to have the opposite effect - which can be called *state interference*. Using this distinction, one can summarise Green’s position by stating that whilst state intervention is legitimate, state interference is not. In other words, state action in itself is not illegitimate, only that state interference which hinders (indeed, may even prevent) individuals from being able to develop their own best - that is, their autonomous (sc. distinctively human) - natures (Green, 1986a: 18). This claim is informed by his belief that “society should secure to the individual every power, that is necessary for realising this capacity” of conceiving of, and actualising, the true good (Green, 1986a: 29). Ultimately, the true state is simply society’s political instrument for carrying out this task (Green, 1986d: 5-6 ; Mukhopadhyuy, 1967: 119-26).

This thought forms the foundation of Green’s theory of punishment (Green, 1986a: 176, 177).<sup>22</sup> Firstly, the state has a responsibility to all of its members to create conditions which offer its members “a fair chance of not being a criminal.” (Green, 1986a: 189) However, where crimes are committed, the state should inflict those punishments which will best serve to secure the moral development of humanity (and deciding what these are is a practical and not a philosophical problem). The state should not attempt to impose a degree of punishment which is in accordance with the “moral depravity” of the crime. Green gives several justifications for this. Firstly, it is almost impossible to gauge the degree of moral depravity or punishment which occurs in any specific instance (Green, 1986a: 190). Secondly - and most importantly for our present purposes - it is not the state’s business to punish wrongdoing as such (Green, 1986a: 16, 196-7, 204, 206). The overriding principle remains,

every action should be so enjoined of which the performance is found to produce conditions favourable to action proceeding from that disposition

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis, 1962a: 90-2 *passim* ; Milne, 1962: 148-55. Alan Norrie presents an extended attack upon Green’s theory of punishment which fails because it is premised upon the crude ‘individual *versus* society’ which chapter three established Green had transcended (Norrie, 1991: 90-104).

[i.e. from a good will], and to which the legal injunction does not interfere with such action. (Green, 1986a: 16)

Richter argues that Green's position on state intervention is deeply ambivalent (Richter, 1964: 270, 293, 369-70).<sup>23</sup> In reality, Richter fails to appreciate the extent of Green's sensitivity to the imperfection of the world (Sabine, 1973: 655-9 ; Bellamy, 1990b: 141-4 ; Nicholson, 1990: 157-97 *passim*). Agents can only act in a distinctively human manner once they have attained a certain minimum level of personal development and where social influences fail to foster this minimal level, the state must intervene and do so instead. Hence, in relation to his own age, and despite the possibility of "over-legislation", Green argues that, as an empirical fact, his society is such that the individual moral agent has his opportunities to act well reduced by "advancing civilisation" to such a degree that it is better to have state intervention in more areas than at present rather than to leave citizens at the mercy of their fellows (Green, 1986a: 18). Certainly, at present some laws do tend to "interfere with the spontaneous action of those interests [in the service of a common good], and consequently checks the growth of the capacity which is the condition of the beneficial exercise of rights." (Green, 1986a: 209) It is for this reason that the state should restrict its actions to the careful "removal of obstacles." (Green, 1986a: 209) Nevertheless, frequently such intervention must be undertaken.<sup>24</sup>

In support of Green, Charles Sherover writes, "To tell an illiterate person that he is allowed to read is rather an empty liberty; to teach him how to read is to provide a positive freedom or opportunity enabling him to do so." (Sherover, 1989: 117) Elsewhere, Sherover brings out the wider implications of Green's position in greater detail.

The responsibility of the positive state is the organic health of the society it governs. It must undertake those activities which are deemed necessary for the general welfare and which it alone can perform. Just which of these activities require state sponsorship is, of course, the center of political debate in any modern society committed to this kind of responsibility. (Sherover,

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<sup>23</sup> O'Sullivan, 1987: 181-2 makes the same claim.

<sup>24</sup> Excellent histories of Green's influence in the area of state legislation include Rodman, 1964: 1-16 ; Vincent et al, 1984: *passim*. The best examination of the internal structure of Green's philosophical position is Nicholson, 1990: 132-97.



At the level of practice, one especially important area for state intervention is the legal requirement for parents to ensure that their children are educated to at least a certain level and in a certain way (Green, 1889r-t). Education is a precondition of the self-realisation of a child's capacity for moral agency.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, it is possible for certain contracts to be made between people and certain rights can be accorded which directly stunt the eudaemonic growth of at least one of the parties (Green, 1986a: 210). These contracts and rights include the renting of bad housing, work contracts which impose conditions leading to the physical and mental injury of the worker and certain land rights. It is with this thought that we turn to Green's most focused discussion of the practicalities of such issues which is found in his *Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract*.

Green begins the lecture by pointing out an apparent problem with the liberal credentials of recent Liberal-supported Acts of Parliament. Specifically, he mentions the Ground Game Act, the Employers' Liability Act, the Factory Acts and the Education Acts of 1876 and 1880 (Green, 1986b: 194-9). These acts and others were supported by the Liberal Party even though they used the law to regulate contracts between individuals. The paradox was that there had been an apparent shift from what would now be termed 'the freeing up of markets' - which occurred in the previous generation of Liberal politics - to the regulation of markets in Green's own generation, whilst the principle of maximising individual freedom was used to underpin both types of legislation. This alleged problem is not of solely historical interest for it did not die with the passing of Green's historical circumstances. Wempe, for one, sees the shift as remaining a philosophical problem for other interventionist liberals as well (Wempe, 1986: 183-7 *passim*).

In reality, the paradox can be resolved in the manner outlined above. Firstly, Green argues that, from a certain perspective, all legitimate social reform is essentially the same (Green, 1986b: 195-6). It always aims at promoting the Common Good. The Common Good - as was established in chapter three - is synonymous with the true or positive freedom of the individual (sc. acting in a distinctively human fashion) (Green, 1986b: 199-200). Freedom from interference by unjust laws and practices (rather than intervention by

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<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, there is no space to examine such a vast subject as Green's views on education in any depth here. See Nettleship, 1889: xlv-lviii ; Gordon et al, 1979 ; Richter, 1964: 350-62 ; Nicholson, 1990: 165-77.

beneficial state) is a stage in the development of a just society. This corresponds to the initial period of Liberal activity. However, the next stage is the construction of just laws and practices and is similarly indispensable in the moral development of humanity and that is the stage which Green argues Britain has entered by his time. He summarises the conclusion of this line of argument when he writes:

freedom of contract, freedom in all the forms of doing what one will with one's own, is valuable only as a means to an end. That end is what I call freedom, in the positive sense: in other words, the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good. No one has a right to do what he will with his own in such a way as to contravene this end.  
(Green, 1986b: 200)

In this way, those contracts which are “an instrument of disguised oppression” must be invalid for a liberal of Green's colour (Green, 1986b: 209). Such devices merely perpetuate the situation in which “the labourer stumbled through a helpless, hopeless life to a pauper's grave”.<sup>26</sup> One important sub-class of such contracts includes voluntary slavery and all other types of contract which on balance objectify any of the participants - even where all of the parties *in a sense* give their consent.

No contract is valid in which human persons, willingly or unwillingly, are dealt with as commodities, because such contracts of necessity defeat the end for which alone society enforces such contracts at all. (Green, 1986b: 201; see also Green, 1986a: 159)

One cannot possess a right to make these sorts of contract because the basis of any valid right or duty is the service which on the whole it renders to the furtherance of the true well-being of humanity. A ‘right’ to harm oneself to the extent of destroying the possibility of pursuing a common good must be self-contradictory for this reason.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Green in a speech to the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, Oxford on 9th December 1874, as reported in the *Oxford Chronicle* on 19th December 1874.

<sup>27</sup> For the same reason, Green holds that an agent cannot possess a right to take his own life (Green, 1986a: 159).

This line of thought underlies Green's vehement reaction against the ease with which alcohol was available in his time. Famously, he argued that:

Drunkenness in the head of a family means, as a rule, the impoverishment and degradation of all members of the family ; and the presence of a drink-shop at the corner of a street means, as a rule, the drunkenness of a certain number of heads of families in that street. Remove the drink-shops, and as the experience of many happy communities sufficiently shows, you almost, perhaps in time altogether, remove the drunkenness. (Green, 1986b: 210)

He goes as far as to argue that without such restrictions upon the sale of alcohol, all other measures aiming to improve human lives will be largely ineffectual. Without the stricter control of alcohol sales, the self-reliant individual is merely a potentially good man who fails to realise his own higher essence (Green, 1986a: 21-2). Placing more extensive temperance legislation works in tandem with restraints upon oppressive work contracts, land reform and all other legitimate instances of state intervention in the lives of citizens to form some of the necessary functions of the British state of Green's age (Green, 1986a: 211).

There is no contradiction or ambivalence in Green's philosophical thought on this point, although things will always be less clear at the level of practice. Richter's criticism fails then, because he has not understood that Green's primary political commitment is to the fostering and expression of distinctively human action. This is "intelligent" action - action which is undertaken with full knowledge of the goals and the best means for achieving the full realisation of all of man's truly human capacities. Human imperfections mean that this circumstance will never be perfectly actualised. However, state action is one device for creating the conditions under which the ideal can at least be moved towards. This approach is analysed in greater depth in chapter six where the discussion considers Green's attitude to private property and capitalism.

## **6. Social Change and Civil Disobedience.**

It has been established that human progress is manifested in the development of social and political institutions and practices. It is important to examine the abstract nature of this developmental process in greater detail as it informs Green's theory of civil disobedience and highlights the conflictual nature of 'politics' (broadly conceived).

New rights, duties and obligations arise as societies and states mature. Such changes can have a number of causes. In essence, however, they occur

upon new conditions arising, or upon elements of social good being taken account of which had been overlooked before, or upon persons being taken into the reckoning as capable of participating in the social well-being who had previously been treated merely as means to its attainment (Green, 1986a: 142)

Elsewhere, he is more specific and highlights five possible sources of such new rights, duties and obligations (Green, 1986a: 135). The first of these sources has been mentioned already in relation to cultural pluralism. It is:

the claim for recognition on the part of families and tribes living on the same territory with those which in community form the state but living at first in some relation of subjection to them. (Green, 1986a: 135)

This arises out of a growing recognition of the possession and moral significance of some common characteristic which is deemed morally relevant when ascribing rights, duties and obligations to particular individuals. In practice, this characteristic need not be identified in all humans. Yet, if it is not, then the resulting union is an imperfect expression of the moral ideal. The ideal group is the whole of humanity (Green, 1986a: 135). This source of social change was examined earlier in this chapter and so will not be expanded upon here.

The second source of new rights and duties is the growing recognition of the validity of claiming respect for members of “external communities (‘external’ territorially)” (Green, 1986a: 135). This can arise through either conquest (Green, 1986a: 135 ; Green, 1906: 216) or “voluntary combination (as with the Swiss cantons and the United States of America).” (Green, 1986a: 135) In both cases, the combined communities are ruled by the same state and share the same system of rights and obligations. A contemporary example of this would be the growth of the European Union. This process and Green’s attitude to it was elaborated upon in chapter three. Thirdly, new rights arise out of the increased complexity of social interactions which the existence of a state makes possible. Green argues that these new rights arise “especially in regard to property” (Green, 1986a: 135).

One could think of new restrictions on the freedom of contracts in the labour market (Green, 1986b: 194-9). This category is returned to in chapter six. Fourthly, new rights arise out of the need for an effective administrative machine to operate as part of the state (Green, 1986a: 135). For instance, Parliamentary Select Committees now possess the right to call witnesses (see also Nicholson, 1990: 94). Lastly, changes in the “situations of life” which the state facilitates “make new modes of protecting the people a matter virtually of right.” (Green, 1986a: 135) Urbanisation is the example of such a “situation of life”, given by Green himself.

In each of these five ways, the creation of the state “leads to a development and moralisation of man beyond the stage which they must have reached before it could be possible” (Green, 1986a: 135) by enabling the citizen to express new facets of his personality. No matter which of these five causes is the source of social change in a particular instance, the developmental process results from the revision of existing social, economic and political norms in accordance with their own higher inherent logics and in response to new circumstances. This point was established in chapter four.

Furthermore, it was demonstrated earlier that the citizen must contravene or seek to change the explicit norms of his society if such developments are to occur. This means that Green is required to produce a viable doctrine of civil disobedience and - in some circumstances - revolution (Milne, 1962: 136-44). He writes:

The general principle that the citizen must never act otherwise than as a citizen does not carry with it an obligation under all conditions to conform to the law of his state, since those laws may be inconsistent with the true end of the state as the sustainer and harmoniser of social relations. (Green, 1986a: 143)

It has been shown that a *perfect* - and hence truly legitimate - state is simply a manifestation of the Common Good. As such, its function is to protect and enforce those rights and obligations which arise out of social relations (Green, 1986a: 140). For this reason, citizens of this particular state should always honour fully those rights and obligations which *this* particular manifestation of society prescribes. Unfortunately, no human agent, no society, no system of rights and obligations - and therefore no state - can ever be perfect. This fact is pivotal within Green’s thought as has been shown *ad nauseam*

throughout this thesis. Missing this argument has led at least two influential commentators to portray Green as arguing that all actual rights, duties and obligations gain their legitimacy from the order of the political sovereign (Prichard, 1949: 57-66 ; Lewis, 1962b ; see also Lancaster, 1959: 224-228-34). If these critics were correct, Green would be proposing the worst form of conservatism. In fact, it has been established that his philosophy has radical implications (Green, 1986g).

Quite simply, Green is emphatic that the imperfection of every actual state means that “we cannot apply this rule [of perfect obedience] in practice.” (Green, 1986a: 143) Indeed, he argues that the citizen has a duty to resist, and if necessary overthrow, the state under certain circumstances irrespectively of whether there is a law “acknowledged or half-acknowledged, written or customary” to do so (Green, 1986a: 107). Hence, even though the individual can be forced to submit to the laws of the state, he has a duty to obey the state only as far as he believes that - in his specific circumstances - doing so is the best method of furthering the distinctively human development of that portion of mankind with which he identifies his true good (see Harris, 1986 ; Thomas, 1987: 356-9). He must always act “[with] reference to the needs or good of society.” (Green, 1986a: 143) When the individual believes that the sovereign is hindering human development, he has a positive duty to engage in civil disobedience.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, the individual must decide for himself whether or not it does so in any particular instance - as was established in chapter four (Green, 1986a: 100).

If the agent does decide that the sovereign should be resisted, he must think carefully about the best method to adopt. Green argues that in a relatively democratic system such as Britain’s, the best method will probably be through the established legal procedures (Green, 1986a: 100). In this case, the dissenter should obey the law as it stands presently, whilst still working to get it changed. If the citizen of a broadly democratic system does not obey the law which he is seeking to change, then unnecessary harm is likely to be done to his society’s chances of living in accordance with the common good.

Of course, socio-economic and political difficulties do arise where previously-favoured citizens lose some of their advantages. Nevertheless, the fact that the ‘old’ rights are ‘violated’ is not a legitimate reason for refusing to fulfil one’s new obligations and the new laws. The true validity of the previous system of rights and obligations was derived

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Lancaster misses this vital point in Lancaster, 1959: 224-5, 228-34 *passim*.

from its contribution to the common good. With the development of the conception of the common good or a development of a better awareness of how to foster the Common Good most effectively, the validity of the old system declines. If legal enforcement of a particular system of rights and obligations is justified because it is required to ensure the well-being of the whole community now, then it is irrelevant that - previously - citizens had rights which a revised system does not honour, for social development “suggests the necessity of some further regulation of the individual’s liberty to do as he pleases” (Green, 1986a: 142). In short, where the “social judgement” (Green, 1986a: 142) about what constitutes the best system for securing attainment of the common good changes (because the common good itself has changed), this transfers legitimacy to the new system.

Unfortunately, this does seem to place the individual at the mercy of society to an unacceptable degree in the manner which Prichard and others have alleged.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Richter pushes this claim still further by arguing that it places the working classes at the mercy of the upper classes:

[Green’s criterion for state action] was moralistic, involving the determination by upper-class persons of those moral traits to be encouraged; it excluded from consideration the economic arrangements of the society, as well as the possibility that the interests and tastes of middle-class reformers might not be those of the working classes. (Richter, 1964: 296)

This is an extraordinary criticism to make. Firstly, nowhere does Green exclude the economic sphere from moral criticism. Secondly, it is unclear whether Richter’s elite are the upper- or the middle-classes. Thirdly and most importantly in the present instance, Green makes no claim about the special authority of the conscientious judgement of this elite. Strangely, Richter ignores Green’s calls for the extension of the franchise and the subsequent development of new rights which has just been outlined.

I return to the more plausible argument that Green’s justification of the state has potentially despotic implications. He asks, “[i]s then the general judgement as to the requirements of social well-being so absolutely authoritative that no individual right can

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<sup>29</sup> Prichard, 1949: 57-66 ; Benn et al, 1959: 97, 326 ; Lewis, 1962b: *passim* ; Robbins, 1982: 67-9 ; O’Sullivan, 1987: 182-8 *passim*.

exist against it?" (Green, 1986a: 143) He argues that it is not. His vital point is that for a right to be fully legitimate, it must be "acknowledged" or "recognised" as being necessary for the common good of society (Green, 1986a: 143). He expands upon his point with the argument that a claimable right is:

[a right whose] exercise should be contributory to some social good which the public conscience is capable of appreciating - *not necessarily one which in the existing prevalence of private interests can obtain due acknowledgment*, but still one of which men in their actions and language show themselves to be aware. (Green, 1986a: 143, emphasis added)

This point was made earlier when Green's conception of implicit recognition was introduced. I will not repeat the argument here. The individual conscientious agent must decide for himself precisely what and how to resist.

Although some commentators have argued that Green downplays the existence and seriousness of social strife arising out of debates surrounding the legitimacy of certain rights and duties (e.g. Ulam, 1951: 37 ; Lancaster, 1959: 219), he is in fact fully alive to these difficulties. Apart from the passages in his published writings where he mentions such conflicts (e.g. Green, 1986b), he demonstrates his appreciation of their moral implications in many of his speeches. Constantly, he makes his fiercest attacks against those individuals and groups who resist or push for reforms on the basis of their own vested interests.<sup>30</sup>

In essence, the problems which Green recognizes as facing reformers - the problems which create conflictual politics - arise out of his awareness of the perennial difficulty of the

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<sup>30</sup> This is one recurring theme of the speeches which Nicholson has collated. For instance, it forms the main subject of Green's addresses to the Oxford Reform League on 25th March 1867, reported in the *Oxford Chronicle* (hereafter *OC*) on 30th March 1867 ; The Special Conference on the Government's Intoxicating Liquor Bill on 6th May 1874, reported in *OC* on 16th May 1874 ; The National Agricultural Labourers' Union on 9th December 1874, reported in *OC* on 19th December 1874 ; Oxford West Ward Liberal Association on 20th September 1876, reported in *OC* on 23rd September 1876 ; Abingdon Liberal Association on 5th December 1879, reported in the *Abingdon Herald* on 13th December 1879 ; meeting of the National Church Reform Union at Merton College on 7th December 1881, reported in *OC* on 10th December 1881 ; and the last speech he was ever scheduled to make, to the Oxford Liberal Associations on 15th March 1882, the manuscript of which (entitled *Liberalism in Birmingham*) survives in Balliol College library. There are many other examples which could be given as well.



practical vagueness of the common good. These must be examined in turn. However, the first thing to notice is that undisputed rights should be adhered to by the competing parties when claimed by both the members of their own group and the members of the group(s) with whom they disagree on other matters. Yet, even allowing for this, Green still highlights four cases in which the nature of the individual's political duty is especially unclear. Firstly, problems arise where sovereignty is disputed. In this case, the legal authority of the (nominal) sovereign's commands does not receive the respect of the whole citizenry (Green, 1986a: 101). Examples in Green's time were found in Ireland and America. He argues that at such times, no legitimate legal right exists on either side (Green, 1986a: 103). This is perfectly in line with his earlier justification of rights and obligations. Every structured social system is based upon the subjects' mutual recognition of the system's essential contribution to the attainment of a commonly-recognised shared good. Where there is no such good - and consequently when there is neither a common path nor a mutually-accepted political process for deciding the path - then there can be no full right as such. This fundamentally undermines the legitimacy of any claim to sovereignty in the disputed area.

The non-existence of a legitimate and legally-enforceable right does not mean that one cannot make a moral judgement about which side in the dispute is 'better' and which is 'worse' (Green, 1986a: 104). Such a judgement is possible and should be based upon one's assessment of the relative moral consequences of victory for each particular side. In short, the side whose victory would most effectively promote man's moral development is the better one. Green uses the example of the American civil war and favours the abolitionists over the supporters of slavery. As well as being intrinsically valuable, their victory would most effectively promote a more developed recognition of human dignity, as was indicated by his earlier argument from intersubjectivity (Green, 1986a: 104).

The second type of difficulty which a social reformer can face when trying to gauge the nature and extent of his political obligation arises when "the government is so conducted that there are no legal means of obtaining the repeal of a law" (Green, 1986a: 101). Green highlights three conditions to bear in mind when trying to decide whether or not subversion is justified in such a situation (Green, 1986a: 109). Firstly, is it possible resist the sovereign on the particular matter without subverting the whole political system? If it is not, then the action will tend to be illegitimate. Secondly, if the political system is going to be subverted by resistance, is the character of the body politic such that the act of subversion will lead to anarchy? If it is, then again the action will tend to be wrong. Thirdly (and this is also

Green's third type of general difficulty (Green, 1986a: 101)), one should ask whether or not the system has been so corrupted by private interests that there is no common good supporting the sovereign and the "so-called" state which it serves. If it has, then revolution is justified.

The fourth type of difficulty with gauging one's political duty arises when a particular political measure can be resisted without seriously risking the destruction of the "social order and the fabric of settled rights" (Green, 1986a: 101). Once again, resistance is justified only to the extent that the individual acts on the conscientious belief that it will further the moral development of mankind better than any other available course of action.

Lindsay sums up this whole approach very well when he argues that, for Green, "[o]ur appeal is to be from the State as it is to the State as it reasonably might be, considering what its citizens are." (Lindsay, 1941: xvii)

From what has been established so far, it can be seen that commentators such as Lancaster (mentioned earlier) and Greengarten are wholly mistaken to argue that "[n]o attempt is made [by Green] to come to terms with the moral dilemma confronting the conscientious citizen when a system of law and government obstructs, rather than assists, the attainment of the common good." (Greengarten, 1981: 67)<sup>31</sup> Similarly, it is misguided to assert:

One cannot escape the conclusion that when the chips are down, timidity and bourgeois punctiliousness prevail over the person and social justice in Green's liberalism. (Germino, 1972: 271)

Certainly, there is a mood in which Green does argue that, as a matter of prudence it is usually better to presume that one is wrong to believe that there is a duty to resist in a particular case unless it is also "the attitude of the mass of the people" (Green, 1986a: 109). It is prudent not primarily in the sense that one has a greater chance of success if resistance is supported by the majority of the population, but in the sense that one's judgement is less likely to be in error. (Again, to some commentators this has conservative overtones.<sup>32</sup>)

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<sup>31</sup> For an excellent attack on Greengarten's interpretation of Green's theory of civil disobedience, see Morrow, 1985: 497-9.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Harrison, 1965: 240 ; Germino, 1972: 263, 266-7, 270-1 ; Greengarten, 1981: 66-70.

However, Green equivocates on this point for he recognises that “[o]n the other hand, it is under the worst governments that the public spirit is most crushed” (Green, 1986a: 108). In these cases, the minority *should* revolt without obvious popular support if they believe the situation demands it.

The previous chapter demonstrated that Green is well aware that often this advice will not be very helpful in practice. He acknowledges that even when the conscientious moral agent is armed with knowledge of all such principles, he faces a very difficult task. “Simply I should answer, [the individual should follow] the general rule of looking to the moral good of mankind” (Green, 1986a: 106). Really, the only way to make an error of judgement less likely is to attempt to make one’s judgment with the smallest self-regard that one can. Nevertheless, ultimately Green is realistic about the situation:

[T]here are times of political difficulty in which the line of conduct adopted may have the most important effect, but in which it is very hard to know what is the proper line to take. (Green, 1986a: 106)

Nevertheless, the seriousness of this ‘admission’ has been overemphasised by some commentators (e.g. Richter, 1964: 265-6). Quite simply, the nature of the subject matter entails that Green cannot be illuminating in philosophical terms. Philosophy cannot provide specific guidance to practice beyond the call for moral agents to follow their conscience. It should not be forgotten that the logic of Green’s position ultimately makes the individual conscience the basic moral and political ‘unit’ (Green, 1986a: 108). The main reason for considering groups is to make the point about prudence. The essential point in this part of his analysis is that where the individual considers the situation to be uncertain, conscientious action - rather than simple prudence - is vital.

He accepts even that consciously applying these criteria in practice would probably prevent many revolutions which would be of net benefit to the society. For this reason, he argues that they will be of service probably only to the subsequent analyst of the revolution.

No doubt revolutionists do and must to a great extent ‘go it blind’. ... [T]he estimate of ... [whether or not] an act should or should not have been done, is not one which we could expect the [revolutionary] agent himself to have made. The effort to make it would have paralysed his power to action.

It is not very important to the conscientious moral agent that assessing what is the correct action is often very difficult on the basis of these principles, then. Principles are at best guides for conscience and ultimately it is careful conscientious judgement of actual situations alone, rather than the dictates of a moral philosopher, which forms the basis of true moral agency (Wintrop, 1983: 99). This goes a long way to countering Germino's claim that Green's thought exhibits "insensitivity to the importance of spontaneity" (Germino, 1973: 263).

## 7. The Downfall of Green's Liberalism?

It may be asked, even if Green is unconcerned by the vagueness of his theory, is it not dangerous for him as a liberal theorist? (see Richter, 1964: 286-7 ; Phillips, 1976: 77-8 ; Wempe, 1986: esp. 173) As has been shown, Green believes that the more determinate conceptions of what virtue requires can only spring from reflections on the nature of the specific demands of one's conscience (Green, 1906: 308) and this means that his theory does not justify repression of conscientious action (Green, 1986a: 176-206 *passim*). Consequently, at most levels, Berlin's allegation that Green's theory potentially justifies despotism fails due to its misunderstanding of the nature of the mechanism of the individual's moral life and progress (e.g. Berlin, 1969a: xlix<sup>n</sup>1). Nevertheless, things are not that straightforward in certain cases as Green does advocate the suppression of some sorts of desire in the interests of fostering the agent's positive freedom. It is this contention which allegedly creates the problem for him as a liberal.

The implications of the objection come out most pointedly in relation to Green's advocacy of temperance reform. Many commentators seem to regard his concern as merely a rather quaint expression of an exaggerated Evangelical preoccupation with the evils of drink (e.g. Hoover, 1973: 560 ; Bellamy, 1990b: 142-4 *passim*). However, such a reaction to Green's position demonstrates a lack of sensitivity to the degree and consequences of drunkenness within mid and late Victorian Britain. There was extensive alcoholism, particularly among the working class (see Nicholson, 1985). The seriousness of the problem was most apparent among children. The equivalent in today's terms would be living in a society where heroin or 'crack cocaine' were widely available and used, and where crime and destitution reflected that fact even among children. One needs only to

think of the poorer sections of many large British and American cities at the moment to recognise how serious such a situation is. This is strictly equivalent to the situation Green is addressing.

With this point in mind, one should now consider the following familiar scenario. The drug addict wishes to give up heroin. Doing so would allow him to develop as a moral being and, on Green's terms, to become more fully human. Should the addict be forced to give up heroin by another agent - for example, an individual or organisation, such as the state? On one view, it seems that Green would say that he should. The addict's desire to overcome heroin is his 'higher', more real desire. Indeed, and this is the real problem for Green, even if a second situation obtains where the agent never expresses any wish to quit his habit, it appears that Green is committed to arguing that he should be coerced into giving it up. He should be "forced to be free" (Rousseau, 1968: 64).

Suppression in the first case - where the addict expresses a desire to come off drugs - does not appear intuitively to be wrong. Even so, one may question the status of intuitive moral judgements. The second case - where the agent does not express a wish to be weaned off heroin - is more difficult. In short, it should be asked, if Green is a liberal, and, very crudely, liberals respect choices which persons at least claim they make, what legitimate moral justification can he offer for forcing the addict to come off drugs?

What is to be respected as the essential nature of a human? In Green's terms, it is the eternal consciousness in man. In practice, and as has been shown, this expresses itself as the agent's conscience. The drug addict - in that he wishes to come off heroin - is presumably expressing his conscience. However, the drug addict who says that he does not wish to give up drugs is having his conscience overpowered by his animal imperfections. On Green's view then, the drug addict should be 'forced' to come off drugs (by having the temptation removed - having the supply cut) only if one is certain that his desire to stay on them is merely a consequence of his conscience being masked.<sup>33</sup> This is precisely the thought underlying Green's call for the restriction of the sale of alcohol<sup>34</sup> and his call to make elementary education compulsory (Nicholson, 1990: 168-71). The real

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<sup>33</sup> The argument that addicts as a matter of fact cannot be forced to give up drugs misses the essential point of Green's argument. If he could be so forced, then Green believes there is a moral duty to do so.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Green, 1986b: 199, 209-12 ; see also Nettleship, 1889: cxv-cxviii ; Richter, 1964: 362-70 ; Gaus, 1983: 178-82 ; Nicholson, 1985 ; Nicholson, 1990: 177-88 *passim*.

problem arises where one is uncertain whether or not the agent is following his conscience. In the case of alcoholics or other drug addicts, Green is clear that they are not.

It was established earlier that things are not too bad for Green at first. Given the difficulties inherent in trying to discover what another agent's conscience tells him on any particular issue (and whether or not he is following it), there are strong grounds for Green to support a 'hands off', a 'liberal' approach. These grounds are, however, pragmatic. Hence, they are inherently contingent on the circumstances in which the agent is studied. It is true that for Green the individual cannot be forced to be free directly anyway. Mere performance of an outward act which coincides with what it is one's duty to do is not in itself a moral or true free action. For the action to be truly free it must be done from a good motive, and importantly no one can successfully command that of another being. The agent must identify with his actions completely and so his real freedom only comes from following his own conscience. In this way, Green's theory could not justify totalitarianism if that requires a forced moral change as well as 'external' repression.

Nonetheless, Green's theory could be used to justify authoritarianism under certain exceptional circumstances. That is, it could justify large scale restrictions being placed by the state on many courses of action which would otherwise be open to the agent. It is not that the individual agent is part of a "social river" for Green in the manner Berlin alleges (Berlin, 1969a: xlix<sup>n</sup>1). It is simply that certain options may be judged to be incompatible with achieving 'the good life', and importantly that anyone pursuing them cannot be following his conscience. This goes some way to explaining Green's attitude to the sale of alcohol. Ernest Barker expresses the idea thus, "[t]he one legitimate challenge to Green's position would lie in urging that the liberty of [for example] buying and selling alcohol does not necessarily constitute a hindrance" to the self-realisation of humanity (Barker, 1915: 53). The thought underlying this contention informs Wempe's assertion that:

Green is prepared to leave things to have their own course, it would seem, as long as this produces the right result; if not, he seems to be saying, the use of force is appropriate in all those cases in which this result is nevertheless needed. (Wempe, 1986: 157-8)

Unfortunately, there is a lot of truth in this allegation when it is given the preceding slant.

Green's position may be awkward, but then so are those of many other liberal theorists. Any liberal who accepts that competence is a precondition of the right to self-determination faces Green's difficulty. This is not a minor problem for liberalism. Placing extra legal restriction beyond those placed on competent adults - such as those which are placed upon children or the insane - is frequently justified by liberals and usually on grounds of competence. As soon as this line is taken, potentially the door is opened to authoritarianism. In this way, Green's difficulty highlights an important problem which is wrongly neglected in a lot of liberal theorising.

This problem is intensified still further for anyone who adopts a consequentialist approach - again, as Green (e.g. Green, 1906: 273 ; Green, 1986b: 199) and many others do (e.g. Thomas, 1987: 359-60). Some commentators have even argued that Kantianism itself possesses a consequentialist thrust (e.g. Cummiskey, 1990 ; Weinstein, 1993). Unless one introduces empirical arguments to protect individuals absolutely, there will always be a danger that some people's welfare will be sacrificed to increase the welfare of others - even if 'welfare' is understood in terms of the protection of (some) individuals' rights. Certainly, Green's emphasis upon the non-competitiveness of the true good may mitigate this problem to some extent under some circumstances. Even so, given his belief that humans are condemned to imperfection when living in the temporal world, the degree of mitigation will vary greatly because, of necessity, it will depend upon the particular contingent empirical conditions at the time. There is no way to judge a case which does not rely upon empirical - and therefore upon contingent - factors.

## **8. Conclusion: Spiritual Determinism.**

The discussion of Green's political philosophy in this chapter so far has worked upon the assumption that he is adopting the neo-Aristotelian theory of the will as it was set out in chapter two. All that remains in this chapter is to draw out the implications of adopting a spiritual determinist line instead. The implications are certainly important. It will be remembered that moral and legal rights exist to secure spaces for moral action - they allow individuals to execute their choices without undue hindrance from other agents. That is the problematic point when one adopts the deterministic position. The latter entails the rejection of the idea that a human can ever make a real choice (sc. can choose to act otherwise than in fact he did). This seems to deprive rights of their rationale.

Fortunately for Green, the situation is not as bleak as this analysis makes it appear.

On the determinist reading, rights, duties and obligations constitute important aspects of the individual's conceptual landscape. Consequently, they form important aspects of the circumstances with which his consciousness and conscience reacts. Reflecting what was established in chapters two and four, social change and civil disobedience should now be characterised as 'automatic' manifestations of "the primary demands of human consciousness" (Green, 1986a: 137). The attempt to modify rights and so on is the communication of human reason with itself. This is because, as will be remembered from chapter three, rights and so on are objective (if imperfect) manifestations of the eternal consciousness in precisely the same manner that all other social institutions are (to varying degrees).

As has been stated, these are radical changes. Nevertheless, the resulting system is internally consistent at the very least.

Having considered Green's theory of rights, political obligation and civil disobedience in some depth, the next chapter turns to Green's justification of one of the most important rights which can be granted in a modern society - the right to hold private property. From this basis, the discussion will conclude with an assessment of Green's qualified defence of capitalism.



**CHAPTER SIX:**  
***THE ETHICAL POTENTIAL OF THE ECONOMIC REALM***

**1. Introduction.**

Green is clear - indeed it should be obvious - that a moral agent cannot be secure in the development of his higher faculties if he is on the verge of starvation or is constantly at risk of becoming so:

Until life has been so organised as to afford some regular relief from the pressure of animal wants, an interest in what Aristotle calls 'living well' or 'well-being', as distinct from merely 'living', cannot emerge. (Green, 1986e: 240)

Furthermore, he conceives of economic activity as playing a crucial role in human self-expression and therefore in human self-realisation. It is for these reasons that I include this short chapter examining Green's writings on economics to conclude my internal critique of his philosophical system. Green presents distinctive, but often misunderstood, arguments in favour of state intervention in many sensitive areas of the economy. It will be established that his position on property is not "confused" as some commentators (e.g. Doyle, 1933: 293) have alleged. Most importantly it will be demonstrated that, although his analysis of capitalism is very naive, his principles can serve as the basis of a radical critique of capitalism.

**2. Private Property and Capitalism.**

Green's analysis of the moral status of the right to private property and of capitalism - as it is presented in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* - proceeds upon the implicit assumption that the "supply of the means of living has been sufficiently secured to allow room for a consideration of the ends of living" (Green, 1986e: 241). The level of requisite means is determined by the need for "[i] means of subsistence," and "[ii] material to work upon" (Green, 1986j: 1, additions by Harris et al). Once this has been granted, private property is important to Green because he recognises that:

A necessary condition at once of the growth of a free morality, i.e. a certain

behaviour of men determined by an understanding of moral relations and by the value which they set on them as understood, and of the conception of those relations as relations between all men, is that free play should be given to every man's powers of appropriation. Moral freedom is not the same thing as a control over the outward circumstances and appliances of life. It is the end to which such control is a generally necessary means and which gives it its value. (Green, 1986a: 219)

He begins his analysis proper with a consideration of two fashionable but competing theories of private property. The first claims that private property rights originate in first occupancy (Green, 1986a: 213).<sup>1</sup> Correctly, Green objects that this approach fails to establish why a person should have a *right* to the things that he is the first person to 'occupy'. Essentially the same objection holds for the second approach, which is the historical method as popularised by Sir Henry Maine (Green, 1986a: 211-3 ; Maine, 1920: chapter VIII). Green argues that:

such an investigation [into the historical origins of the right to private property], however valuable in itself, leaves untouched the questions, (1) what it is in the nature of men that makes it possible for them, and moves them, to appropriate; (2) why it is that they conceive of themselves and each other as having a right in their appropriations ; (3) on what ground is this conception treated as of moral authority - as one that should be acted on. (Green, 1986a: 212)

These questions frame Green's own analysis of the justifications of private property and capitalism (see Barker, 1915: 53-8). In relation to the first question, he argues that persons appropriate things as part of their effort for self-expression and hence self-realisation (see Nicholson, 1990: 95-9). "(1) Appropriation is an expression of will ; of the individual's effort to give reality to a conception of his own good ; of his consciousness of a possible self-satisfaction as an object to be attained." (Green, 1986a: 213) It should not

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<sup>1</sup> Harris and Morrow cite Hume's *Treatise* as an influence here (Hume, 1978: 505-7 ; Harris et al, 1986: 338 sec. N, n.2).

be surprising that this is Green's position given his Hegelianism (Muirhead, 1908: 74-8 ; Morrow, 1981: 88 ; Kloppenberg, 1986: 179-82). As chapter two demonstrated, it formed the basis of his theory of the will, particularly the notion of 'distinctively human action' (Green, 1986a: 217) Every human agent must express and hence develop his highest nature - importantly, this means his *permanent* nature - through purposive actions. Frequently, this requires the use of "things" (sc. non-purposive objects). In short, such objects form the raw materials used in the execution of a plan which the agent adopts as a reflection of the permanence of his highest nature (or eternal consciousness). The security which arises with the right to hold an object as his own (i.e. to have the right to determine its use) expresses the permanence of the owner's true self and so serves to legitimate his claim to be respected as a purposive agent both to himself and to other persons.<sup>2</sup>

To complete this introductory sketch of Green's analysis of the right to private property, it must be noted that an agent's right presupposes recognition by society that his appropriation should be guaranteed to him and redeemable only on his wish (Green, 1986a: 214 ; Muirhead, 1908: 78-80). This is in line with the justification of rights set out and criticised in chapter five.

I begin my analysis by noting a defect within Green's position. He argues that the mere fact a person wastes his opportunity to use his property well does not mean that he should not be accorded this right as long as he does not also remove the same opportunity from other rights-holders. Unfortunately, he goes further than this and argues that there is no reason to remove the right to private property from someone who uses it in such a manner that it is "demoralising to themselves *and others*" (Green, 1986a: 221, emphasis added). This last clause presents real problems for his theory. It is not clear why a rights-holder has a right not to have his property interfered with when he harms the moral development of other persons. Indeed, as Monro notes, in relation to other difficult situations - such as the clash between the parents' (alleged) right over their children and the child's right to be educated - Green is clear that rights find their legitimacy in their contribution to the development of human potentials and the former is invalidated by usage of parental power that proves detrimental to the welfare of the children (Monro, 1951: 353-

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<sup>2</sup> Rodman argues that Green's emphasis on 'permanence' in his theory of property is a reaction to the decline of religious faith in this society and to an increased scepticism about the possibility of an eternal afterlife (Rodman, 1973: 579-80). This is an interesting if supported argument.

7 *passim*). The justification of non-interference in the private property rights of the owner for the detrimental effects which he has on his own moral development is more secure given that there is a strong presupposition for the agent to be given a wide sphere of negative freedom. Such a sphere is necessary to provide the opportunity for conscientious action. Yet, even this observation merely serves to strengthen the objections against Green's position regarding the situation where harm is done to others. The property owner whose use of his property harms the capacities of others to make the (eudaemonic) best of themselves is infringing upon the latter's spheres of 'negative' and 'positive' liberty and his right should be subject to limitation for that reason. Rights have true validity only when they tend to promote the development of man's permanent nature. In the present case, Green seems to lose sight of that temporarily.

The significance of such an emphasis upon permanence has been missed by many important commentators such as Geoffrey Thomas and Peter Nicholson (Thomas, 1987: 342-9 ; Nicholson, 1990: 99-115 *passim*).<sup>3</sup> Becoming more distinctively human - and hence becoming truly free - does not mean satisfying fleeting desires, as these are, in Green's eyes, a reflection of man's animality. When 'raw materials' are used in a "distinctively human" fashion,

[t]hese things, so taken and fashioned, cease to be external as they were before. They become a sort of extension of the man's organs - the constant apparatus through which he gives reality to his ideas and wishes. (Green, 1986a: 214)

These "ideas and wishes" are expressed through the agent's will and so "will" equates to

a constant principle, operative in all men qualified for any form of society, however frequently overborne by passing impulses, in virtue of which each seeks to give reality to the conception of a well-being which he necessarily

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<sup>3</sup> Morrow gives the best treatment of this subject in the previous literature (Morrow, 1981). There is insufficient space here to assess Lewis' claim that, in regard to property at least, "*in all essentials the position of Green is the same as that of Locke*." (Lewis, 1952: 72, emphasis is original). For the relationship between Green and Locke's theory of property, see Morrow, 1981: 88-9.

regards as common to himself with others. (Green, 1986a: 217)

Each individual should be secured the right to hold property privately in order that he may use it in a manner which expresses his conscientious assessment of his highest and permanent interests.

This argument is fundamental to Green's justification of private property and yet Muirhead underestimates its significance within Green's wider system when he asserts that Green "would probably have viewed with grave distrust such proposals as those ... for the 'economic independence' of married women." (Muirhead, 1908: 95). In reality, Green's theory is essentially 'gender-blind' (Anderson, 1991). Indeed, he is at pains to argue that any society - such as the ancient polis of Plato and Aristotle - which failed to recognise "the proper and equal sacredness of all women, as self-determining and self-respecting persons" is necessarily imperfect (Green, 1906: 267). Respecting persons requires that they are, firstly, all accorded the same rights "without distinction of sex". This is "negative equality before the law" (Green, 1906: 267). Secondly, it requires that women must be accorded "positive equality of conditions and a more real possibility for women to make their own career in life" (Green, 1906: 267). In other words, everyone - whether male or female, whether married or single - should be given the opportunity to express their own highest essence by *freely* pursuing their own conception of the common good. Consequently, every person should be accorded the same general rights in regard of property, irrespective of gender.

Emphasizing the role played by the concept of 'permanence' within Green's position on property in this manner has other important implications. For example, C B MacPherson distinguishes between two claims which have been made to justify liberal democracy and - what he sees as its necessary attendant - capitalism. "The first claim is that the liberal-democratic society ... maximises individual satisfactions or utilities ... [and] does so equitably : that it maximizes the satisfactions to which, on some concept of equity, each individual is entitled." (MacPherson, 1973: 4) The other claim is that this type of socio-economic system "maximizes men's human powers, that is, their potential for using and developing their uniquely human capacities." (MacPherson, 1973: 4) Using these categories, MacPherson claims that Green, J S Mill "and the whole subsequent liberal-democratic tradition" produced "an uneasy compromise between the two views of man's essence, and, correspondingly, an unsure mixture of the two maximizing claims made for the liberal-

democratic society.” (MacPherson, 1973: 5)<sup>4</sup>

Although MacPherson is explicit that he does not defend this claim himself (MacPherson, 1973: 11n4), Philip Hansen does so in his highly perceptive and - in many ways - very persuasive article attacking Green’s theory of property. Even so, it will be established now that Hansen’s argument does not work. He writes:

Green remarks that ‘the transition from mere want to consciousness of a wanted object, implies the presence of the want to a subject which distinguishes itself from it and is constant throughout successive stages of the want.’ [Green, 1906: 85] As Green does not specify the wants he has in mind (other than that they must be transformed into objects of desire suitable for the attainment of the moral ideal), nor dispute the sorts of ‘mere’ wants that Utilitarianism posited, we may assume that Green’s treatment of wants is an important basis for his moralization of the market. (Hansen, 1977: 98)

Hansen is arguing, then, that Green endorses a “utility-maximising” model of human nature.

This establishes that Hansen for one (and - from the nature of the criticism - probably MacPherson and Greengarten as well) fail to recognise just how restricted Green’s range of what may be termed ‘morally valuable wants’ really is in Green’s opinion. Indeed, in one remarkable endnote, Hansen even claims that “There was one want which Green felt should be suppressed to some degree: the desire for liquor.” (Hansen, 1977: 114n12) Such commentators fail to recognise that Green attaches no intrinsic value to the (alleged) maximisation of utility-satisfaction produced by capitalism. No matter what else can be said against Green’s economic philosophy (and there is a lot), he does not commit the error which MacPherson and MacPherson’s followers accuse him of (see also Morrow, 1985: 499-504). He does not conflate ‘man-as-utility-maximiser’ with ‘man-as-potential-realiser’. In effect, he explicitly recognises the differences<sup>5</sup> and rejects the former while heartily championing the latter.

As has been established, Green’s reason for doing this stems from the role played

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<sup>4</sup> See also MacPherson, 1973: e.g. 10, 32, 50 ; MacPherson, 1962: 2-3 ; Greengarten, 1981: 100-9 *passim* ; Vincent et al, 1984: 33.

<sup>5</sup> Implicitly, Morrow questions whether or not Green does this in Morrow, 1985: 501.

by the concept of “distinctively human action” within his justification of private property. As Ernest Barker puts it, “[i]t is only by the free action of individual wills that the social good is attained” (Barker, 1915: 55). More specifically, the crucial ideas are that a) the individual needs private property in order to express his highest essence and that b) free exchange is - *formally at least* - the best system to facilitate this expression by individuals. Richard Bellamy notes,

Green contended that in an ideal free market [private] property would be treated as an aspect of the common good and the possibilities for possession as part of one’s self-realisation would become open to all. (Bellamy, 1992a: 42-3)

Capitalism is valued by Green because he conflates it with the truly free market and holds that it maximizes the development of the agent’s “uniquely human capacities” (MacPherson, 1973: 4). It is for this reason also that he favours, for example, the right to unlimited wealth accumulation. To do otherwise - at least in Green’s eyes - would be to impose possible restrictions upon the agent’s expression of his distinctively human nature. Even Green’s more sympathetic commentators have missed the full implications of this argument. Here, I will look at two such misinterpretations - one is presented by Peter Nicholson and the other is presented by Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant.

In the course of his consideration of the critique of Green’s economic thought made by C B MacPherson and his followers (especially Hansen and Greengarten), Peter Nicholson argues that, for Green,

the right to [private] property, like every right, is not absolute but historically relative. Green is led to a qualified defence of capitalism, but only of capitalism in and for the circumstances of his own time. ... [His attachment to capitalism] clearly remains open to revision in the light of economic, technological and social change and of new moral ideas. (Nicholson, 1990: 114)

Assessing Nicholson’s contention is complex. The first point to make is that it is certainly true that Green stresses the importance of historical change in moral ideals.

However, it must not be forgotten that his is a teleological theory. The telos of man is to freely actualise his own highest nature. The idea of freedom necessarily includes the requirement that the individual follows his conscience for the sake of duty itself. He cannot be coerced into doing this. Hence, the agent requires security in the exercise of his power to express his conscientious judgement in practice. For this reason, he must have the right to decide how to use the materials which he believes are necessary for the successful implementation of that course of action which is entailed by this judgement. From this, Green concludes that the right to private property occupies a special place within the system of natural rights and duties (where 'natural' is used in its teleological sense). Certainly, Nicholson is correct to the extent that man's telos can only be attained once the agent's society has progressed to a certain stage. Until that point is reached, the normative status of the right to private property depends above all upon the role it plays in the imperfect lives of imperfect individuals. Despite this qualification, Green is emphatic that given man's nature, the right to private property is 'better' (in a very important sense) than, for instance, a system of communal property rights. Hence, there is a sense in which Green does believe that the right to private property is "absolute" and not merely "historically relative".

Nevertheless, he is being totally consistent when he accepts that property rights have been accorded throughout history which imperfectly reflect the relationship between possession and a human's will (Green, 1986a: 217). The imperfection of property rights under the kinship system is manifested in two ways. As the clan, rather than the individual clan member, owns certain property - especially land - he is hindered in his effort to implement a plan which he sets to himself as expressive of his own highest nature (Green, 1986a: 220). Secondly, the individual's morally-relevant community is restricted to the clan rather than encompassing all moral agents. As should be clear by now, such a situation cannot bring abiding satisfaction to a human being. The perfect society would include all living humans.

What implications does this have for the McPherson/Nicholson debate concerning the nature of Green's attachment to capitalism? To a large extent, it depends upon how 'capitalism' is defined. Green does not tell us very clearly what he understands by the term. It appears that he takes its essential aspect to be free exchange between agents, with 'free' entailing that the agent's choices about which parts of his private property to exchange and at what rates are not deliberately determined by the will of the other parties to the exchange (except via the *unplanned* result of the interaction of supply and demand). This is a



controversial and highly simplistic conception of 'capitalism'. Usually, the latter is taken to mean something along the lines of:

An economic arrangement, defined by the predominant existence of capital and wage labour, the former consisting of accumulation in the hands of private (i.e. non-government) owners, including corporations and joint stock companies, the latter consisting in the activities of labourers, who exchange their labour hours (or, according to Marxian theory, their labour power) for wages, paid from the stock of capital. (Scruton, 1983: 52)

Despite Green's simplistic definition, his analysis makes at least one thing clear. If private property rights are special in the way I have argued they are for Green, then the same logic of justification applies to the market as opposed to a more substantive - non-Greenian - conception of 'capitalism'. In other words, he favours capitalism over those economic systems which do not - in theory at least - make the individual agent the controller of his own economic choices. This serves to emphasize the fact that in a perfect world, Green's attachment to the free market stems from his ontology of moral agency in the sense that he sees this type of market as being best in accordance with the economic activity of perfect conscientious citizens (Morrow, 1981: 88). The capitalist free market attracts Green because he believes it has the potential to make the individual citizen the primary economic decision-making unit in the same way his metaphysics of action has established that the individual is the primary moral decision-making unit. It is in this sense that he has a special attachment to the free market in the same way that he has a special attachment to the right to private property. He is emphatic that:

All restrictions on freedom of wholesome trade are really based on special class interests, and must disappear with the realisation of that idea of individual right, founded on the capacity of every man for free contribution to social good, which is the true idea of the state. (Green, 1986a: 174)

Such class interests are the marks of an imperfect culture.

Yet, Green does not give "a thoroughgoing justification of the capitalist market economy", in the manner Greengarten alleges (Greengarten, 1981: 87) He is emphatic that,

as the culture of modern capitalist societies - to which, for the most part, he is referring in his writings on property - is imperfect, the outcomes of their capitalist economic systems will be similarly imperfect. It is for this reason that government intervention and trade union activity<sup>6</sup> in the terms and conditions of contract, as well as in the provision of welfare services, is not merely a right but a duty of the state and trade unions. It forms an integral part of their proper functions. The existence of economic and hence social evils creates the need for positive intervention in the working of capitalism (Green, 1986a: 230-1). For this reason, in an imperfect world, Nicholson is correct when he argues that Green's attachment to capitalism "clearly remains open to revision in the light of economic, technological, and social change and of new moral ideas." (Nicholson, 1990: 114)<sup>7</sup>

Green believes that this corruption is almost inevitable in practice. Actual capitalist markets can never be 'free' in the specified sense of that term. Certainly, it is possible to envisage a market between imperfect citizens in which the state does not interfere. However, this would not be a 'free market' in the sense in which a 'free market' would exist between citizens who have attained their telos. There would almost certainly be harmful power asymmetries and hence exploitation, both of which are incompatible with action properly aimed at the Common Good. Ultimately, there can be no power asymmetries or exploitation in a kingdom of ends.

Some commentators argue that Green's writings smack of confusion at this point. For example, Vincent and Plant conclude their assessment of Green's justification of the right to private property by claiming that "Green wished to justify a system of responsible enterprise, ultimately a form of humanized capitalism." (Vincent et al, 1984: 31).<sup>8</sup> However, they fail to recognise with sufficient clarity that - in the end - what Green's philosophy actually justifies and what he himself supports is a system of private enterprise in which the participants tend to aim at the Common Good (Brinton, 1962: 218-24). Hence, Vincent and

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, see his speech to the Agricultural Labourers' Union on the 23rd October 1872, as reported in the *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette* on the 26th October 1872. For more on Green's attitude to trade unions see Richter, 1964: 329-30.

<sup>7</sup> Even so, Nicholson's last clause is curious. Clearly, if moral ideas change, then the whole of Green's philosophy may change as well. On Green's attitude to capitalism, also see Barker, 1915: 50-7.

<sup>8</sup> See also Vincent et al, 1984: 30-4, 85-6, 119 ; Vincent, 1987: 345-6 ; Richter, 1964: 290; Gaus, 1983: 241-3 *passim*.

Plant are incorrect if they include Green in their claim that

[t]he Idealists overall had an ambiguous view of property, competition and capitalism. It was as if they wanted to achieve a unity of the competitive instinct with the moral and rational good, within a moralized form of competition, yet all the time realizing that the two were exclusive, and providing no detailed account of an institutional resolution of the conflict. (Vincent et al, 1984: 32)<sup>9</sup>

For his own part, Green is clear that there are real and serious questions to be answered when judging the moral legitimacy of any claim to allow, for example, the unimpeded accumulation of wealth by individuals or the existence of inequalities of wealth (Green, 1986a: 222). He is clear as well that if inequalities of wealth necessarily entail the existence of absolute poverty, then there would be a problem for his justification of the right to hold property privately. His reason for accepting such wealth inequalities stems from the nature of the options which he believes himself to face. As Reeve notes:

the choice is between equal but limited powers [of alienation and bequest of property], and extended powers with unequal results. Green seems to have favoured the latter, but J. S. Mill and Rawls give more weight to the distributional problem. (Reeve, 1986: 162)

These problems are compounded by the ‘tightness’ of the conceptual links between such a right, free trade, bequest and inheritance. It is worth quoting Green’s formulation of the general problem in full:

Now clearly, if an inequality of fortunes, of the kind which naturally arises from the admission of these two forms of freedom [i.e. freedom to trade and to bequeath], necessarily results in the existence of a proletariat, practically excluded from such ownership as is needed to moralise a man, there would

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<sup>9</sup> A similar objection to Vincent and Plant’s position is made by Nicholson (Nicholson, 1987: 120-2).

be a contradiction between our theory of the right of [private] property and the actual consequence of admitting the right according to the theory, for the theory logically necessitates freedom both in trading and in the disposition of his property by the owner, so long as he does not interfere with the like freedom on the part of others; and in other ways as well its realisation implies inequality. (Green, 1986a: 222)

Consequently, it is important for Green's justification of capitalism that any harmful practices or institutions which currently attend capitalism, are contingently attached to the right to private property and the system of market exchange. Essentially, Green's problem is to find some method of distributing resources which is sensitive to the plans of particular persons. The differences in talents which determinate individuals possess entails that they have need of different materials through which to actualise their highest potentials (Green, 1986a: 223). The artist requires one set of materials and the man of letters requires another. At one point, he argues that there are two methods by which this distribution could occur. The first relies on the distribution of resources to individuals "by society" (Green, 1986a: 223). He objects that this method "would imply a complete regulation of [the individual's] life [by society]" (Green, 1986a: 223). The alternative is to trust individuals to obtain the resources they need for themselves through the market. He argues that, although market transactions can be used to exploit the poor, it is not inevitable that such transactions will be anything except the facilitators of a truly just distribution of resources (Green, 1986a: 224). To begin to assess whether or not the harmful consequences are contingently related to capitalism, we must examine the specific evils. I begin by considering the interconnected rights of bequest and inheritance.

### **3. The Origins of the Present Evils of Capitalism.**

Green states that each agent should be free to bequeath his wealth "as he likes among his children (or, if he has none, among others)" (Green, 1986a: 224).<sup>10</sup> Reeve alleges that it is unclear whether Green takes "the primary right" to be that of bequest or of inheritance (Reeve, 1986: 160). In response, it should be noted that Green claims the right

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<sup>10</sup> Reeve misses this last clause when he argues that Green neglects the childless, in Reeve, 1986: 160.

of bequest gains its legitimacy from the role which it plays in allowing the individual to make plans for the future (given that such plans will include those for whom he cares and who will survive him) (Green, 1986a: 224). Furthermore, children have a *prima facie* claim upon their parents for an at least minimal level of consideration which seems to imply a right to inherit from them. However, the right to bequeath remains primary as it allows the performance of distinctively human action in a manner which the right to inherit (given that it is essentially passive) does not.

In the present context, the most significant difficulty for Green is that both of these rights can easily lead to, firstly, inequalities of wealth and hence of opportunities for self-realisation and, secondly, the creation of a group of people who have done nothing to earn their wealth and advantages. Again, Green makes the point that there is nothing necessarily bad about either of these situations. For example, the undeservedly wealthy can make useful contributions to the common good voluntarily and under compulsion, for instance, through taxation. Even so, Green concedes that difficulties do arise in practice and these need correction.

He focuses upon those measures which affect the right of bequest rather than inheritance because he believes that the former is more likely to bring about harmful concentrations of wealth. He rejects as illegitimate any practice which will interfere with the individual's tendency to distribute his wealth through bequest on any basis which furthers the latter's own conception of the common good. In short, he denies the legitimacy of any practice which proscribes a particular distribution of property irrespective of a person's conscientious plans for the future. Under this heading, Green includes any law or custom of primogeniture as well as any obligation for the bequeather to distribute his property equally amongst his children (Green, 1986a: 224-5 ; Green, 1986b: 205-6). More concretely, he attacks peerages (which require a great deal of personal wealth to maintain properly) and "the power of settlement [of landed estates] allowed by English law" (Green, 1986a: 225).

Also, Green considers the more fundamental problem of poverty. He is clear that even in modern Europe, where the right to private property is firmly established in custom and law, private property has not always been used in a manner which is morally beneficial. As a result of this abuse, there are people who "have not the chance of providing means for a free moral life, of developing and giving reality or expression to a good will, an interest in social well-being" (Green, 1986a: 220) because they are condemned to labour for the

subsistence of themselves and those for whom they care (Green, 1986a: 210). In effect, possessing a legal right to hold property is meaningless for these people. It must be asked whether poverty is an endemic feature of capitalism or merely the result of the particular and contingent historical path via which the present economic system has arisen.

In defence of capitalism, Green argues that the system does not necessarily entail a zero-sum economic game (Green, 1986a: 226 ; Green, 1986j: 1). He argues that in fact there is good reason to believe in the existence of a tendency for there to be a steady increase in the stock of capital and hence wealth. As Elizabeth and Richard Jay note, “he shares with most progressives after Mill a belief that the economic problem of wealth-creation has been superseded by the political problem of its distribution” (Jay et al, 1986: 179) Indeed, he is very optimistic that the process of free trade, when combined with a free labour market, will lead to a relatively equal distribution of wealth throughout the whole population. Both of these points are made in the course of his *Notes on Ancient and Modern Political Economy* (Green, 1986j: 1, 4, 6). There, he argues that “where labour [is] *really* free (it is not always so where there is no legal slavery), it compels distribution.” (Green, 1986j: 1, emphasis in original, addition by Harris and Morrow). The situation is improved still further by the workers’ opportunities to band together into savings societies. This creates opportunities for “the better sort of labourers” to become capitalists themselves “to the extent often of owning their houses and a good deal of furniture, of having an interest in stores, and of belonging to benefit-societies through which they make provision for the future” (Green, 1986a: 227). All they need is proper “education and self-discipline” and an effective will to make more of themselves (Green, 1986a: 227).

It is a notable fact that many of Green’s poorer contemporaries - like millions of people today - make no effort to make more of themselves. Yet, Green does not view this as a necessary condition or effect of the system. The source of the “impoverished and reckless proletariat” (Green, 1986a: 227, 228) labouring so inefficiently throughout Europe is not a necessary accompaniment of the working of the capitalist system. Instead, their subservience stems from the culture in which they are raised. It retains the marks of that violence and domination which characterised the transition from feudalism to the modern capitalist epoch. As he puts it, “[t]he original landowners were conquerors” (Green, 1986a: 228) and “[l]andless countrymen, whose ancestors were serfs, are the parents of the proletariat of great towns.” (Green, 1986a: 229) In short, the potentially beneficial effects of the capitalist system - in Britain at least - are mitigated by the (contingent) culture of

subservience of the society in which it operates.

This sort of response from Green encourages commentators such as Greengarten to argue that Green held “[t]he problem of the proletariat” to be “a problem, not of economics, but of consciousness.” (Greengarten, 1981: 81, see also 81-5 *passim*). Ulam presents this criticism as well, although in milder tones (Ulam, 1951: 30). However, such a line of attack neglects the crucial fact that, for all of Green’s emphasis on consciousness, he also emphasizes (without self-contradiction) that consciousness is determined by circumstances in the manner set out earlier in this thesis. That is, the interaction of consciousness and circumstance provides the materials of all human experiences. Of course, these circumstances can be economic. Indeed, Green emphasizes the importance of the material conditions in which the spiritual person lives. However, Greengarten is oversimplifying and consequently misrepresenting Green’s position.

The second source of imperfection in the working of modern capitalist societies is found in the details of its system of land tenure. This was touched upon earlier when mention was made of the grounds of the rights of bequest and inheritance. Legal rights have been granted which are morally unjustifiable as they work against the common good (Green, 1986a: 194, 204-9, 229). Land, like labour, is a special commodity.

It is from the land, or through the land, that the raw material of all wealth is obtained. It is only upon the land that we can live; only across the land that we can move from place to place (Green, 1986b: 205)

However, landlords have been granted rights which are harmful to the well-being of the society as a whole. They have been given many opportunities for selfishness and control of other persons and frequently these opportunities are taken advantage of. For example, the landlord has been allowed:

[to use] his land [so] as to make it unserviceable to the wants of men (e.g. by turning fertile land into a forest), and from taking liberties with it incompatible with the conditions of general freedom and health; e.g. by clearing out a village and leaving the people to pick up house-room as they can elsewhere - a practice common under the old poor-law, when the distinction between close and open villages grew up - or, on the other hand,

by building houses in unhealthy places or of unhealthy structure, by stopping up means of communication, or forbidding the erection of dissenting chapels. (Green, 1986a: 229)

Moreover, the practice of tenant farming has seriously diminished the tenants' incentives to make the most of their land especially where - as in Ireland - farmers have very little power relative to the landlords. Clearly, this practice has caused a great social harm.<sup>11</sup> Good land has gone uncultivated and good farmers starve (Green, 1986b: 205-9).

The combination of land's scarcity and the fundamental role which it plays in most distinctively human activity means that property in land must be carefully regulated by the state for the common good. To argue, as Greengarten does (Greengarten, 1981: 85-7), that Green's calls for careful regulation of land holdings by the state "are clearly designed to hasten the development of capitalist methods of production in the cultivation and general use of the land" (Greengarten, 1981: 86) is misleading. Certainly, Green does emphasize the idea that the "poverty and recklessness" of the lower classes "can be cured only by such legislation as will give the agricultural labourer some real interest in the soil."<sup>12</sup> Yet, he bases this support for private ownership in this concrete case upon empirical grounds. His primary goal remains to structure the system of land-holdings in the manner which best serves the common good under the particular circumstances in which the policy is being implemented. Consequently, any moral value which capitalism possesses is derived from the service which it renders to the attainment of that goal. Green is clear about this. He gears his reforms to private property in land so as to promote that end. Indeed, in the case of land, already the state possessed in 1881 an established right of compulsory purchase in certain circumstances (Green, 1986b: 205).

Two other priorities which face Green's age are producing reforms which secure the physical and mental health and mental development of its citizens. More concretely, this means that the modern citizenry needs legislation in certain areas - such as health and education - to ensure "the young citizens' growing up in such health and with so much knowledge as is necessary for their real freedom." (Green, 1986b: 203) As Harris and

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<sup>11</sup> Agricultural Labourers' Union, 23rd October 1872, reported in the *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette* of 26th October 1872.

<sup>12</sup> Speech to the Wellington Lodge of Odd Fellows on 25th February 1868 as quoted in Nettleship, 1889: cxii.



Morrow point out, this is yet another reason for believing that Green would have been strongly supportive of the British Welfare State.<sup>13</sup> This conclusion is given further weight by Green's argument that "[l]eft to itself, *or to the operation of a casual benevolence*, a degraded population perpetuates and increases itself." (Green, 1986b: 203, emphasis added) The highlighted clause indicates that what is needed is an ordered and principled system of welfare supports. Melvin Richter has established that Green believes that this does not necessarily require action by the state (Green, 1906: 305 ; Richter, 1964: 336-43 *passim* ; supported by Nicholson, 1990: 166-8 *passim*). By the same token, there is nothing to say that it should not undertake this task. As in all cases of practical action, the best course depends upon the specific empirical circumstances. It is a matter of practical judgement. Laws are needed which will give real power to good citizens in their pursuit of the Common Good. By freeing the good man from the need to occupy most of his time with the process of securing merely the most basic material conditions of a moral life for himself and his family, the just state enables the agent and those for whom he cares to develop their higher facilities more effectively.

#### 4. The Naivety and Flexibility of Green's Analysis.

Richard Bellamy has argued that

Within the pluralistic and complex mass societies of today, dominated as they are by imposing structures of corporate and bureaucratic powers and an intricate international market, the Victorian moral code of self-improvement has become little more than a useful fiction for justifying forms of oppression and privilege akin to those liberals originally sought to remove. (Bellamy, 1990a: 12)

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<sup>13</sup> Harris et al, 1986: 346n26 ; see also Hallowell, 1950: 286 ; Lancaster, 1959: 228 ; Holloway, 1960 *passim* ; Thomson, 1969: 196-200 ; Knapp, 1969: 57 ; Sankhdher, 1969; Sankhdher, 1970 ; Germino, 1972: 262-5 *passim* ; Thakurdas, 1978: 200, 302-8; Gaus, 1983: 255-7 ; Vincent et al, 1984: 181-2 ; Kloppenberg, 1986: e.g. 147, 280 ; Hurka, 1993: 147-8. Muirhead appears to have missed this point in his discussion of Green's attitude to a possible policy of ensuring full employment through state action (Muirhead, 1908: 99-100). Clarke disagrees with those who claim that Green was "an architect of the welfare state" (Clarke, 1978: 15).

It is true that one can easily criticise Green's economic theory on the grounds that it is unrealistic and - despite his recently published *Notes on Ancient and Modern Political Economy* (Green, 1986j) - shows limited knowledge of the more specialist sources of his time beyond some acquaintance with certain sections of J S Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*. Indeed, many commentators have done just that.<sup>14</sup> However, Green's difficulties stem from the naivety of his analysis of capitalism and not his choice of basic moral principle. Certainly, one should question the extent to which - as a matter of fact - the continued existence of capitalism presupposes forms of action which are inherently competitive and exploitative.<sup>15</sup> Also, one should question the extent to which capitalism actually does distribute wealth to all sectors of the society in such a manner as to best serve the realisation of the common good. Finally, one should question whether or not Green is correct to believe that "*in the general sense ... [the] interests of capital and labour are identical.*" (Green, 1986j: 6, emphasis in original, addition by Harris et al). There is not enough space to consider such matters in any real depth here.<sup>16</sup> However, I will make three points in passing. Firstly, Green does have an overly-optimistic view of the workings of and probably of the potential for capitalism. In this he is clearly influenced by the English strand of the classical tradition in political economy and the Manchester School.<sup>17</sup> His debt shows through most clearly in the degree of importance which he places upon land reform and the impediments which landlords place in the path of free trade (Ricardo, 1963: esp. 190-6 *passim*). Following on from this point (and secondly), Ulam is correct to note that "It is characteristic that [Green] probes most deeply into the question of *property in land* and

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, Barker, 1915: 57-8 ; Chin, 1920: 160-1 ; Ulam, 1951: 66-7 ; Lewis, 1952: 70-9 ; Lewis, 1962a: 100-4 ; Milne, 1962: 157-9 ; Mukhopadhyay, 1967: 149-54 ; Mehta, 1974: 42-9 *passim* ; Hansen, 1977 ; Lawless, 1978 ; Hansen, 1978 ; Thakurdas, 1978: 202-3 ; Coates, 1981: 156 ; Vincent et al, 1984: 174-8 *passim* ; Wempe, 1986: 172, 264-9 ; Nicholson, 1987: 118 ; Bellamy, 1990b: 144-7.

<sup>15</sup> See Ulam, 1951: 66-7 ; Hansen, 1977 *passim* ; MacPherson, 1985: 113-5 *passim* ; Nicholson, 1987: 120-2 *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> See Hansen, 1977: 109-13 ; Greengarten, 1981: 100-9 *passim*, 124-7, 131-41 *passim* ; Hurka, 1993: 183-5.

<sup>17</sup> Harris and Morrow cite J S Mill's *The Principles of Political Economy* as the main influence here (Harris et al, 1986: 339n11) as does Nicholson, 1987: 118. In particular, they highlight Bks II and IV, ch. xi. (Probably, they mean Bk V, ch. xi as there is no Bk IV, ch. xi.)

touches but incidentally upon industrial problems of the age” (Ulam, 1951: 39, emphasis in original). Thirdly, Nicholson has emphasized Green’s self-identification with “Constructive Liberalism” which pushed for reforms on the basis of ‘traditional’ liberal principles in just the way that Green himself does in his *Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract* (Nicholson, 1990: 162-5).<sup>18</sup> Green’s conception of the economic world was dominated by older evils which were being eclipsed by new industrial problems. In part, this was reflected in his overly-optimistic vision of capitalism.

Later idealists, such as Arnold Toynbee, made significant movements away from Green’s practical views (Toynbee, 1969: esp. 1-26, 155-221). In particular, Toynbee was far more sceptical about the working of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” whose efficiency forms a fundamental presupposition of (non-Marxist) classical economics (Toynbee, 1969: 11-26). Nevertheless, Green’s ethical assessment of capitalism was significant because it provided a powerful basis of principles and ideals from which the later idealists such as Toynbee could produce radical critiques of capitalism which brought together many of the differing strands of criticism which had been building up in Britain during the nineteenth century (see Jay et al, 1986). This thought appears to underlie Kloppenberg’s judgement that Green “self-consciously and painstakingly drew connections between knowledge, responsibility, and reform, and [his] political writings represent an important, intermediate step in the convergence of socialism and liberalism towards social democracy and progressivism.” (Kloppenber, 1986: 147)<sup>19</sup> It remains valuable today as a source of principles with which to implement a radical critique of capitalism. In an unpublished manuscript, Green states explicitly that - in the area of health care at least - the functional area of legitimate state action should widen over time as the conception of the true end of the state comes into contact with a better understanding of the sources of human progress and misery.

(A g)reat obstacle to such free development is disease and as (the) condition of disease - specially in connection with (the) mode of work and housing - come to be better understood, (the) office of the state, under (the)

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<sup>18</sup> This is an important and understudied link between Green’s position and wider intellectual currents. However, it is not sufficiently relevant to be discussed at length here.

<sup>19</sup> Also see Sabine, 1973: 667-8 ; Mehta, 1974: 48-9 ; Reeve, 1986: 93-4, 184-5.

limitations aforesaid, seems almost indefinitely to extend. (MS10a, as quoted in Wempe, 1986: 202)

In the present context, the crucial point is that these changes are results of differences over questions of empirical fact. They are not indicative of any inconsistency within Green's philosophical system (Sabine, 1973: 664 ; Cacoullos, 1974: 19-20). Peter Nicholson hits the nail on the head when he writes

In the far from perfect societies that we know, there is a constant process, requiring much attention and effort, of deciding what are the minimum resources needed for the moral life, and checking whether or not everyone has access to them. This is the sphere of politics. (Nicholson, 1990: 196)

Nevertheless, Vincent Knapp argues that "Green's doctrine of the exorability of [private] property did run counter to accepted laissez-faire dogmas, but it was in no way socialistic" (Knapp, 1969: 63).<sup>20</sup> However, Knapp is oversimplifying hideously. Certainly, Green's theory is not materialistic and he baulks at extensive state intervention because of his fear that it will impede self-reliance unduly. However, he is clear also that the state should intervene in all of the areas where it can remove hindrances to the development of individuals. Once that position is held, it becomes - in important respects - a matter of empirical judgement whether or not Green is closer to being a socialist or a liberal.

If "socialism" is taken to include - *by definition* - an antagonism to all private property (as it is by Knapp, Coker and Milne), then Green is not obviously not and never could be a socialist. However, this is a strange conception of "socialism" In the fragment on political economy mentioned earlier (which was published after Knapp, Coker and Milne had made their claims), Green defines "*practical* socialism" as:

[the] doctrine (a) that wages should be regulated otherwise than by competition ([i.e.]: competition of labourers for employment and of masters to get work done most cheaply and quickly), and (b) that accumulation of

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For the same claim, see Coker, 1934: 426 and Milne, 1962: 156. Sankhdher argues that Green is not a Fabian socialist, although ultimately the exact structure of this claim remains unclear (Sankhdher, 1969)

capital should be limited. (Green, 1986j: 6, emphasis in original, additions by Harris et al)

There is no mention here of a definitional aversion to all forms of private property. Many socialists attack private property and market competition only when it becomes a tool of oppression. Frequently, this means that private property in the means of production is rejected while private property in other possessions is not (e.g. Marx et al, 1973: 59-60). Green's theory is open-ended on this matter for the reasons which have been explained already. The perfect society requires a system of solely private property in all things. The imperfect societies in which humans are condemned to live, frequently cannot really afford private property. The moral costs are just too great. Consequently, the state usually has some duty to intervene.

The important points are as follows. It is true that Green's attitude to capitalism - for all of his awareness of the evils which result in practice from freedom of contract and bequest - is 'over-friendly'. There is a lot of truth in Richter's assertion that:

Although his [Green's] mode of thought led him to apply the formulae to the more complex issues of state intervention in economic life [as he had done in the areas of "public health, education, and temperance"], he had no particular interest in, or knowledge of, the problems peculiar to capitalism. (Richter, 1964: 363)

Nevertheless, it remains the case that Green is emphatic that any judgement about the morally correct course of action (whether by the state or individuals) in the economic system should be always subject to revision in the light of empirical investigations of the inner-workings of capitalism in practice. If Green had become acquainted with those theories of economics which were more sceptical about the moral value of capitalism whilst still stressing the moral importance of self-realisation - such as many Marxist theories - there is no telling how much more sceptical and "socialistic" he would have become. He may even have come to agree with Marx that only with the overthrow of capitalism could humans attain the situation where

[i]n place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class

antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. (Marx et al, 1973: 61)

## *CONCLUSION.*

I began this internal critique of Green's philosophical system by noting Ernest Barker's claim that "If his [Green's] principles are true, then each age can progressively interpret their meaning to suit its own needs." (Barker, 1915: 58) The body of the discussion established that the system which these principles form is nowhere near as implausible as many commentators have alleged. In this short conclusion, a few general thoughts are offered regarding where the preceding discussion leaves us. I will sketch the most important problems remaining with Green's thought and indicate their real significance. Then, I will make a few very brief remarks about the reasons for returning to a study of his system and I end by passing judgment upon some of the allegations which were noted at the beginning of the introduction. I will not present a sketch of the discussion as that was given in the abstract.

Two notable problems appeared in chapter one. Firstly, Green's epistemology stresses the unifying power of consciousness. Immediately, this raises the question, what materials are being unified? Green claims that they are sensations. However, on his own terms, he cannot legitimately make such a 'guess beyond experience'. The second (alleged) 'problem' is his attachment to the idea that "categories of experience" must exist within the mind before they are determined by sensations (although they cannot be known prior to such determination). In his favour, it was noted that if one rejects the idea of categories, it becomes very unclear precisely how to explain the human capacity to unify disparate sensations.

In chapter two, it was established that Green presents simultaneously two mutually exclusive theories of the will. On the one hand, the "spiritual determinist" line portrays human agency as the non-voluntaristic reaction of human nature to circumstances (thus creating problems for conceptualising human freedom and moral responsibility). On the other hand, the "neo-Aristotelian" line portrays it as necessarily entailing the making of choices from options which the agent's determinate character makes available to him. However, adopting the neo-Aristotelian approach commits Green to explaining how an essentially non-determined choice is logically possible, which he cannot do and indeed which at other times he argues vigorously against. He does not appear to recognise the tensions between these two lines and merely adopts the neo-Aristotelian line (for the most part) without comment in his (logically subsequent) writings on ethics and politics.

Chapter three established that there are two slight ambiguities within Green's conception of "the true good". Firstly, is it a state of character, or abiding satisfaction, and, secondly, is it merely a state of character, or the expression of that character in practice? In both cases, the points at stake were shown to be of minor practical importance.

Green's belief in the inevitability of progress was shown to be philosophically unsupported in chapter four, although it was established also that this does not invalidate his whole system as some commentators have alleged. The philosophical vagueness of his moral prescriptions was highlighted, but it was pointed out that he accepts this as an inevitable consequence of the particular area under consideration. Legitimate moral judgements can be made only in actual situations and never in the abstract.

Essentially the same response was given in chapter five to the charge that his theory of civil disobedience and revolution offers little guidance to the social reformer. Furthermore, it was established that Green's adoption of the fostering of self-realisation as his most basic ethical principle necessarily excludes many groups - such as animals, the severely mentally disabled and the severely and irredeemably insane - from the sphere of rights. These represent the most objectionable implications of his ethical position. For similar reasons, his theory of the state was shown to leave the door slightly ajar to potential authoritarianism. However, it was argued that this is an under-recognised difficulty also facing many other liberal and non-liberal philosophies. Lastly in chapter five, it was indicated that subscribing to the spiritual determinist theory of the will radically transforms Green's conception of politics.

In the final chapter, it was demonstrated that, although he does have an overly-optimistic attitude towards capitalism, Green's theory of economics does offer a valuable way to conceptualize the economic realm in normative terms. Most significantly, it is an approach which can be used to launch a radical critique and reform of existing economic relationships.

In spite of all these problems, there is much to be gained from a return to the serious study of Green's writings. Stuart Hampshire was clearly incorrect when he stated that "T H Green ... left no legacy of convincing argument or insight." (Hampshire, 1964: 184) The claim that Green addressed issues which "no longer command our attention" (Vincent et al, 1984: 183, quoting Collini, 1979: 253) is similarly misguided, as is the claim that his thought is irrelevant in the modern age because "much of liberalism has been shaped by aspirations and beliefs which have ceased to command our allegiance" (Bellamy, 1990a: 12).



In reality, Green's thought articulates a plausible vision of the interrelationship between human life as it is and as it could be. His relational organicist theory of society and his theory of rights are particularly important here, highlighting as they do the fact that *morally enriching* societies are more than mere collections of individuals trying to get through their daily lives without hurting each other. People need *communities* - groups with which to identify themselves in a deep sense - groups which they recognise themselves as *belonging* to. This remains a potent idea for many people in modern societies reflecting as it does the perennial human need for personal authenticity. Where this feeling of authenticity is absent, Green's analysis highlights the importance of the common good. Where people question the basis of their duties, Green's analysis highlights the importance of reciprocity in normative judgements. In this way, his thought helps to clarify what sort of beings we truly are.

Central to all of this is the concept of "distinctively human action". This is more than mere 'self-reliance' - a term (*but not a concept*) which has largely fallen into disrepute as an alleged piece of Victorian humbug. "Distinctively human action" encapsulates a vision of human life which still commands a lot of respect and many proponents, as was argued in the introduction to this thesis. Whether this form of life is conceived of in terms of a 'kingdom of ends' or a true communist society, clearly it is an ideal which is needed in the present age.

Certainly, the social and political environment has changed markedly since Green's time (Bellamy, 1990a: 12) Yet, far from invalidating Green's philosophical system, this serves to heighten its critical edge. For this reason, I concur with A J M Milne when he writes,

I do not suggest that he [Green] has said the last word on any topic. But I am suggesting that, if we are interested in developing a social philosophy for ourselves, it is by carrying further the work he has already begun that we shall make most progress. (Milne, 1962: 164)

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