

Justifications, Aldous Huxley

JUSTIFICATIONS

Well beaten by the Don, Masetto lies groaning in the darkness. To him comes Zerlina, repentantly tender. Kneeling beside him, 'Vedrai, carino,' she promises in a melody of the most ravishing elegance,

Vedrai, carino,

se sei buonino,

che bel rimedio

ti voglio dar.

È naturale,

non da disgusto,

e lo speciale

non lo sa far.

È un certo balsamo

che porto adosso.

Dare te'l posso,

se il vuoi provar.

And after half a dozen repetitions of *tocca mi qua, qua* and twenty bars of deliciously melodious twiddles, the orchestra ends up, *pianissimo*, but how definitely and satisfyingly! with the chord of C major, and the newly married lovers retire to enjoy their bliss.

È naturale, non da disgusto . . . Da Ponte evidently spoke for himself. This is his description of the manner in which the libretto of *Don Giovanni* was composed: 'I sat down at my writing-table and stayed there for twelve hours on end, with a little bottle of Tokay on my right hand, an inkstand in the middle, and a box of Seville tobacco on the left. A beautiful young girl of sixteen was living in my house with her mother, who looked after the household. (I should have wished to love her only as a daughter—but . . .)

She came into my room whenever I rang the bell, which in truth was fairly often, and particularly when my inspiration seemed to begin to cool. She brought me now a biscuit, now a cup of coffee, or again nothing but her own lovely face, always gay, always smiling, and made precisely to inspire poetic fancy and brilliant ideas.' It is a scene from a settecento Earthly Paradise—before the Fall of 1789.

The mind is its own place, and there have always been plenty of men and women whose home was Da Ponte's Eden. The rest of us are not so fortunate. In the world we inhabit, that certo balsamo which Zerlina and her young friends carry about with them is listed as one of the dangerous drugs. Its administration is not permitted, except under a medical certificate. In the moral pharmacopœias of all civilized countries it is official in only one form—matrimony. Made up in this way the *bel rimedio* is 'a remedy against sin.' Made up in any other way, it is sin.

Those who, like Da Ponte, are untroubled in this matter by qualms of conscience, merely ignore the prescriptions of the pharmacopœia. If they want the balm, they take it, in whatever form and from any bootlegger who is willing to supply it. The behaviour of these drug traffickers is so straightforward, their thoughts and feelings so transparently comprehensible, that it is unnecessary to pay any further attention to them. It is just a matter of *tocca mi qua, qua*, and there's an end of it.

But there is another class of men and women, the scrupulous, for whom this simple solution is morally impossible. They want the *certo balsamo* in forms that are not official; they feel impelled to give an unduly violent expression to their lust for power, or social position or money. Current morality condemns these wishes. It would be possible for them, by breaking the law discreetly, to get all they want without discomfort; but they are not prepared even to think of themselves as law-breakers.

They reject an enjoyment which is illicit, refuse to be the furtive evaders of a rule of which their own furtiveness tacitly confirms the validity. Declining the dishonourable rôle of bootleggers, they claim to be on the right side of the law, they insist on the essential orthodoxy of their actions. Other people condemn them; they retort by inventing philosophies to prove that they are right.

Many people carry scrupulousness a stage further. There is no question of their committing an act that has been pronounced illegal or immoral. They take their *certo balsamo* as prescribed; they indulge their avarice and their lust for power only in such ways as convention regards as respectable.

But all sensualities and egotisms are essentially irrational; and, along with their animal cravings, men feel a hunger and thirst for explanation, for reasonableness, for righteousness. Even a licit indulgence in the irrational can be distressing to the scrupulous. Law and the local system of morality may pronounce such indulgences to be harmless; but they feel it necessary to invent more elaborate justifications of their own.

A complete history of justifications would be, to a great extent, identical with a history of thought. Most political, ethical and even cosmological systems have been essentially justificatory. They are the work either of men in rebellion against the existing system, or of the scrupulous, or of the defenders of orthodoxy.

To be effective, justifications have to be made in terms of the philosophy which condemns the acts or thoughts that it is desired to justify. The scrupulous are concerned to prove that the irrational they so much dread is in truth rational or even divine; the rebels, that they are really, if the matter be examined with an unprejudiced eye, more Catholic than the Pope and more royalist than the King. Conversely, the supporters of an established system will try to show that they have on their side, not only tradition and divine revelation, but also logic and considerations of utility.

An elaborate system of justification often does more than it was intended to do. In justifying one set of thoughts, impulses and actions, the author finds (or his readers find) that he is logically committed to believing in the rightness of other doings and other feelings, which he had not originally thought of justifying. Thus, a system intended originally to justify simple fornication may turn out to be logically capable of justifying murder. Those who want to commit murder will seize on the excuse offered by the system, and even those who don't will find themselves impelled by the force of logic into this course.

Philosophies are devices for making it possible to do, coolly, continuously and with a good conscience, things which otherwise one could do only in the heat of passion, spasmodically and under the threat of subsequent remorse. Unsophisticated by thought, anger soon dies down; but supply a man with a

philosophy proving that he is right to be angry, and he will go on performing in cold blood the acts of malice which otherwise he could have performed only when the fit was upon him. Philosophies, which their authors devised in order to justify some relatively harmless craving, have been subsequently made the excuse for monstrous iniquities. For example, the seventeenth-century Puritans were anxious to prove that there was no incompatibility between trade and wealth on the one hand and Christian virtues on the other.

The philosophy which they concocted out of the Old Testament hid much more than it was meant to do. Not only did it prove that rich nonconformist merchants were thoroughly virtuous; it also proved that workmen, peasants and, in general, all the poor were thoroughly vicious, therefore that they deserved all the miseries they suffered, and a good many more as well. The surprising thing about the industrial revolution is not that capitalists and entrepreneurs should have behaved badly; it is that they should have been so serenely convinced of their perfect goodness. For this the philosophy of the Puritans, reinforced at a later period by that of the political economists, was responsible.

In the pages which follow, I shall illustrate these general remarks on justification by a few concrete examples chosen almost at random from the illimitable literature of the subject. The choice has been determined more by the hazards of my recent reading than by anything else. My only guiding principle has been that the examples should be curious, striking and even, in certain cases, extravagant. It is by studying madness that psychologists have learnt to understand the workings of the healthy mind.

Similarly, it is in the most absurd and fantastic instances that the mechanism of the essentially normal and commonplace process of justification is seen most clearly at work. If my principal examples are concerned with the *certo balsamo*, it is because the theological and philosophical devices which have been invented for the justification of sexual activity, whether licit or illicit, have generally been more fantastic and far-fetched than those by which men have sought to moralize their swindles and murders, their cruelties and rapacities, the manifestations of their vanity, pride and personal ambition.

My first examples belong to the class of justifications by religious experience. Such justifications tend to be especially extravagant where the prevailing theological system is one which postulates the reality of guidance by a personal God. For men and women brought up in such a system, it is easy to justify any action by identifying the desire to perform it with the direct prompting of the deity. In certain of these theological systems, God is regarded as completely transcendent and of a nature utterly incommensurable with man's. This being so, He becomes capable of anything; we must not be surprised to find God guiding us to perform acts which would be judged, by merely human standards, as crimes and lunacies.

Kierkegaard wrote a whole book on this subject, choosing as his theme the story of Abraham and Isaac. The command to sacrifice Isaac was, he insists, genuinely divine. God's ways are so emphatically not ours that there is no cause for astonishment in His ordering His servant to commit a crime. Such 'temporary suspensions of the moral order' are proofs of God's omnipotence and transcendence. Kierkegaard's choice of an example is significant. His God is a justifier of cruelty, not of sensuality. The idea that there could be a temporary suspension of the laws of sexual morality is evidently repugnant to him. That God should prompt to murder is, to his mind, more easily conceivable than that He should prompt to an act of sexual indulgence. Kierkegaard's attitude is widely shared at the present day.

There are plenty of pious churchmen who consider that God approves of men killing their fellows in war, but who would be horrified at the suggestion that fornication and adultery can ever be anything but detestable in His eyes. Those who invoke guidance to justify behaviour commonly regarded as immoral may be grouped in two main classes. In the first class we place those whom Dante would have consigned to the lower circles of hell—the violent and malicious; in the

second we place the merely incontinent whose chief preoccupation is with the *certo balsamo* and who find themselves divinely guided towards sexual promiscuity. The two classes cannot in practice be sharply distinguished. Those who are guided towards promiscuity may also be guided, as we shall see, towards pride, fraud and violence.

In choosing the sacrifice of Isaac as his example, Kierkegaard displayed a certain timidity. For after all, this particular suspension of the moral order was not complete; the angel and that eleventh-hour ram saved Isaac from the knife. If he had really had the courage of his convictions, Kierkegaard would have chosen a case like that of Thomas Schucker, the Swiss Anabaptist who, in 1527, cut off his brother's head. 'He called together a numerous assembly and declared to the company that he perceived himself under the influence of the spirit of God. Upon which he commanded his brother to kneel down, and took a sword. His father and mother and some others demanded what he was about to do. Be satisfied, replied he, I will do nothing but what is revealed to me by our heavenly father. The company waited impatiently for the event, when they saw him draw his sword and cut off his brother's head.

He was punished by the magistrates as his crime deserved; but he showed no signs of repentance, and declared upon the scaffold that he had executed the orders of God.' The most remarkable feature of this story is not that Schucker should have felt himself guided to cut off his brother's head; it is that the brother should have consented to let his head be cut off and that the numerous assembly should have looked on without a protest. Under the influence of his religion and justified by its theology, Schucker was merely taking too seriously a childish fantasy of murder. But the victim and the spectators had no such fantasies; if they behaved in the way they did, it was because it seemed to them inherently probable that Schucker's revelation was valid.

Those who believe that God gives guidance are forced to admit that what feels like a divine command is in fact very often a prompting from some all too human source. Accordingly they advise anyone who receives what seems a guidance to confide it to others and ask their opinion upon it. A guidance that can stand up to the criticism of a group may be relied upon as being of divine origin. Thomas Schucker's guidance came through this test with flying colours. We must either believe that an act of criminal imbecility can be divinely inspired, or that the test is far from infallible.

The case of Thomas Schucker is not unique; it is merely a particularly extravagant specimen of a very common type of religious aberration. A group under supposedly divine guidance is not quite so frequently the victim of absurd fantasies and disreputable desires as is an individual; but the difference is merely one of degree, not of kind. There is no dogma so queer, no behaviour so eccentric or even outrageous, but a group of people can be found to think it divinely inspired.

Here, for example, is the case, chosen from among a thousand others, of the Reverend Henry James Prince and his disciples. Prince was born in 1811 in the West Country; was articled to a doctor; then, at twenty-six, decided to take Orders. A journal which he kept at this period was published in 1859 for the edification of his followers. It is a typical specimen of evangelical literature. One opens it at random upon such entries as this, for September 20th, 1835: 'In the evening I found strength to expound John iii. with boldness to a party of Mr. M. C.'s and then to pray with them. Afterwards spoke seriously to F. H., endeavouring to convince him that he needed a new heart.

At night was assaulted with a severe trial, when I found it exceedingly difficult to resist the idolatrous feeling of self-complacency on account of those doings.' A month later he 'dined at Dr. H.'s and spent a rational evening. He lent me Bickersteth's Guide to Prophecy, and gave me a book by Mr. Cunningham on the Millennium.' On May 17th, 1837, 'Jesus vouchsafed after dinner to visit my soul with His love; it was quite delicious to my poor barren soul; my heart melted over the dying Lamb, and the sight of His bleeding love was such that for

a season my soul seemed quite swallowed up in the enjoyment of His dying love; I felt that I had done the bloody deed, and loathed myself; all that I could do was to sigh and weep and look and love.'

In the following spring Prince entered St. David's College, at Lampeter, to prepare for ordination. He was an exemplary student—too exemplary, indeed, for the taste of most of his fellows, who resented the zeal for self-improvement displayed by Prince and a small band of earnest companions. One of these companions, Arthur Augustus Rees, published in 1846 a pamphlet, *The Rise and Progress of the Heresy of the Rev. H. J. Prince*, which contains an account of the young man's career at Lampeter. It was, so it seems, the reading of a book called *The Life and Writings of Gerhard Tersteegen* (Tersteegen was a German pietist of the eighteenth century) that launched young Prince upon the course that was to lead him to the Agapemone.

Tersteegen convinced him of the importance of living always under guidance; so much so, that 'at length he was determined to say or do nothing without a previous intimation of the divine mind. For example, if Mr. P. were about to take a walk and there were every appearance of rain, he would not carry out his umbrella without first asking the will of God.' In due course, he came to believe that he could always discover what the will of God really was: an infallible intuition revealed it in every conjunction of life. Judged by ordinary standards, God's advice might often seem rather injudicious; but since it was God's it was right. Prince would always act upon it, even in defiance of his judgment.

The will of God had a good deal to do with Prince's two marriages. The first, contracted while still a student at Lampeter, was with a Miss Martha Freeman. This lady was old enough to be her husband's mother, but possessed by way of compensation an independent income. A friend of Prince's family, she had contributed towards the expenses of the young man's education. In return he converted her from Catholicism to Anglicanism, and had acted almost from boyhood as her spiritual adviser.

Their relationship was simultaneously that of husband and wife, mother and son, spiritual father and daughter. Alas! the couple had little time to enjoy this complicated bliss; a few months only after Prince's ordination to the curacy of Charlinch, in Somerset, the poor old lady died. Whereupon, with a haste which his friends could only regard as indecent, but which he himself explained as being due to the will of God, he married Miss Julia Starky, sister of the rector of the parish.

Mr. Starky was Prince's senior by some years; but from the first his relations to his new curate were those of disciple to master. Prince, it is evident, was one of those born snake-charmers and lion-tamers who go through life effortlessly dominating their fellow-men and women. Such magnetism is a dangerous gift, which it is almost impossible not to abuse or be abused by. Prince duly succumbed to the temptations into which his own powers led him; he fascinated others into believing him a superior being; feasted his self-esteem on their adulation until it swelled to monstrous proportions; then invoked the Almighty to justify his pretensions and to moralize his sexual eccentricities.

In *The Charlinch Revival*, which he published in 1842 (in order, 'under the Divine blessing, to stir up the hearts of the Lord's people'), Prince reveals himself to us at the moment when he first discovered the full extent of his powers. Charlinch was an agricultural parish, peopled by stolid Saxon rustics, in whom the temperature of religious zeal was little, if at all, above absolute zero. The revival began in October 1841. Mr. Prince, who had for some time been 'shut up' and deprived of his ordinary power to preach a stirring sermon, found himself suddenly inspired. There was a memorable Sunday afternoon when 'the church was unusually full, but the minister felt as if he had nothing to say; he was still shut up. In the pulpit, however, the spirit of prayer came on him and he prayed for twenty minutes with considerable unction.

He then told his congregation that he would read the text to them, Ephesians v. 14, and that if the Lord were pleased to speak by him He would; and if not, that he must hold his tongue, as he could not speak from himself. He had scarcely spoken these words, when the Spirit came upon him with power: certainly he did not preach, but the Holy Ghost preached by him. The word was not vehement, and far too solemn to be violent; but it was searching like fire, heavy as a hammer, and sharper than a two-edged sword.' The congregation was overwhelmed. 'Several men and women sobbed aloud; the head of most dropped on their breast, the hearts of all were awestruck. (One boy excepted.)' Galvanized, the parish started out of its secular repose. The revival had begun.

Prince's next great victory was won in the Sunday School, where he 'had laboured fourteen months without witnessing so much as one child become even serious.' On December 10th, 1841, about fifty children were assembled in the Charlinch school. 'In a few minutes, the Holy Ghost came upon the minister with the most tremendous power. . . . About twenty of the children were pierced to the heart by it, and appeared to be in great distress; but the bigger boys continued unmoved, and some of them even seemed disposed to laugh. In a short time, however, the word reached them too, and they were smitten to the heart with a most dreadful conviction of their sin and danger. . . .

In about ten minutes the spectacle presented by the schoolroom was truly awful; out of fifty children present there were not so many as ten that could stand upright. Boys and girls, great and small together, were either leaning against the wall quite overcome by their feelings of distress, or else bowed down with their faces hidden in their hands, and sobbing in the severest agony.' The triumph was complete. 'Who can possibly resist the conviction that the hand of the Lord hath done this?' Certainly not the Reverend Henry James Prince.

The revivalists were so excessively zealous that, in May 1842, the Bishop of Bath and Wells revoked Mr. Prince's licence to preach. Charlinch was becoming too hot to hold its curate. He migrated; but a similar fate overtook him in two other parishes. Finally, 'after some months waiting on God for guidance in faith and prayer,' he left the Established Church and started to preach on his own—at Brighton, where he founded an Adullam Chapel; at Weymouth, where Mr. Starky, who had also had a difference with the Bishop, was ministering to a considerable flock of Starkyites; at Spaxton, a village near Charlinch and the site of the future Agapemone.

The heroes of tragedy are torn between love and honour—in other words, between egoism and egotism, between craving and pride, between the urge to indulge oneself and the urge to dominate others. In Prince there was no conflict. The two motives presented themselves not simultaneously but in succession. He began with the pursuit of honour and, having achieved it, went on to love. His first systematic efforts at justification were made on behalf of his ambition and vanity; it was not till later that he used his theology and his religious experiences for moralizing his sensualities.

It was in the spring of 1843 that he wrote to his friend Rees to inform him that the Holy Ghost had taken up its residence within himself; and by the end of the same year he had evolved a complete system of theology, based firmly upon the foundation of unquestionable experience: the experience of his identity with the spirit of God. This theology subsequently underwent certain modifications under the pressure of his desires. As the claims of sensuality became more insistent, new theological dogmas had to be invented to justify them. In 1843 pride and vanity were in the ascendant, and the refinements of the doctrine elaborated twelve years later in *The Little Book Open*—refinements intended to sanctify Prince's cravings for the *certo balsamo*—had not yet been invented. The fully developed doctrine will be described in due course.

Meanwhile, we must see how Brother Prince, as he now called himself, was guided to deal with the important problem of finance. His methods were simplicity itself. Disciples would come down to breakfast to find a note couched in some such words as these: 'The Lord hath need of £50 to be used for a special purpose

unto His glory. The spirit would have this known unto you. Amen.' So great was the faith of those to whom such communications were addressed that they would sit down at once to draw the cheque. So far so good. But it soon became clear that what the Lord really needed was capital—a good solid lump of it. And in due course the capital appeared. Here is the story of the first twenty thousand.

After being deprived of his curacy at Charlinch, Prince spent some months as curate of Stoke, in Suffolk. Here he made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Nottidge, and their four unmarried daughters. These ladies, who were no longer in their first youth, became Prince's disciples and, when he left Stoke (under orders, this time, from the Bishop of Ely), followed him to Brighton and subsequently into the west of England. In 1844, Mr. Nottidge died, leaving each of his daughters about six thousand pounds. Shortly afterwards God intimated to Brother Prince that it was His will that three of the Miss Nottidges, Agnes, Harriet and Clara, should marry three of Prince's followers, George Thomas, Lewis Price and William Cobbe, respectively.

The ladies hesitated for a moment, then decided that the will of God must be obeyed, and the three marriages were celebrated simultaneously, at Swansea, on July 9th, 1845. In the following year Agnes parted from her husband—not, however, before parting with her six thousand pounds, which had been made over on her marriage to Mr. Thomas, who in his turn had made them over (for such was the will of God) to Brother Prince. The Cobbes and Prices did likewise. These gifts, to which were added a thousand pounds from Starky, and no less than ten thousand from a Mr. Malin and four Miss Malins, formed the nucleus of a considerable fortune which was afterwards invested in the purchase and maintenance of the Agapemone.

Meanwhile, the fourth Miss Nottidge (aged forty-four and called Louisa) had returned to her mother in Suffolk. Not for long, however. In December 1845 she came at Prince's invitation—or rather, at the invitation of the Holy Ghost—to Weymouth; thence, after some months, migrated to Charlinch. She was living quietly there in a cottage, with Mrs. Prince, when her brother, the Rev. Edmund Nottidge, and her brother-in-law, Frederick Ripley, drove up in a chaise and abducted her.

Louisa was taken first of all to her mother's house in London; but on 'declaring that Prince was the Almighty in human form, she was, on the 12th of November 1846, upon the usual medical certificate, placed in a private lunatic asylum in Middlesex, where she continued until the 14th of May 1848, when she was discharged by the order of the Lunacy Commissioner.' From the asylum, Louisa hurried straight back to Spaxton and, within three days of her release, had transferred the whole of her property to Brother Prince.

These six thousand pounds were dearly bought; for their transfer was to lead, twelve years later, to a lawsuit which was a source of much pain to the Spaxton community. Louisa died in 1858, and in 1860 her brother, Ralph Nottidge, filed a suit against Prince in the Court of Chancery, for the return of £5728, 7s. 7d. 'In 1848,' runs the summary of the case in the Law Journal Reports, 'a person pretending that he had a divine mission obtained a gift of stock from a lady by imposing a belief on her mind that he sustained a supernatural character.

The lady's relations were aware of the gift at the time it was made, and she resided with and was supported by the donee from 1848 up to her death in 1858. Upon a bill by the administrator of the lady, the Court ordered the donee to refund the stock, with interest thereon from the time of her death.' And now the point which made the decision worthy of record: 'Whether the donee really believed that he was the supernatural being he represented himself to be, was immaterial.'

At the time of Louisa's release from her asylum, Nottidge v. Prince was still in the distant future. The present was a season of triumph. Crowds came to listen to the preaching of the Two Witnesses, as Prince and Starky called themselves; the number of believers increased; money came pouring in. Brother Prince decided

to found a community to be called The Agapemone, or Abode of Love. Two hundred acres of land were bought at Spaxton, a handsome mansion erected, gardens laid out. The hothouses were filled with exotic plants, the stables with magnificent horses, the cellars with the choicest Madeira and claret.

There was a chapel, complete with stained-glass windows and Gothic trimmings, but a chapel that was at the same time the principal drawing-room. It was furnished with arm-chairs, a comfortable sofa and a billiard-table. To the sinless and perfected inhabitants of the Agapemone all activities were holy; a game of snooker was a sacrament like any other.

Into the Agapemone Brother Prince settled down with some sixty disciples—gentlefolk and servants. His state, in these early years, was lordly. He bought the Queen-Dowager's equipage with four white horses and drove through the countryside as though he were an emperor. In London, when he visited the Great Exhibition of 1851, his open carriage was preceded by outriders, bareheaded, as befitted men in the presence of the Lord. Letters were sent through the post addressed to 'Our Lord God, Spaxton, Somerset,' and were duly delivered. Brother Prince, or 'Beloved' as now he preferred to be called by his followers, had climbed to the pinnacle of Honour. It was time for Love.

At the beginning of the 'fifties a young lady called Miss Paterson had joined the flock. Hepworth Dixon, who visited the Agapemone some years later, has left a description of a certain fascinating 'Sister Zoe,' whom he identified (though she refused to give her mundane name) with the ci-devant Paterson. In a pale, romantic way, Sister Zoe was extremely beautiful. 'Guercino might have painted such a girl for one of his rapt and mounting angels.' Beloved was smitten.

But a man whose soul was the residence of the Holy Ghost—who had indeed, by this time, actually become the Holy Ghost—could hardly be content with a bootlegged balsamo. His affair with Zoe had to be justified. He might, of course, have written her a little note to the effect that the Lord had need of her for a special purpose unto His glory.

But he must have felt that this would not be enough. Beloved lived in a society which honoured the Low Church mill-owner, growing rich on sweated labour, but was horrified by sexual impropriety. A man might grind the faces of the poor; but so long as he refrained from caressing his neighbours' wives and daughters, he was regarded as virtuous. In money matters Beloved had found plain guidance quite sufficient; but when it came to sensuality, more elaborate justifications were needed.

These were set out in The Little Book Open, published in 1856. After a brief introduction, the theme of the Little Book is announced in capital letters for all to understand. The subject of Brother Prince's testimony is 'THE REDEMPTION OF THE BODY.' The Gospel 'addressed itself to the soul of man. It left out the flesh.' Beloved had appeared to remedy this defect.

The cosmology and theology, in terms of which Mr. Prince rationalized his desire to have an affair with Miss Paterson, may be briefly summed up as follows. God enters periodically into covenants with man, through chosen individuals. The first covenant was at the Creation, and Adam was God's witness. The second was at the Flood, and the witness was Noah. The third was entered into after the building of the Tower of Babel; Abraham was the witness on this occasion. The fourth, with Jesus as witness, at the Redemption upon the cross.

And now, at Spaxton, 'God, in Jesus Christ, has again entered into covenant with man, at the resurrection of mankind, and I am His witness. This one man, myself, has Jesus Christ selected and appointed His witness to His counsel and purpose, to conclude the day of grace and to introduce the day of judgment, to close the dispensation of the spirit and to enter into covenant with the FLESH.' How sorely the poor flesh needed this covenant!

It had become God's enemy at the Fall—with an enmity that 'neither the holiness

of the law could eradicate, nor the Grace of God amend. . . . Even the dying love of a crucified Redeemer never once took away the enmity of the flesh of the believer against God; but rather brought it the more to light.' The Gospel had saved only souls, not flesh. Beloved had come to save the flesh. He had already 'revealed the mind of the Lord concerning the dispensation of the spirit—the Gospel—by living it as a spiritual body.' (I neglected to remark before that Henry James Prince had for some time ceased to exist, and that what people took for the ex-curate of Charlinch was a visible manifestation of the Spirit of God.) Having lived the Gospel in a spiritual body, 'he was now to bring to light, or reveal, the mind of the Lord concerning flesh, by living it in flesh. Accordingly there was given unto him a reed like unto a rod; and the angel said, arise and measure the temple of God. He did so.'

The circumstances in which he did so were singular in the extreme. He announced to the people in the Agapemone that 'it was now God's purpose to extend His love from heaven to earth, from spirit to flesh, from soul to body. . . . Agreeably thereto He (the Holy Ghost) took flesh—a woman. He did this through Brother Prince, as flesh; yet not Brother Prince as natural flesh. . . . Thus the Holy Ghost took flesh in the person of those whom He had called as flesh. Thus He did measure the temple of God; and the reed like unto a rod wherewith He did measure it was the flesh He had taken.' Having thus explained the meaning of his symbol, Brother Prince launches into an account of his taking of the flesh. 'He took the flesh absolutely in His sovereign will. . . . He had no respect for any other will than His own. He was not influenced by what others would think or say.

He did not even consult or in any way make known His intention to the flesh He took, until He actually did take it in the presence of others; and then He took it with power and authority, as flesh that belonged to God and was at His absolute disposal; so that in the taking of it He left it no choice of its own. He took it in free grace. It was flesh He took; flesh that knew not God, that wanted not God, that was ignorant of Him; and, like all other flesh in its nature, contrary to the spirit. He took it as it was—ignorant, indifferent, independent, at enmity against God, and having nothing to commend it to Him. He took it in love. Not because it loved Him, for it did not; but because it pleased Him to set His love upon it. And though He took it in absolute power and authority, without consulting its pleasure, or even giving it a choice, yet He took it in love; for having taken it, the manner of His life with it was such as flesh could not but know and appreciate as love.

'Moreover, although it was natural flesh He took, and therefore flesh indifferent to and at enmity with God, He never for a moment made it sensible of this, but in everything and at all times, regarded it and treated it according to His own mind, WHICH WAS TO SEE NO EVIL IN IT; in fact, He loved it as His own flesh.

'According to the purpose He had declared, He kept it with Him continually, by day and by night. He took it openly with Him wherever He went, not being ashamed of it; and made its life happy and agreeable by affording it the enjoyment of every simple and innocent gratification.'

Through this muddy verbiage, we divine the oddest realities. From Hepworth Dixon, who had sources of information not available at the present time, we learn that the covenant of God (in the person of Mr. Prince) with the flesh (in the person of Miss Paterson) was sealed in a public act of worship, upon the sofa in that consecrated billiard-room at Spaxton. Beloved had announced in advance that the great event was to take place on a given day and at a predetermined hour. What he did not reveal in advance was the name of the particular piece of flesh which was to be reconciled. One can reconstruct the scene: the little congregation sitting in apprehensive expectation round the billiard-table in the chapel; the solemn entry of Beloved; a few prayers offered by the two Anointed Ones, otherwise Messrs. Thomas and Starky; the singing in unison of one of those hymns composed by Beloved in his own honour; then, falling upon the vibrant religious silence, the words of Beloved, announcing the name of the chosen flesh. One can reconstruct the scene, I repeat; but when it

comes to Miss Paterson's thoughts and feelings, imagination boggles. 'He took it in love.

Not because it loved Him, for it did not; but because it pleased Him to set His love upon it.' To set His love upon it, 'with power and authority, and in the presence of others.' Whether Beloved would have behaved in this extraordinary way if he had been a mere bootlegger of sexual pleasures may be doubted. But in justifying his desires for Miss Paterson, he had created a theology which made the performance in the billiard-room a sacred duty. As plain Mr. Prince, he would never have thought of executing more than a straightforward seduction. As the divine witness of a new dispensation, he was bound to do something spectacular and uncommon. He did it, with a vengeance.

The public initiation in the billiard-room was not the last of Miss Paterson's ordeals. New trials were in store for her; in due course, she became pregnant. Now, according to the Princean theology there was to be no birth under the new dispensation, just as there was to be no death. Beloved and his followers had become immortal and at the same time divinely sterile. In spite of which, it soon became apparent that Sister Zoe was in a family way.

For a moment, Beloved was at a loss to understand. Then, from on high, the explanation was vouchsafed. Doomed to annihilation, Satan was making a last despairing effort. Miss Paterson's baby was the result. How it was received when it arrived, this child of flesh by the Holy Ghost through the instrumentality of the Devil, is not recorded; nor how it was brought up. Sitting in the billiard-saloon-chapel, on the very sofa where the covenant had been sealed, Hepworth Dixon saw a solitary little creature playing in the garden outside. It is our only glimpse of this most unwelcome of children.

The case of Nottidge v. Prince was heard in 1860—at a moment, that is to say, when the mid-nineteenth-century reaction towards rationalism was setting in. It is a significant fact that, between 1859, the year of the Irish revival, and 1873, the year of Moody's first visit to Edinburgh, we have no record of any considerable outburst of religious excitement in Great Britain. If the fortunes of the Agapemone began henceforward to decline, that was not solely due to the strictures of Vice-Chancellor Stuart; it was also and perhaps mainly due to the fact that people with money were losing their interest in Covenants and Anointed Ones. If they wanted justifications for unorthodox behaviour they looked for them elsewhere than in theology. The chosen band lived on at Spaxton, steadily shrinking as the immortals who composed it died off, steadily growing poorer as the value of money declined and the original capital was eroded away. Beloved lingered on and on, outliving all his original followers, outliving even the age of rationalism.

For in the later 'eighties the tide began to turn. Intellect went out of fashion. Nietzsche was regarded as a great thinker, Bergson had written his first books, and money began to pour once more into the coffers of the Agapemone. A branch was opened at Clapton, where an Ark of the Covenant was built at a cost of nearly twenty thousand pounds. After Beloved's death in 1899, the pastor of the Ark, the Rev. T. H. Smyth Pigott, became Beloved II, and, with a punctuality that bespeaks the unchangeableness of basic human motives, proceeded to repeat all that his predecessor had done. The urge to domination had first to be satisfied and theologically justified; then the craving for the certo balsamo. Smyth Pigott did both—becoming God in 1902 and producing, in 1905 and 1908, two illegitimate children called respectively Glory and Power. In due course, he also died. The Agapemone still exists.

Both in doctrine and in practice, Brother Prince was wildly unorthodox. Coventry Patmore's loves were nuptial and his religion Catholic. But, for scrupulous souls, even nuptial love is an odd, inexplicable kind of activity, requiring to be rationalized and sanctified. Patmore found what he required in the ancient doctrine which sees in the consummation of human passion a type and symbol of the union of God with souls and with the Church.

The doctrine, I repeat, is old and unorthodox. Patmore's eccentricity consisted in insisting upon its truth with excessive emphasis, in taking too literally an analogy that most writers have preferred to regard as a kind of poetical metaphor. In a prose work, *Sponsa Dei*, this literalness of interpretation was pushed, indeed, so far that a clerical friend advised the book's suppression. But the published poems and, above all, the little volume of aphorisms, *The Rod, the Root and the Flower*, make it sufficiently clear what the lost book must have contained.

Patmore suffuses the whole universe, natural as well as supernatural, with sex. 'No writer, sacred or profane, ever uses the words "he" or "him" of the soul. It is always "she" or "her"; so universal is the intuitive knowledge that the soul, with regard to God who is her life, is feminine.' (A whole book could be written on the way in which thought has been affected by the accidents of grammar. The word *anima* means the principle of animal life, as opposed to *animus*, which stands for the principle of spiritual life. For some odd reason Christian theologians labelled their particular conception of the soul with the first and less appropriate of these two words.)

Grammatically, the Latin Christian soul was feminine; what more natural than to suppose that it was in some sort physiologically female? For Greeks the soul might be either feminine or neuter. Either *psyche* or, the word habitually used by St. Paul, *pneuma*. Brought up on *anima*, modern theologians have preferred to this non-committal neuter the personifiable feminine substantive. It is owing to a grammatical prejudice that earnest ladies call themselves psychic rather than pneumatic, and that Coventry Patmore was able to justify his connubial tastes in terms of Catholic theology.)

The soul, then, is a woman; and 'woman, according to the *Salve Regina*, is our Life, our Sweetness and our Hope. God is so only in so far as He is "made flesh" i.e. Woman. The Flesh of God is the Head of man, says St. Augustine. Thus the Last is indeed the First. "The lifting of her eyelash is my Lord." ' Again, 'Woman is the visible glory of God . . . The Word made Flesh is the Word made Woman.' 'Heaven becomes very intelligible and attractive when it is discovered to be-Woman.'

Feminine, the soul knows her God in a consummated marriage. For 'all knowledge worthy of the name is nuptial knowledge.' Even death is a form of married love-charged as it is with 'a hope intense of kisses close beyond conceit of sense.' Mysticism is essentially connubial. 'Lovers put out the candle and draw the curtains when they wish to see the god and the goddess; and, in the higher Communion, the night of thought is the light of perception.' God is discovered by touch and 'the Beatific vision is not seen by the eyes, but is a substance which is sucked as through a nipple.' 'God Himself becomes a concrete object and an intelligible joy when contemplated as the eternal felicity of a lover with the beloved, the Ante-type and very original of the Love which inspires the poet and the thrush.' Conversely, the felicity of the lover with the beloved and the inenarrable experiences of touch are foretastes of the Beatific Vision. 'There are some who even in this life can say, "Under the Tree where my Mother was debauched, Thou has redeemed me." '

The most distinctive feature of Patmore's doctrine is that which attributes to God a kind of *nostalgie de la boue* and therefore justifies the more god-like among human beings (such, of course, as Patmore himself) in seeking out and cultivating the extremes of sensual irrationality.

'Enough,' he makes the woman, Psyche, cry,

'Enough, enough, ambrosial plumed Boy!

My bosom is aweary of thy breath.

Thou kissest joy to death.

Have pity of my clay-conceived birth

And maiden's simple mood,

Which longs for ether and infinitude,

As thou, being God, crav'st littleness and earth.'

The mystery of the Incarnation provides Patmore with an analogy to marital bliss. Addressing himself to the Virgin, he writes as follows:

Life's cradle and death's tomb!

To lie within whose womb,

There, with divine self-will infatuate,

Love-captive to the thing He did create,

Thy God did not abhor,

No more

Than Man, in Youth's high spousal tide,

Abhors at last to touch

The strange lips of his long-procrastinating Bride;

Nay, not the least imagined part as much!

Ora pro me!

He returns again to the same theme in other poems. In 'The Dream,' for example, we read:

The pride of personality,

Seeking its highest, aspires to die,

And in unspeakably profound

Humiliation, Love is crown'd!

And from his exaltation still

Into his ocean of good-will

He curiously casts the lead

To find strange depths of lowlihead.

It is, however, in *The Rod, the Root and the Flower* that the theme is treated most fully. 'Spirit craves conjunction with and eternal captivity to that which is not spirit; and the higher the spirit, the greater the craving. God desires depths of humiliation and contrast of which man has no idea; so that the stony callousness and ignorance which we bemoan in ourselves may not impossibly be an additional cause in Him of desire for us. . . . Human love requires to be grounded in the sensitive nature, in order to give counterpoise and reality to its spiritual heights.'

'What if the love of God demands even a deeper foundation in the unspiritual and in the junction and reconciliation of "the Highest with the Lowest"? There are obscure longings in the natural man; glimpses of felicities of an "Unknown Eros," which it is perhaps worse than vain to endeavour to indulge; a desire for fruits of the Tree of Knowledge which seem to promise that we "shall be as Gods," if we partake of them. Maybe, to such of us as become Gods by participation, these fruits will be found fruits of the Tree of Life, as are other fruits, which, in the eating, have only "a savour of death unto death," until they have been refused, in obedience to a temporary prohibition, and only tasted in God's season and with the divine appetite of Grace. Meantime, it is permitted to such as have qualified themselves for such contemplation, to meditate upon the dim glimpse we can catch of such things, as they exist in God, who, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, knows matter, as he knows all his creation, with love and desire.'

What lies behind the veils of this mysterious utterance? We can only obscurely guess.

Odd examples of justifications by guidance and theology could be multiplied indefinitely. There are the refined and aristocratic Muckers in East Prussia, with their ritual of exhibitionism and long-drawn sexual confessions; there are the Perfectionist Bundlers, a sect of American ladies who were guided to burst into clergymen's bedrooms at night; there were the Revivalists, with their spiritual wives—so closely allied in practice, if not in theory, to the Mormons with their all too solid and tangible harems. Or again, one could mention the reverend gentleman who boasted that 'he could carry a virgin in each hand without the least stir of unholy passion,' or the ladies described by Mrs. Whitall Smith in her *Personal Experiences of Fanaticism*, who cultivated the art of giving themselves physical 'thrills,' under the impression that they were receiving the Baptism of the Spirit.

One could mention the early Spiritualists. Here is a statement made by one of them in 1867: 'During a year and a half I became very impressible; in fact a medium; the invisible guides impressed me with many ideas of a religious nature. Among other things I became strongly impressed with the incompatibility between myself and my wife; and, on the other hand, with the growing affinity between Mrs. Swain and myself. . . . Nine-tenths of the mediums I ever knew were in this unsettled state, either divorced or living with an affinity. The majority of spiritualists teach Swedenborg's doctrine of one affinity, appointed by Providence, for all eternity; although they do not blame people for consorting when there is an attraction; else, how is the affinity to be found? Another class travelled from place to place, finding a great many affinities everywhere.'

It would be possible, I repeat, to multiply such instances indefinitely. Possible, but not particularly profitable. The principles of religious justification have been sufficiently illustrated by the few characteristic examples I have given. What follows is an example of philosophical justification—chosen deliberately for its revealing extravagance. The work in question is Laurence Oliphant's *Sympneumata*, published, near the end of its author's life, in 1885. Oliphant's was an oddly variegated career. He was born at Cape Town and brought up in Ceylon. As a young man he visited Nepal and Russia, served as Lord Elgin's secretary at Washington and again, after a visit to Circassia during the Crimean War, in China. In 1861, when he was thirty-two, he was appointed first secretary in Japan; but his diplomatic career was cut short by an attack on the Legation, in which he almost lost his life. He returned to Europe, served as *Times* correspondent in Poland and Holstein, and in the intervals dined out in the best society and wrote successful novels. In 1865 he was elected to Parliament. Three years later he resigned his seat and emigrated to America, to become a member of 'the Brotherhood of the New Life,' a community founded by Thomas Harris on the shores of Lake Erie.

Harris was an American Brother Prince. He possessed all Beloved's magnetic power

with all Beloved's lust for domination and all his preoccupation with the certo balsamo. Like Beloved, he was consistently guided to relieve his followers of all their available cash and, again like Beloved, he had invented a theology proving that he was divine and justifying him in going to bed with any woman he had a mind to. The story of Oliphant's strange servitude to the Prophet of Brocton has been told in the biography written by his cousin, Margaret Oliphant, the novelist. I need not repeat it here. Suffice it to say that Oliphant, together with his mother, Lady Oliphant, and his wife, Alice Le Strange, remained under Harris's spell for thirteen years. Lady Oliphant, indeed, escaped only by death. Laurence and Alice broke away, after a long and scandalous conflict, in 1881. But it was only from the man Harris that they had parted, not from his ideas. Freed from his clutches, they proceeded at once to the Holy Land, where they set up a community of their own (suppressed in due course at the instance of the London Vigilance Association) and wrote in collaboration the work which I shall now describe.

The sub-title of *Sympneumata* is 'Evolutionary Forces now Active in Man.' The words announce unequivocally that justification, in this case, will not be in terms of theology or religious experience, but of hard-boiled secular thought. Oliphant was addressing himself to a public that ranked *The Origin of Species* above the Apocalypse. He wanted to behave very much as Beloved and Mr. Harris had behaved; but he felt it necessary to justify this behaviour in terms of the philosophy most highly esteemed by his contemporaries. The appeal is no longer to religion but to science. True, the science is peculiar; but that does not matter. The significant fact is that Oliphant should have found it natural to use even the ridiculous parody of science for the justification of his sexual desires.

He begins his book with an account of human evolution. Originally, it appears, man was a being composed of matter in the fluid state. At a certain moment in his history there occurred 'a catastrophe, of which the tradition survives in so many forms under the name of "the fall."' "What was the nature of this catastrophe? 'A precipitation of the period of reproduction'—whatever that may have been. The result was that the original, liquid man came to be encrusted with grosser matter.

A divine energy, the energy of love, radiates out from the core of every human individual. 'If the action of this force could be maintained in a constant projection from the centre to the circumference, it would necessarily remain absolutely pure and holy.' Unfortunately, currents flow in from the lower creation. 'Rushing like a torrent towards the centre, it (the current of lower life) meets the divine outward streaming current, and produces a shock throughout the nervous system, which is utterly foreign to the orderly and divine expression of emotion.'

But a change is at hand. During the nineteenth century Evolution has been producing new types of human beings, gifted with 'an acute sensibility for perceiving the quality of the dynamic impulsion, that plays through the nerve fluids.' This dynamic impulsion, as we have seen, is divine; and the new, nineteenth-century human beings discover 'to their astonishment that, while their emotions acquire a character of spiritualization, a delicacy and a subtle fervour, by which they can only judge them to be discarding more and more the earthliness of things earthly, they nevertheless connect themselves with the physical organism by an increasing sensational consciousness. . . .

That disconnection between high and pathetic feeling and bodily sensation, which has prevailed in the human mind, ceases to be possible, and man begins to have sensational acquaintance with his interior organism, as being the seat of his loftiest and purest emotions.' That modern man should be subject to such apocalyptic sensations is not surprising; for evolution is changing his whole structure. 'Evolution's work on the superincumbent atoms, changing their constitution and bringing into the spaces tenanted by the corruptible flesh atoms developed from the inner nature of the body's form, is bringing to these same surfaces the power to endure the acute and intense sensations generated by

divine heat currents.'

'The immanence of God in man, so much asserted and so little felt, becomes now a physical fact; as physical as marital affection, as the ardours of heroism, as the tremors of alarm—but more absolutely and unmistakably physical; and acting upon the surface with an intensity superior to that of any other known sensation, in the degree in which it corresponds with the more profound depth from which it has taken its rise.' The new man is 'a vessel charged with holy force.'

This force cannot act freely 'unless human beings participated in the active and emotional being who is to them the sex-complement, whom we term the Sympneuma.' (We recognize Harris's Counterparts and our old friends, the Affinities and Spiritual Wives.) Thanks to Evolution (blessed deus ex machina!), 'the quality of the intense vitality which God presses down upon us at this hour, burns with some fuller ardour as His sex-completeness than the world could receive before.' For this reason 'the value of history, of philosophy becomes nil as a basis for the deduction of theories as to what the man of this age may feel, can know, or should do.'

There follows next a section of the book addressed primarily to the ladies. Evolution has changed woman as profoundly as it has changed man. The 'suppression of her active powers' has been succeeded by her 'surprised awakening at the embrace that steals upon her sense—as her Sympneuma's form constructs itself around and over her—presenting her at last, in those organic realms of her sub-surfaces, where she reflected before, as on a vapoury void, the confused images of dreams and disfigured truths, with a fixed organism, constructed to take up at once the waves of her deep vibrations, and through which her contact is reopened into the whole connected world of potent manhood.' But potent manhood, it obscurely appears, is not to perform its ordinary, vulgar functions.

There are to be no babies, only sympneumatous sensations. Therefore, O woman, in this age of sharp transition, there is a marvellous lesson for you to learn that has not yet been dreamt of. . . . Revive, for the airs of heaven breathe on you now to that effect, in the folded petals of your deepest nature. Body forth at last, bring forth the joy of nature's depths—man makes a new demand on you, and asks not for himself but for all people.

He craves not now the commerce of the dissevered sexes, nor the production of fresh peopling in their forms, for he lives now in the expanding chambers of his own sub-surfaces, where the Sympneuma's presence pervades and satisfies sensation, and bids the old activities of exterior forms make long pause, awaiting high conditions.' That which has happened in the course of evolution is that which ought to have happened. Not only is it possible for modern woman to enjoy it, it is also her duty 'to demand of God the draughts of the supreme elixir which waits to shower into human nature.'

Not unnaturally, Oliphant regards the intellect as a danger. Its roots are too 'slightly grounded in the pregnant bowels of the moral nature' to be capable of appreciating the significance of the sympneumatous revelation. Therefore get rid of the intellect; 'let loose the powers of actual nature in you—man-woman, woman-man—that God may be incarnate! . . . Hurl right and left and far all claims of systems of thought and life that served of old their time, if they now cling upon your skirts and burden your free ascent. . . . Lo! on the little field of your frail nature is room for mightiest peace, for the full immensity of reconciliation to God's demands and man's—room for the meeting in you of heaven and earth.' Science, in the shape of Oliphant's fluid atoms and evolving sub-surfaces, brings us to the same harbour as Patmore's Catholicism and the divine guidance of the ex-evangelical parson, Brother Prince.

No, not quite to the same harbour; for through the book's dark phrases one half perceives, half guesses that Oliphant liked his certo balsamo in some oddly refined and alembicated form. 'When he (man) has once experienced by repetition

the unerring tendency of delight, intense, sensational, to visit him spontaneously, the painfully acquired enjoyments that he knew before, of body, intellect or spirit, fade and grow valueless.' This is as near as our author ever comes to lifting the veil. One closes the book, not altogether certain of his meaning, but at any rate divining enough to know that 'liberal shepherds give a grosser name' to the sympneumatous experience.

Oliphant's obscurity is lightened by the probing beam directed upon him by Mrs. Whitall Smith. A female disciple of the Oliphants told her 'that Mrs. Oliphant was doing a wonderful missionary work among the Arabs in Palestine by imparting to them what the Oliphants called "Sympneumata," which they claimed was the coming of the spiritual counterpart to the individual. She said the way Mrs. Oliphant accomplished this was by getting into bed with these Arabs, no matter how degraded and dirty they were, and the contact of her body brought about, as she supposed, the coming of the counterpart. It was a great trial for her to do this, and she felt that she was performing a most holy mission. As she was one of the most refined and cultivated of English ladies, it is evident that nothing but a strong sense of duty could have induced her to such a course.' We have here a good example of the way in which a philosophy invented to justify one set of actions leads logically to the justification—nay, to the imposition as positive duties—of other and much stranger acts, of which the justifier originally never dreamt.

Mrs. Smith's next contact with Oliphant was through a young lady who had been engaged to one of the Sympneumatist's disciples. Introduced to Oliphant, she was deeply impressed by his appearance and manner. He gave her religious instruction, in the course of which he 'took more and more liberties with her, and at last induced her to share his bed, with the idea that the personal touch would bring about the sympneumata for which she so longed. . . . Finally, when he thought the time was ripe, he began to urge her to spread the blessing by herself enticing young men into the same relations with her as his own.'

The girl was disquieted and, after taking advice, broke off her engagement. The young man remained faithful to his master. Mrs. Smith reveals the reason for this loyalty. 'Mr. Oliphant's idea was that the sexual passion was the only real spiritual life, and that in order to be spiritually alive you must continually keep that passion excited. The consequence was that he could never write anything except when his passions were aroused. His influence over the young Scotchman was so great that he had induced him to believe entirely in this theory, and he too was never happy for a single moment unless his own passions were excited.'

A favourite instrument of philosophical justification is the conception of nature. Nature, one finds, is invoked in almost every controversy about matters of conduct—not by one party only, but by both. Rebels will justify rebellion, and the orthodox their orthodoxy, in the same way—by an appeal to nature. Rebellion is in accordance with nature; therefore permissible and right. Conversely, orthodoxy is right, not only because it is divinely revealed, but also because it is in accordance with nature. Thus, we learn from St. Thomas that fornication is a sin, because, among other reasons, it is unnatural.

For it is 'natural in the human species for the male to be able to know his own offspring for certain, because he has the education of that offspring; but the certainty would be destroyed if there were promiscuous intercourse.' Therefore fornication is unnatural. If nature is that which is (and there is no other legitimate definition), then such arguments as St. Thomas's are perfectly meaningless. Some men wish to know and educate their offspring; some do not. Some indulge in fornication, some refrain. Both types of behaviour occur and we have no right to say that one is natural and the other unnatural.

Writers who speak of the unnaturalness of asceticism are making the same mistake as their opponents. Asceticism, like licentiousness, is an observable fact; in other words, it is natural. For scholastically minded people, nature is not that which is; the nature of a thing is practically identical with its essence, and

its essence is a metaphysical entity, not susceptible of observation. The scholastic method may be represented schematically as follows: you take a collection of beings, you set your fancy and your ingenuity to work and, out of your inner consciousness, you evolve (with the aid of such literature as you regard as authoritative) a conception of their essential character. This you call their 'nature.' When any member of the group in question behaves in a way which does not conform to your a priori conception of his essence, you say that the behaviour is unnatural.

The scholastics sought to rationalize revelation by proving that revelation was in accord with nature; but what they called 'nature' was entirely home-made. All they did was to justify one metaphysical conception in terms of another metaphysical conception. Owing to the vagueness and ambiguity of language, this proceeding was and still is remarkably successful. By 'nature' the scholastically minded mean 'metaphysical essence'; but the word also connotes 'that which is.' They trade on the fact that most readers attach to 'nature' its second meaning and can therefore be induced to accept as a record of observation or a sober piece of inference any a priori absurdity which may be passed off under that reassuring name.

The thirst for rationality and righteousness is almost as insistent as the thirst for sexual pleasure and for the gratification of pride. There will always be cravings to justify and always a desire for justification. Justificatory theories are often nonsensical; but this would not greatly matter, if they justified only those desires and actions immediately responsible for their invention. The real trouble about most of these theories is that they justify and indeed logically impose upon those who accept them modes of thought and behaviour to which mere irrational cravings would never have prompted them. The cases described in the preceding pages are mainly farcical in their extravagance.

It is difficult for people whose main preoccupation is sensual enjoyment to do harm on a very large scale. But where the cravings to be justified are cravings for power, glory and the like, the case is different. The tree is known by its fruits. Judged by this standard, sympneumatism, for example, is a joke; nationalism, which is a theory intrinsically almost as preposterous as poor Oliphant's, is a tragedy and a menace.

All justificatory theories are determined by the prevailing systems of philosophy and ethics. These, in their turn, are in part determined and themselves in part determine the economic and social circumstances of the age. Changes of circumstance result in changed philosophies; changed philosophies provide men with the motive power for changing circumstances. The reformer must attack simultaneously on all the fronts, from the metaphysical to the economic; if he does not, he cannot hope to achieve more than a partial success.

How can justificatory theories be made less extravagant? How can they be prevented from justifying all kinds of monstrous actions, which the original inventor of the theory never felt the impulse to perform? A complete answer to these questions would have to contain, among other things, a full-scale programme of social and economic reform and text-books—more comprehensive than any yet written—of social and individual psychology. All I can do here is to offer a few reflections on the purely intellectual aspects of the question.

All justifications in terms of science and rationalistic philosophy are ultimately utilitarian in appeal. They aim at showing that the particular action which it is desired to justify is useful, either to the individual or to the community. The science and the rationalistic argument are intended to demonstrate this utility. The cure for extravagance in these cases is knowledge. True, it is not an infallible cure. A man may know that the action he desires to perform is bad for him; but if his desire is strong enough, he will either ignore his knowledge or else manipulate it in such a way as to make it seem to justify his behaviour.

The Nazi race-scientists furnish a case in point. Most of these men are highly educated; in other words, they have been given every opportunity for discovering what to the great majority of biologists outside Germany is obvious: that most of the stuff talked about Nordics and Aryans is simply rubbish. They have been given this opportunity, but they have not taken it—they have not wished to take it. Knowledge, I repeat, is not an infallible cure for extravagance in justificatory theories; but at least it sets certain obstacles in the way of extravagance. People who know the facts can never be quite so free to indulge in fantasy as those who don't.

Justification in religious terms seems to tend towards extravagance in proportion as God is thought of as personal. 'Temporary suspensions of morality' are essentially personal acts; and those who are 'guided' to suspend morality do so under the belief that they are receiving orders from a superior and inscrutable Divine Person. The historical records show that they persist in doing this even where theology lays it down that the Divine Person is absolutely good. Similarly, men persist in attributing to a personal God a special interest in their own nation, even where theology has defined Him as the Father of all. That this should be so is not surprising: it is difficult, if one thinks of God as a person, not to think of Him as similar to the only persons with whom one has direct acquaintance—oneself and one's fellows.

We must ask ourselves whether belief in the personality of God is, first, logically necessary; and, second, pragmatically valuable. It is impossible in this place to set forth the arguments for and against the personality of God. The matter has been summed up by Professor Whitehead in his *Religion in the Making*, and I cannot do better than quote his words:

'There is a large concurrence in the negative doctrine that this religious experience does not include any direct intuition of a definite person, or individual. . . .

'The evidence for the assertion of general, though not universal, concurrence in the doctrine of no direct vision of a personal God, can only be found by a consideration of the religious thought of the civilized world. . . .

'Throughout India and China religious thought, so far as it has been interpreted in precise form, disclaims the intuition of any ultimate personality substantial to the universe. This is true of Confucian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy and Hindoo philosophy. There may be personal embodiments, but the substratum is impersonal.

'Christian theology has also, in the main, adopted the position that there is no direct intuition of such an ultimate personal substratum for the world. It maintains the doctrine of the existence of a personal God as a truth, but holds that our belief in it is based upon inference.'

In order to calculate the pragmatic value of belief in a personal God, it would be necessary to collect and carefully weigh all the available historical and psychological evidence.

From the little I know about the subject, I should guess that the results of such an investigation would be more or less as follows. Belief in a personal God tends to heighten the believer's energy and to strengthen his will. So far so good. But energy can be used to achieve undesirable as well as desirable ends; and a strong will misdirected is the source of endless trouble. A personal God, as we have already seen, tends, in spite of all theological precautions, to be thought of as similar to a human person.

Thus, it comes about that the believer feels himself justified in giving rein to such all too human tendencies as pride, anger, jealousy and hatred, by the reflection that, in doing so, he is behaving like a God who is a person. The frequency with which men have identified the prompting of their own passions with the personal guidance of God who is Himself (the sacred books affirm it)

subject to passion, is really appalling. Belief in a personal God has released a vast amount of energy directed towards good ends; but it has probably released an almost equal amount of energy directed towards ends which were evil. This consideration, taken in conjunction with the philosophical improbability of the dogma, should make us extremely chary of accepting belief in a personal deity.

The end