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A study of the influence of custom on the moral judgment

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Appendix

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APPENDIX

THE QUESTIONS

COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCE: SERIES I., DECEMBER, 1905.¹

I. [I.] May a poor man without money, out of work, and unable at the time to find employment, take without the knowledge of the owner a loaf of bread from a baker's shop in order to save from starvation the young children of a neighbor? Their mother, a widow, is sick in bed and unable for the time to earn money for their support, and the man himself is unable to get the bread in any other way.

II. [II.] A young man just graduated from college was hesitating between law and business. His tastes inclined him very strongly to the former; indeed the very idea of the latter alternative filled him with antipathy. But the young man's father had built up a large manufacturing business by his own unaided efforts and wished this, his only son, to carry it on after he himself should be compelled to give it up. Before the matter was decided the father fell sick. On his death-bed he obtained from his son a promise to abandon all thought of the law and devote his life to carrying on the business. The young man did as he promised, but although successful in the work, the longer he continued in it the more distasteful it grew, until he began to feel it positively unendurable. Under these circumstances would he be justified, after giving it a fair trial, say for a year or two, to abandon the business career and turn to the law?

III. [III.] Is it right to tell children that there is a Santa Claus?

IV. During a famine which extended over a considerable part of Europe in the early part of the Eighteenth Century a

¹ The order of the questions in this Appendix is that of the printed paper placed in the hands of the students. The numbers in brackets attached to the five principal questions are those used throughout the study in referring to those questions.

wealthy nobleman was the only man in a certain district who had food for sale. A peasant who owned a little property going to the nobleman to purchase a supply of food for the remainder of the winter, the latter refused to part with any except at the price of the man's house, land, agricultural implements, and an agreement to serve the nobleman one-fifth of his time for the rest of his life without compensation. The peasant had no other course open to him than to accept. Has the nobleman done anything wrong in making this bargain?

V. A young author is offered an opportunity to sell his title to the authorship of a book he has just written to a wealthy man who wishes to pass as an author himself. The large sum of money offered the real author will enable him to repay to the ward of his father the equally large sum which the latter (now dead) in his capacity as executor lost to her estate through an unfortunate investment. Would it be right for him to make the sale?

VI. [IV.] A university student hires a room for a year. After four weeks, when there is no longer any probability of its being taken by any one else, he leaves and goes to another room. Is this right under any of the following conditions? (1) He is lonely and wishes to go to a house several blocks away where some friends are lodging. (2) He is working his way through the university and an opportunity offers itself to get room-rent in return for an exceptionally small amount of service. He could earn enough to put himself through in other ways but the change will save him two hours a day, which will enable him to do very much better university work. Does the answer to (1) or (2) differ if we suppose that: (a) his present room belongs to a man sufficiently well situated so that he and his family will not actually suffer at the loss of the rent; or (b) that it belongs to a widow with a young child and that she has no other means of support than the income from her rooms, representing let us say a net income of \$400 a year, which in case (1) will be reduced by \$60.00 and in (2) by \$30.00 if the lodger leaves.

VII. A century or more ago a shipload of people were wrecked upon a desert island in the Pacific far from all trade routes. There they and their descendants lived for many years, unvisited

by other men, until finally a ship appeared and carried them away to Europe. At that time there was in their prison a man, who had just been sentenced to be hung for murder. Is the community, before breaking up, its members to scatter to different parts of the world, bound to hang this murderer or are they at liberty to set him free? It being assumed that while the murder was in every respect unjustifiable, it was committed under circumstances which give no grounds for the fear that the murderer, if freed, would ever commit another similar crime.

VIII. In the Sixteenth Century a city was being besieged by a powerful king, with every prospect that it would soon be captured. The king finally offered to withdraw his army entirely provided they would deliver to him a certain one of their citizens, who was a personal enemy of his, and whose life he was determined to take. Otherwise he would order an assault. This they knew would almost certainly be successful, and would in any event involve a great loss of life. They also knew they could trust the king to keep his promise in case they complied with his demand. What was it their duty to do?

IX. A man returning home from his day's work discovered that a careless switchman had left a switch open which would mean death or injury to the several hundred people on the swiftly moving train that was only a few hundred yards away. At the same moment he saw his only child playing upon the track in front of the approaching engine. He had time only to turn the switch and save the train or else to save the child. Which was it his duty to do?

X. [V.] Is it right for a physician, by administering an overdose of morphine or otherwise, to hasten by several weeks the death of a patient, hopelessly sick with cancer and suffering terrible torture all the time? Three cases may be distinguished: (1) It is done without the knowledge of the patient and his family; (2) it is done with the knowledge and consent of the family, but without the knowledge of the patient; (3) it is done at the request of the patient and with the consent of the family. Does the answer differ for the different cases?

COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCE: SERIES II., FEBRUARY, 1906

I. In the recent Russian upheaval an influential labor leader was instrumental in the killing of a number of officials, including in one case an entire family, composed of a wife and several young children. His arrest and punishment would have led to a general strike and a great revolt of the laboring classes, with consequences which no one could foresee. So the authorities refrained from arresting him, recognizing, when they did so, that if they let him go now they might never have a chance to get him again. Did they do right?

II. According to the daily papers, a Chinese merchant living in the State of Washington recently crossed the boundary line into Canada in order to transact some business. Because of the red tape connected with the admission of the Chinese into this country the United States government officials found it was absolutely impossible for them to give him a permit to reënter the United States. Knowing that he was a *bona fide* resident of this country, would the official in authority have been justified in shutting his eyes and allowing the merchant to slip through without the legally required formalities?

III. At the burning of Moscow in 1812, two guards at the royal palace were in the confusion forgotten and the order to relieve them was not given. They therefore remained at their posts and were buried under the burning timbers. Was it their duty to remain, when they knew there was nothing left to guard? If not strictly their duty, would you think less of them for making their escape?

IV. In the lives of the early Christian saints occurs the story of a certain monk who stole leather from the shop of a rich merchant in order to make shoes for poor children. Assuming that the leather could have been obtained in no other way, was this right?

V. An astronomer of great ability was offered an opportunity to make large sums of money in a commercial enterprise. This would necessitate the giving up of his professional career and entail a mode of life containing too much routine to be of any cultural value worth considering. While his researches did not

promise to be of any "practical" value to the world, they were of a very high order of excellence and had helped towards the solution of more than one mystery. Would he do wrong to abandon them? If not, would you think less of him for doing so?

VI. The story is told of a mathematician passionately devoted to his wife who, immediately after her death and for a number of months following, devoted every moment at his disposal to the most intricate and profound mathematical problems in order that he might rid himself as soon as possible of her memory and the sorrow which it caused him. Was this morally justifiable? If not wrong are we to think worse of him for so doing?

VII. A has been swindled in an indirect way and within the limits of the law, by a real estate dealer. A's present holdings of real estate in the town where this agent lives are in the hands of the only other agent in the place, an honest but inefficient and unenterprising man. The dishonest agent, who does not know that A is aware of his share in the swindle, comes to him and says that he has a customer for the property. Shall A tell him what he thinks of him and refuse to have any dealings with him, or shall he say nothing about the past and accept the offer.

1. If he has no immediate need of the money, although desirous of getting rid of the property;
2. If he needs the money very much in order to liquidate certain obligations which are now pressing and which he sees no other way of meeting?

VIII. A young lawyer who, as a worker in municipal politics, has performed for his city services of exceptional value, discovers, on looking back upon the five or six years just passed, that his political life has much blunted his moral sensibilities and lowered his standards of conduct. He has just been offered a place on the Executive Committee of his party and the nomination to an office which, if accepted, will bind him to four years more of political life. Believing, as he does, that this will inevitably lead to a still further lowering of his standards, what is it his duty to do? Should he get out of politics altogether in order to save himself from further degradation, or should he continue his political work for the sake of the welfare of the city, which those who would replace him would, as he knows, disregard?

IX. Many of the Russian officers captured at Port Arthur refused to accept the parole offered them by the Japanese because it was not offered to their soldiers. Ought we to condemn morally those who did accept it?

X. A young man came to New York from the country without money and without friends. He was soon befriended by a prosperous business man who took him into his employment and into his home, and, in the end, made him his partner. The new partner took advantage of his position to cheat his benefactor out of all his money, deprived him of his share in the business, and turned him out of both shop and home, penniless. More than that, he openly boasted of it to certain persons, evidently considering it not merely a smart trick, but also a good joke. Suppose the benefactor, knowing not merely what had been done to him, but also the brazen effrontery of the man in boasting of his misdeeds, and having no prospect before him of obtaining restitution from the courts, had found himself able to secure the aid of powerful influences that by diverting custom and withdrawing loans could have ruined the business of the younger man, would he have been morally justified in so doing? This story of ingratitude, I may add, is true in every detail.

XI. Some years ago in a railroad wreck a lady was imprisoned in the debris in such a way that escape was impossible. Her husband, who might have extricated himself with an effort, deliberately chose to remain and die with her, in order that he might give her the support and comfort of his presence in her last moments. She herself, we must suppose, was not aware of the possibility of his escape, otherwise his aim would of course have been defeated. What is to be said of the moral character of his choice in each of the following cases?

- (1) If he was a clerk with the expectations of the average of his class and had no family ties apart from his wife?
- (2) Position as in (1), but he had a mother living with him in his home, who was very much devoted to him, but not dependent upon him for support.
- (3) Position again as in (1). He had a distant relative, a lady who was an invalid and absolutely dependent upon him for support.

- (4) If he had been a clergyman doing a great deal of good.
- (5) If he had been a Morse, conscious that he was on the eve of the solution of the problem of the electric telegraph.
- (6) If he had been an artist of very exceptional talents.

THE SHORT COURSE IN AGRICULTURE: JANUARY, 1907

I. [I.] In a Russian city last year a poor man who could get no work took from a baker's shop without the knowledge of the owner several loaves of bread in order to save from starvation the young children of a sick widow who was his neighbor. He was unable to get food in any other way. Did he do wrong?

II. [III.] Is it right to tell children that there is a Santa Claus?

III. About a century ago a shipload of people were wrecked upon a desert island in the Pacific. There they and their descendants lived for many years until finally a ship appeared and carried them away to Europe. At that time there was among them a man who had just been sentenced to be hung for murder. Was it their duty to hang this man, or would it have been all right to set him free? It being understood that although the murder was entirely unjustified it was committed under peculiar circumstances which made it certain that the murderer, if freed, would never commit such a crime again.

IV. A settlement was once besieged by a large body of Indians. The chief promised to withdraw permanently if they would deliver to him one of their number who, he thought (incorrectly, however,) had done him a great wrong. Otherwise, he threatened to take the town by storm. They all knew that the chief could be absolutely depended upon to keep his promise to withdraw. They also knew that in case of an attack the Indians were almost certain to succeed; they knew that there must be a great loss of life anyway. On the other hand, they also knew that to give up their fellow-citizen meant for him torture and death. What was it their duty to do?

V. [IV.] A university student hired a room, agreeing to keep it for a year. After four weeks, when there was no longer any chance of renting it to anyone else, he left and went to an-

other house because there he got a room rent free for taking care of the furnace. The student was working his way through the university and needed to save every dollar he could. The house he left belonged to a poor widow with a young child whose principal means of support was renting rooms. Was it right for him to leave? Suppose the owner of the house he left, instead of being poor, had been comfortably situated so that the room rent would not have been greatly missed, would it have been right for him to leave?

VI. At the burning of Moscow in 1812 two soldiers who were guarding the royal palace were in the confusion forgotten and the order to relieve them was not given. They therefore remained at their post and were burned to death. Was it their duty to remain when they knew there was nothing left to guard? If not strictly their duty, would you think less of them for making their escape?

VII. [II.] A man who had devoted his life to building up a very successful grain elevator business had an only son whom he wished to continue the business after his death. The young man himself was very anxious to go into stock raising, but at the earnest request of his father he promised to give up his life to the business. Soon afterwards the father died. The young man stuck to his promise at first, but although successful in the business, he hated it more and more. So after about two years he sold out and went into stock raising. Was this right? He had no reason to suppose that his father would have released him from his promise if living.

VIII. [V.] Is it right for a physician, by giving an overdose of morphine, to hasten by several weeks the death of a patient hopelessly sick with cancer and suffering terrible torture all the time, when he knows the patient is in every respect prepared to die and will be glad to die?

IX. A young man came to New York from the country without money and without friends. He soon was befriended by a prosperous business man who took him into his employment and into his home, and, in the end, made him his partner. The new partner took advantage of his position to cheat his benefactor out of all his money, deprived him of his share in the business, and turned him out of shop and home, penniless. More than

that, he openly boasted of it to certain persons, evidently considering it not merely a smart trick, but also a good joke. Suppose the benefactor to have known how shameless this man was. Would he have been morally justified in ruining the business of the younger man, if he had a chance? This story of ingratitude, I may add, is true in every detail.

X. According to the daily papers, a Chinese merchant living in the State of Washington recently crossed the boundary line into Canada in order to transact some business. Because of the red tape connected with the admission of the Chinese into this country the United States government officials found it was absolutely impossible for them to give him a permit to re-enter the United States. Knowing that he was a genuine resident of this country, would the officials have been justified in shutting their eyes and allowing the merchant to slip through without the legally required formalities?

THE EUDÆMONISTIC REASONS FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF GENERAL RULES:

1. The effects of one's example upon others, the reasons for which the agent permits himself to break the rule being either not known or not understood by others.

2. The danger of starting a habit of breaking the rule. The infraction might be innocent in itself, but, as a result, a reason not quite so good is liable to serve as an excuse for breaking the rule a second time, and so on.

3. The agent will lose the confidence of others. They will believe they can not depend upon him.

4. The act will tend to cause others to lose their confidence in their fellowmen as such.

5. If everybody acted in that way, the institution of property, confidence in the word of others, *et cetera*, would be undermined; the life of society would thus become impossible.

6. If you once admit a single exception to a general rule, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to determine where to draw the line.