

I have pointed out in an earlier chapter how the disintegration of philosophical systems, the contradictory conclusions which were drawn from apparently identical premises, led to an abandonment of the central philosophical problems, to a distaste for metaphysics: further, how a new line of research and study took its place under the name of the Theory of Knowledge or Epistemology—a genuine outcome of the critical spirit as it lived in Kant's philosophy. We have now to note a still more important consequence of this disintegration of systems, of this collapse of metaphysics. This was the gradual revival of ethical studies in the narrower and more practical sense of the word. As in antiquity the larger and more comprehensive metaphysical systems of Plato and Aristotle were followed by the ethical speculations of the Stoics and Epicureans where the problem of the Good, of the *summum bonum*, was pushed into the foreground, so it has again happened in recent times that when the foundations of knowledge became shaken, the principles of action attracted once more the attention of foremost thinkers. With this difference however: that whereas during the decline of classical culture the problem seemed to be how, amidst the disturbance of external political and social events, the secluded thinker could preserve his moral dignity and philosophic calm, in modern times the teachers of philosophy have more and more realised that, amidst the collapse of creeds and systems it must be their task to provide a firm foundation, not so much for private morality as for the reconstruction of society and the enlightenment of the masses.

45.  
Revival of  
ethical  
studies.