L'ame diffuse| The ethics of Jules Romains

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L'ÂME DIFFUSE: THE ETHICS OF JULES ROMAINS

by

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B.A. Montana State University, 1957

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Chairman, Board of Examiners

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PREFACE

One thing has become obvious to me in my study of Romains' literary works: it is necessary to know the biography of the man to thoroughly understand his unanimisme and the ethical system that lies hidden in it. There is really no work which fills this need, nothing which even approaches Maurois' Olympio or biographies of similar stature. I have had to rely heavily on Cuisenier's critical study of Romains' works to fill in the gaps. One might wonder why there has been no extensive biography written on Romains, but the answer becomes evident in reading his books. I feel that, even though he is a member of the Académie Française, he does not approach a Valéry or Rolland, two writers with whom he might be compared. His esteem is merited more by the compass of his endeavor than by the quality of his writing.

D.W.
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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Looking at the life of Jules Romains, spanning the late nineteenth century and all of our own, it is curious to notice the effect on this philosopher, writer, and humanist of the various places he has known. They all seem to have contributed in more than ordinary fashion to the shaping of the varied facets he presents to the critical eye.

Born Louis Farigoule on August 26, 1885, at Chapuze near Puy-en-Velay, Louis was to retain much of the "montagnard" humor common to this country, a humor, however, tempered by an ever increasingly cosmopolitan education. Indeed, Louis was able to stay only a few weeks in his birthplace before his father, the school teacher Henri Farigoule, found occasion to take a position in Paris, settling his wife and young son in Montmartre, rue Marcadet.

This move was the most important in Louis' life for it introduced him to the teacher who was most to influence his life and work: the city of Paris. Much of his life would be spent here; the city would become, along with Cuisenier and those of the Abbaye,¹ his intimate friend. It came to

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¹This was a community of artists, authors, and musicians established as a collective effort at Créteil in 1906 and lasting until early 1908. Among its members were Romains,
know him best and gives us perhaps the deepest insight into the works of the man.

Louis at this point was, of course, too young to recognize that he lived in anything but a place of buildings and streets, of good smells and bad, of horse-drawn carts and carriages, curious shops and interesting people. At the age of four he entered his father's class to begin the schooling that would later qualify him for the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Henri Farigoule implanted in his son at this early age a taste for classical culture, supplementing Louis' formal studies with books from his own library.

Studies, though, did not take all the boy's time. He visited his mountains during vacations from July to October, staying at his grandmother Richier's. Here his cousins Jacques and later Camille and Rosa joined Louis in games which gave free rein to their "naturelle turbulence." In Paris, Louis, not unlike young Bastide in Les Hommes de...

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Pierre-Jean Jouve, George Duhamel, René Arcos, Charles Vildrac, Luc Durtain, and George Chennevière, all prominent literary contemporaries of Romains. The purpose of the house was the founding of an artists' commune.

2Louis Bastide is a young schoolboy whom we see growing up throughout the years of Les Hommes de bonne volonté. He is one of Romains' most charming and touching characters, first appearing in Volume I, Le 6 Octobre.
bonne volonté, found diversion in the streets and squares of Montmartre. Thus the youthful years passed with Louis maturing rapidly and yet reserving for odd moments displays of the prankishness born with him in the mountains of Velay.

The Lycée Condorcet was the next step in Louis' life, when in 1895 M. Farigoule enrolled his son in the sixième under the bill granting free secondary schooling to the children of teachers. The family Farigoule made again one of its frequent moves, this time to 54 rue Lamarck. Here the future Jules Romains completed his adolescence.

Each day brought the trip to school, rue d'Amsterdam. Paris now was beginning to awaken for Louis, to exert the hold on him which would be a guide to his talent. One October evening in 1903 the hitherto silent soul of Paris announced itself to Louis. Walking along the rue d'Amsterdam with Léon Débille, his own being empty and unfeeling, Louis suddenly became aware of what surrounded him. "Ce fut le soir où il se sentit baigner dans l'âme fraternelle de la rue d'Amsterdam, dans l'âme de ses trottoirs, et ses

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3 Les Hommes de bonne volonté is Romains' major work, describing France through the eyes of a great number of characters during the years 1908 to 1933. Comprising twenty-seven volumes, the work was finished in 1946. Each volume is a separate novel in itself.

4 Later to be known as George Chennevière, the poet.
boutiques, de ses passants et ses réverbères." This evening Jules Romains was born, and with him "les hommes de bonne volonté" and "l'unanimité," the latter a philosophy to be sure, but also a religion and a moral system, an ethics.

From this point on young Romains was dedicated. The first few years of the 1900's thus were very important. Earlier, Romains had made the acquaintance of Léon Débille, who became his close companion. Together they indulged in a passion for long walks,—as do Jallez and Jerphanion in Les Hommes de bonne volonté—exploring eagerly as much of Paris as they could reach. Jules also became, during these years, a close friend of André Cuisenier, who later wrote the most extensive critical study of his writing. The young students were at a period which found them fertile soil for


6The term was apparently first used by Romains in an article for Le Penseur in April, 1905.

7Pierre Jallez is a poet, novelist, and journalist who figures as one of the two main characters in Les Hommes de bonne volonté. He seems to represent Romains' poetic mood. Appearing in the first volume as a college student, he remains prominent through the twenty-seven volumes.

8Jean Jerphanion is the other main character in Les Hommes de bonne volonté. He is more objective and less imaginative and more concerned with the welfare of society on the whole. He arrives in Paris in the first volume to begin school at the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

the ideas current both at school and in their outside life. Louis underwent the usual religious training for a boy of his background, but his young mind had also tasted of the materialism of Lucretius. In 1900 he enrolled in philosophy under Léon Braunschvig, beginning preparation for the role of philosophy professor he was to assume in 1909. Braunschvig's influence further cultivated the soil where on that October evening in 1903 the seed of "unanimisme" was sown.

Jules showed even here, while preparing for the entrance exams of the Ecole Normale, the intellectual grasp and logical approach which animates his unanimistic writing. In 1903 came the "crise spirituelle" and soon after in 1904 the first volume of poetry, L'Âme des hommes, appeared. On the title page was the name of Jules Romains. The field of literature had become his own; soon he became a member of the Abbaye along with Chennevière, Duhamel, Vildrac, and others.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1906 Romains left for Pithiviers to fulfill his military obligations. A few months before, he had met Mlle. G. G.,\textsuperscript{11} his first "amour"; but the military service, coming at such a moment, brought the separation which caused Romains to lose contact with G. G.

\textsuperscript{10}Cf. ante n. 1.

\textsuperscript{11}The only name given to Romains' first wife by Madeleine Israël in her biography, Jules Romains, sa vie, son oeuvre.
On his return from the army in 1907 Jules entered the Ecole Normale where, already having his *license-ès-lettres*, he could devote an entire year to the study of science. He prepared for the examinations in philosophy and natural science only to flunk the latter; but he had become sufficiently interested in scientific work to spend a great deal of time experimenting and writing a treatise on extra-retinal vision.  

The years at the Ecole Normale were delightful ones for Romains, allowing him ample time to pursue his academic interests and at the same time to display his "montagnard" spirit in pranks that dismayed both his superiors and his comrades, pranks quite similar at times to those executed by Bénin and his companions in one of his best known novels, *Les Copains*.

And yet his studies and his jokes left Romains time to remember his Mlle. G. G. from whom the army had separated him and whom he had seemed to have forgotten. She began to meet him, neglecting, however, to tell Romains that she had married in 1906. This Jules was to find out later, but his love survived and perhaps even matured. Mme. G. G. was divorced in 1911.

In 1909 Romains began to teach at the Lycée de Brest,

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returning now and then to see Paris, his friends, and G. G. The following year he and G. G. made a trip to London together, and shortly thereafter Romains took a position at Laon. Near now to Paris, he began to frequent the literary circles, accompanied by G. G., and during those years from 1909 to 1913 several major works appeared: the volume of poetry, Un Être en marche; the play L'Armée dans la ville; and two prose works, Les Copains and Mort de quelqu'un. Following their marriage in 1912, Jules and G. G. spent an extended honeymoon traveling through the Ardennes, the Vosges, and into Italy.

From Italy to the "Service des allocations aux mobilisés" seemed but a short journey. The Second of August effected this rapid change and Jules Romains, reservist, found himself in Paris, avenue Victoria, director of the Service des allocations. The war brought to light the pacifist tendencies of Romains who, thorough unanimist that he was, could not support the idea of "un conflit armé à l'intérieur d'une civilisation homogène." But Romains did not have to bear an official part in the war long. It was decided that a professor of philosophy should be teaching and he returned to his classes, first at the College Rollin and then in 1917 at the Lycée de Nice.

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The period of the end of the war and the early twenties increased Romains' literary stature with the publishing of Cromedeyre-le-vieil, Donogoc-Tonka, and the first volume of Psyché. In 1920 Mrs. Dawson Scott, an Englishwoman, organized the P.E.N. Club\textsuperscript{14} which was to take Romains for the first time to the United States. He took an active part in the P.E.N. Congress held in 1925 in Paris, and traveled to Berlin for the succeeding convention, getting at first hand a glimpse of the German political scene. His play \textit{Le Dictateur} appeared in the same year.

An increasing interest in politics now marked much of Romains' literary production and put to test his unanimist convictions. He saw in each man and in man collectively "l'âme diffuse"\textsuperscript{15} of which he had become aware that evening in 1903, and it is man and his varied relations with his fellows and the world that he lives in which form the essence of each work. 1932 had seen the beginning of \textit{Les Hommes de bonne volonté}, the roman-cycle of which the twenty-seventh and final volume was to appear in 1946. Using incidents which parallel in many cases those of Romains' own life, this vast work portrays in kaleidoscopic fashion France and Europe from 1908 to 1933. Romains presents the period his-

\textsuperscript{14}"P" for publishers, "E" for essayists, "N" for novelists.

\textsuperscript{15}Jules Romains, \textit{Une Vue des choses} (New York: Editions de la Maison française, s.d.), p. 31.
torically through the reactions of his characters to the events of the time. Frequently the reactions are his own; the accounts of Jerphanion and Jallez, Jerphanion's marriage, Viaur's\textsuperscript{16} experiments, all are autobiographical.

Although we might expect \textit{Les Hommes de bonne volonté} to have taken all of the author's time during these years, other works such as \textit{Le Dieu des corps} (1928) and \textit{Quand le navire} (1929), the second and third volumes of \textit{Psyché}, \textit{Le Roi masqué} (1932), and \textit{Une Vue des choses} (1941), were published.

But this literary productivity belies the situation of Romains' private life. 1933 brought the death of Romains' father and the breaking up of his marriage to G. G. The latter had found letters to her husband from a young woman, Lise Dreyfus, implying more than their professed interest in his writing. Like Jallez in the novelette \textit{Françoise}, Romains was struck by "l'intelligence, l'émotion contenue" in Miss Dreyfus' letters. After his divorce from G. G. in 1936, Jules Romains and Lise Dreyfus were married, with Paul Valéry as one witness. Two years later, Romains' mother died, breaking finally his closest connections with the past.

The German rearmament and the threat of a second world

\textsuperscript{16}Dr. Albert Viaur appears first in Volume VIII of \textit{Les Hommes de bonne volonté}. He conducts experiments on the voluntary control of nerve reactions and becomes friendly with Jallez.
war were sufficient to disillusion Romains politically, and he added his cry to those of the men who recognized the turn events were taking. Even for a man who had had no part in the actual fighting, one war had been sufficient. Lost in words, the Société des Nations could accomplish nothing.

Romains, somewhat unrealistically, contended that action by a few of Europe's most prominent minds could clear the darkening horizon. To this end he pronounced frequent discourses, and soon found himself heading the movement of the youth of several political factions known as the "Mouvement du 9 juillet."

Coming back to France from a trip to the United States and to South America, where he gave the inauguration speech for the Maison Internationale of the P.E.N. groups in Buenos Aires, Romains commented with alarm on the German activity, stating that a balance of military power was necessary to maintain peace. 1939 seemed to confirm his statement.

The war brought exile to America for Romains and his wife. Here Jules worked ceaselessly for the cause of free France, founding the "France Forever" organization and a small French theater in New York, the proceeds of which went to aid his country. Lise Romains often acted there in her husband's plays. In 1945 the Romains returned to a liberated France where, a year later in Paris, election to the Académie Française crowned Jules' literary career.

Between the time of this final acknowledgment of his
contribution to French literature and the present, Romains has been, as we could expect of a man now in his early seventies, less active; but the man whose travels in the interest of peace have taken him throughout Europe, to Russia, and to North and South America, and who has written in all the literary media, has not yet had his final word. Le Fils de Jérphanion (1956), Une Femme singulière (1957), and Le Besoin de voir clair (1958) are the most recent works, tempered it seems by contemporary developments but certainly still expressive of the deep concern for man shown by the Jules Romains of Les Hommes de bonne volonté.
CHAPTER II
THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Having thus taken a look at some of the incidents which bring the life of Jules Romains up to the present, we should be ready to begin our examination of the moral system displayed in the writings of the man. However, before isolating the particular precepts which constitute this system, it is necessary that we mention, at least briefly, some of the literary and philosophical traditions which have given rise to the ethics of Romains' works. And in doing so we must remember, as Cuisenier notes, that we are not dealing with a systematic philosophy in the case of unanimisme, that is to say, Romains makes no effort to answer, logically and categorically, all the questions, metaphysical, epistemological, etc., that man has been asking for so long.

As a child of these traditions which we are going to consider, unanimisme has a quality all its own. Its author, as we have seen, was a man of rather varied interests; and it is this diversity of interests which gives to unanimisme its particular complexity, or, we could even say, vagueness.

The source of this complexity stems from the fact

that we can find in Romains' philosophy expression of the poet, scientist, and political thinker that he was. Indeed, we see in *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* the scientist Viaur conducting an experiment in precisely the same methodical manner that Romains himself must have used in his research on extra-retinal perception, and reacting no doubt with the same scientific curiosity. Yet in other parts of his writing, particularly in his poetry, Romains becomes almost mystical.

Romains' attitude is then a mixture of the materialism implicit in the scientific approach and of a poetical nature sensitive to the omni-present emotional and ethical questions for which science seems able to provide no answers. It is this attitude, especially in relation to those ethical questions, that we will more carefully analyze in later chapters; but at this point it will be of some value to see how in its present form (*unanimisme*) this attitude is in part a product of two parallel trends in the history of thought.

The first of these two currents of thought which, flowing through history up to the present, seem to have one confluence in the *unanimisme* of Jules Romains is the materialistic tradition. For our own purposes we need not trace this type of thinking any farther back in time than to the atomism of Epicurus which finds its most eloquent expression, in the first century B.C., in the *De Rerum Naturae* of Lucretius. Systematically Epicurus tried to answer the main question which was then puzzling philosophers: "What is the
single substance underlying the world in all its aspects?" He contended that matter is composed of tiny, variously shaped particles (atoms) the interaction of which accounts for the events that take place in the world. This was certainly a brilliant hypothesis, but it seems even here that the cliché that philosophers never know when to stop holds true. Construe atomism as he might, Epicurus had a difficult time making it seem a plausible explanation for more than physical events.

One can see, though, by even the most cursory study of the history of philosophy that failure in one case or even a dozen did not give sufficient reason to stop seeking a common basis underlying the material and the ideal.

With the increase in scientific knowledge of the last three hundred years or so, the materialist position has been represented with a great deal more force.

In the eighteenth century an anatomist, Julien La Mettrie,2 gave strong voice to the scientific argument that all reactions, emotional and otherwise, have a physiological basis. He sought to explain in this manner those of man's faculties, e.g. reasoning and imagination, which had hitherto been proper subjects only for speculation.

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This trend continued and increased in the nineteenth century with the positivist philosophy of August Comte and the literary criticism of Hippolyte Taine. In this century, too, modern psychology began to delve into man's mental states, seeking there evidence to support the contentions of such men as La Mettrie and using as its main tool the method proposed in Descarte's *Discours de la méthode*.  

Our own century brings the materialistic tradition up to date with the work of the man who had perhaps the greatest single influence on Jules Romains, Emile Durkheim.  

Durkheim was both a philosopher and a sociologist. He did not attempt to explain human reactions in individual terms as did La Mettrie, but said rather that society was the key to man's existence. It was the seat, the origin of religion, politics, and all the ideal institutions which have become a part of this life. While, for example, Kant claimed that God is necessary to morality, humanity for Durkheim, and also for Romains, humanity in the collective sense, is the essential. Consequently, society is the origin and *raison d'être* of morality. We find Durkheim affirming this in his writings, "All I can say is that up to the present I have not found in my researches a single moral rule that is not 

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the product of particular social factors."

This sociological system which Durkheim offers us is a unifying approach in two ways: at the same time that it brings each individual into the social group, it gives a single basis for all the institutions which are at present essential to life.

In view of the emphasis placed on society as a whole, we might with good reason ask if the individual has lost all significance in the Durkheimian scheme. This question brings to the fore the most puzzling of the tenets of Durkheim's philosophy and of Romains' unanimisme. The former does not deny the importance of the individual, but simply asserts that man cannot realize himself to his fullest capacity alone. "The human personality is a sacred thing; one does not dare violate nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others."^5

Obviously we have left much unsaid about Durkheim's position and hence at this point we might easily question the validity of some of the theses he presents; but the main thing to remember here is that Durkheim has made, on a materialistic basis, the connection between the actual physical existence of man and the existence of ideals. For

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^5 Ibid., p. 37.
him there is no supernatural system necessary to explain ethics; society is the answer.

On the other hand we have the idealist tradition whose influence for the last two thousand years has been much greater than that of its materialistic counterpart. Here the basis of understanding is the recognition of an absolute, universal set of principles which holds true for all men at all times. Whereas the materialist trend lent itself more readily to the solution of problems concerning the physical world and seemed to have little luck with the ethical and the emotional, idealism is calculated first of all to handle these two questions.

Let us reverse the process we used in tracing the materialist tradition and go backwards chronologically from the present to an arbitrary point of origin. It will suffice to mention only a few of the more important exponents of idealism and their theories.

In the eighteenth century Immanuel Kant set down his categorical imperative which stated that men should act so that their actions might become universal laws. In other words, men, to paraphrase the Golden Rule, should do only what they would have other men do. This rule might seem at first glance to have utilitarian implications, but Kant retained its absolute, ideal significance by making God
necessary to the effectiveness of the rule.\textsuperscript{6}

From Kant and the eighteenth century we can skip back to the birth of Christianity, to the life of Christ. Considered objectively this is without a doubt the most important single contribution to absolute idealism. The concept of a Supreme Being on whose dictates rests an all-pervasive ethical system is most strongly expressed in the teachings of Jesus and of his followers. There is no question of utilitarianism in this case, for as we can see Christian ethics has a foundation which transcends the scope of physical reality.

Another idealist philosophy which predates the Christian era by several hundred years is that of the Greek Plato. He posited the material world as ever-changing and hence unreal whereas the only reality is the world of ideas which is eternal and unchanging. In this system the Supreme Being of Christian ethics is replaced by the concept of the Good, knowledge of which is the highest goal man can achieve.

This is as far back as we need go in discussing the idealist tradition, for even in so sketchy an outline we can see that throughout the history of thought, man has been constantly aware of the dual nature of his existence. It is not so important for us to know to the last detail the philo-

sophical theories which make up our two traditions, or to be able to show where they are fallacious, as it is for us to be cognizant of the main ideas which they express.

It is of these ideas that unanimously is a mixture. Durkheim stated that "there is no realm of nature which is not bound to others." Thinkers have been trying to establish the connections between these realms of nature, and have in most cases failed. As we have shown, the gap between the material and the ideal seems to have been unbridgeable.

The key to the philosophy of Jules Romains, which in a way solves the duality, is the realization that for him nature was not the mere physical reality in all its forms. His is a desire to illustrate the bonds between the realms of this all-inclusive nature using man as a focal point.

As we have said, this effort is not a systematic one; there is no attempt to construct a theory designed essentially to bear up under the scrutiny of logicians and philosophers. Rather does Romains concern himself intimately and personally with man in the many phases of his life. Man is the unifying factor in unanimously; we see the rest of reality in relation to him. Consequently, just as it is difficult to authoritatively define human nature, so is it hard to be explicit regarding unanimously. We can only seek to underline some of its main ideas. Pierre Brodin calls unanimously, "une

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7Durkheim, op. cit., p. 23.
philosophie sensualiste et une façon nouvelle de déifier la nature," and goes on to add some of the characteristics he feels to be essential to it:

peut-être un certain goût de la liberté et de l'honnêteté intellectuelle; une certaine tendresse, exempte de naïveté et de faux-semblant, pour l'aventure humaine—qu'il serait navrant, mais point tellement improbable de voir vite et mal terminer--; et puis encore un penchant, point toujours décent, pour le rire vengeur, la joie de vivre "quand même," la camaraderie lyrique; bref, quelque pantagruélisme. Une horreur fondamentale pour la bêtise, la violence, le crime collectif, d'où précèdent tous les maux.

This is without argument a vivid characterization, but there are some more objective points that we should consider. Romains, if we will remember, is a scientist and as a scientist he is also a materialist. It would seem then also that he is a positivist, in the modern sense of the term, for he himself says in Une Vue des choses, "c'est l'expérience qui a toujours le dernier mot." Underlying unanîmisme there seems to be the solidity of the real, physical world, the one represented to us by our senses.

This is true, there is this basis for reality; but Romains feels that it is the human spirit in a psychical rather than a material sense that is able to alter the out-


ward manifestations of this reality. 11 Among the men of
good will, for example, there is a communion which transcends
the boundaries of ordinary communication. Unanimisme also
seeks to point out that the lines separating the ideal from
material, the beautiful from the ugly, and so on, are not as
distinct as some strictly materialist thinkers would have us
believe.

As we can see then, unanimisme is a synthesis in the
Hegelian manner of speaking; 12 it is a mixture, although per­
haps not in equal parts, of a scientific materialism on the
one hand and of a poetical idealism on the other. This in
some part explains its elusiveness, but there is still more
that we must say about it.

First, from what has gone before, we can conclude
that we are dealing with a humanism of a sort, if only by
dint of the fact that it is a philosophy primarily concerned
with man. The twenty-seven volumes of Les Hommes de bonne
volonté give sufficient evidence of this by portraying
intensively a certain section of mankind at a particular
point in history.

As its main tenet unanimisme seems to maintain the

11 Ibid., p. 30. "J'accorde en effet une place éminente
dans l'univers au principe psychique ou spirituel."

12 That is, a synthesis arising from a thesis and an
antithesis, the former being, in our case, idealism, the
latter, materialism.
Durkheimian principle that man realizes his nature to its fullest extent only when he acts in communion with his fellow men. Paradoxically, however, there is no denial of the right of the individual to exercise his individuality, especially, in the Romainsian treatment, by taking advantage of the credulity of people. Witness for example the exploits of Dr. Knock in the play of the same name. To be sure Knock needs the aid of two colleagues to effect his dupery, but it is his individual ingenuity that carries the scheme through.

The individual has his place then in guiding the actions of a group whose complex nature stems from the collection of different personalities. The whole of Romains' literary creation illustrates this. Society, to use an analogy frequently heard in connection with the writings of Jules Romains, is the representation of a number of individuals who are like so many cells in a living organism, each being necessary to the function of the organism as a whole and yet retaining its own distinct qualities.

This idea of participation in a larger whole is comparable to many philosophical and religious teachings, particularly the pantheistic ones. Romains declares, "sans nier l'existence de formations concrètes, et bien définies, qui sont les âmes particulières, j'incline à les croire reliées et soutenues par une immensité d'âme diffuse, qui n'a peut-être d'autres limites que celles du cosmos et à qui l'espace avec certaines de ses servitudes ou de ses opportunités,
n'est probablement différent."

It is this concept of l'âme diffuse which underlies the morality we will be discussing in later chapters. The idea of man as an individual and also as a member of a general, diffuse soul of which the essential form is society, is the determining one in the ethical system implicit in the writings of Jules Romains.

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13 Jules Romains, Une Vue des choses, p. 31.
CHAPTER III

THE ETHICS OF GOOD WILL

What is ethics?\(^1\) This is the first question we must ask in our consideration of the ethical system implicit in the works of Jules Romains. The moral question invariably lies behind the problems of any society, and hence will be of the utmost importance to a writer who claims society to be the highest realization of the human instinct.

There might seem to be in this last statement a contradiction of what we said in the preceding chapter. There we represented Romains as adhering to Durkheim's contention that society is the seat of morality, in which case society would be the key to an understanding of morality rather than the converse. However, by saying that society is the seat of morality, Durkheim meant simply that "morality is not an individual affair."\(^2\) In other words, no ethical system should have as its object the actions of a single man, but, on the contrary, must be concerned with the relationships of men to each other, and hence with society.

\(^1\)The use of "ethics" and morality may seem confusing here. I have intended ethics to be the sets of rules by which men govern their actions. Morality is action in accordance with these rules.

In Chapter II we also saw that an understanding of *unanimisme* is necessary to any discussion of the ethical system which forms a part of *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* and the other books of our author. According to *unanimisme* it would seem that morality has the simple, objective significance of a set of principles by which men guide their actions. This essentially is the answer to the question with which we began the chapter and from which we seem to have strayed a little.

It is, however, an answer with not a few ramifications. If we use then as our basic definition of ethics "a set of principles by which men guide their actions," some related questions come to mind. Among other things we will want to know what are the origins of these principles and why these principles vary according to the different societies for whose use they are intended.

In answering these questions let us look at ethics more closely. Every ethical system is based on the fact that different men have different values. It follows, then, that in order to act man must choose, that is, he must differentiate between the vast number of alternative courses of action which will confront him during his life. This fact seems obvious and extremely simple, but it is entirely basic. For example, Jerphanion ultimately chooses a political career instead of remaining in the teaching profession where he started out. To choose this alternative from among
the several which confronted him, he had to have a set of values which would make one course of action seem more satisfying than another.

Thus the nature of any ethical system is determined largely by a scale of values which is peculiar to each individual. Jerphanion had been raised in the mountain country and had received his first schooling from his father. When he came to Paris, then, the foundations for one set of values had been laid; the pursuit of knowledge, to use the cliché, offered him the greatest personal satisfaction, and to further this pursuit he entered the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

But, as we shall see more clearly later on, values are, to say the least, mercurial. Jerphanion found that another career meant more to him than spending long hours in the classroom struggling to dispense an understanding of the various philosophical concepts he had become so familiar with. It was experience again which had the last word. Spending what must have seemed like an eternity in the trenches of Verdun, and traveling through Russia for three weeks with his chief Bouiton\(^3\) during the famine after the 1917 revolution, created for the somewhat provincial profes-

\(^3\)Bouiton makes his appearance in Volume XXI of *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* as a minister about to travel to Russia. Jerphanion is his right-hand man some time before and during the Russian excursion in 1922.
sor any number of new approaches to a life which previously had seemed quite cut-and-dried.

These experiences stretched the scope of reality to limits of which, up to that point, Jerphanion had been unaware. Reality is by nature a rather strange thing; traditionally we look at it through glasses tinted by what we have experienced and by what we have been taught. It is no larger for each man than his own personal perspective. This is precisely the reason that Jerphanion chose an academic career at first. But Verdun showed young Jerphanion that there was a larger, more inclusive perspective and that there was a life which had greater value for him than that of a teacher. As a man of good will, he wanted sincerely, as he showed in his first speech to the constituents from the Velay, to put his intelligence and his integrity to the service of society on a scale larger than that of the classroom.

How much altruism and how much personal satisfaction contributed to Jerphanion's decision to seek the deputyship from the Velay is hard to say. We might contend, as do many, that all morality is based on personal interest, that men obey the laws of church and state because doing so best assures them of the satisfaction of their individual desires. While this seems true in part of the unanimist ethics, it is not the whole story. If it were, we could condemn most actions judged to be Christian as being carried out only to
escape eternal damnation, i.e., selfishly. There is a genuine altruism pervading unanimist ethics.

To go back a little, we have said that the ramifications of the question of values are almost inexhaustible; let us remember first of all that they (values) form the most important part of any ethical system. Whether values per se are objective, that is, intrinsic to the object or idea valued, or whether they are subjective and dependent on the personality of the individual who values, is not entirely relevant to our discussion of the ethics of Jules Romains. It does seem, however, that those value systems and the ethics based on them which claim to be objective have had greater influence than their subjective counterparts. As we saw in the last chapter, absolute systems such as Christianity, etc., have been more popular than the relative ones.

One of the essential points which Romains is striving to make is that the difference between the two types of morality is not so great as we might think, and that frequently the result which each achieves is the same. We can see through Jerphanion's eyes, so to speak, a change in the compass of reality and hence in the nature of morality. It is Romains' intent to show that the boundaries separating the absolute from the relative become frequently confused. Jerphanion ultimately chooses a career which will require that he act differently from the way he acted as a professor in a college. There will be new responsibilities and new
rewards, but he had learned that it is not so much the difference in the way people act, but rather the similarities, that form the basis for both types of morality.

Portraying, as he does in *Les Hommes de bonne volonté*, a great many different types of people, Romains gives us insight into a large variety of values. Although Pierre Jallez sees things in much the same fashion as Jerphanion, he has constructed for himself another scheme of values. As college students, both he and Jerphanion were very interested in literature; but whereas Jerphanion found the political life to be the more satisfying, Jallez chose the creative life of a writer. He, too, traveled a great deal, but the effects of this broad experience are manifested in print rather than in deeds.

As is the case with many writers, he was perhaps more idealist than realist. During the war he refused to take any part in the fighting, valuing human life too much even to want to take it in defense of those liberties for which France and the Allies stood.

The two men, Jean Jerphanion and Pierre Jallez, represent different attitudes towards ethics, and yet they both express Romains' views. Ethics is indeed a system of principles which act as a guide for men, but Romains includes in his concept of ethics the idea of duty, the idea that men should act in a certain way. For Romains, though, this "should" is purely in keeping with the relativist approach.
A given ethical system prescribes how men should act in order to attain a certain end. Ultimately Jallez and Jerphanion seek the same goal, a society of good will where all men tend towards a life which will guarantee the freedom to do as one pleases, and yet where the free action of one individual never jeopardizes that of another. They both desire that men participate fully in the collective soul of humanity, that they enjoy and bear the responsibilities of the "brotherhood of man."

This type of ethics, where justification lies in the successful achievement of an end, is most certainly a utilitarian one, but strangely enough, even in the midst of its utilitarianism, the unanimist ethics takes on an almost objective significance. We can explain this by the fact that in Romains' works the ethical system prescribes much the same sort of life that an absolute system such as the Mosaic Law dictates. With perhaps only slight variations, we could transpose the Ten Commandments into a unanimist setting, for they, too, have as one of their goals man's peaceful coexistence with his neighbors.

This existence is the "highest good" of unanimisme. We make the acquaintance of many people in our author's
writings, such as Haverkamp\textsuperscript{4} and M. de Champcenais,\textsuperscript{5} the industrial tycoons, who have little concern for others. Their interests are entirely self-centered, but they are portrayed so that in comparison with Jerphanion or Jallez they inspire little admiration. Money or, perhaps more accurately, the by-products of money, such as power, motivate Haverkamp and de Champcenais.

During his trip to Russia, Jerphanion meets the two industrialists who are there not to aid the new government to overcome the famine which was ravaging the country but rather to exploit the opportunity to make a huge profit on any capital they might be able to invest in the production of needed goods. They seem almost to subscribe to the government's thesis that "le succès justifierait tout."\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4}Frederic Haverkamp gets his start as a real-estate promoter, building Celle-les-Eaux, a large health spa near Paris. He manages to capitalize on the war's increased demands for goods and makes a huge fortune manufacturing shoes. He is a kind man in many ways but thoroughly an opportunist.

\textsuperscript{5}The Count Henri de Champcenais, Marie's husband, is an oil magnate who during the war manufactures grenades. He is even less scrupulous than Haverkamp where money is concerned. Both he and Haverkamp are in Moscow in 1922 where they have a dinner for Bouitton.

\textsuperscript{6}Jules Romains, Montée des périls (Paris: Flammarion, 1935), p. 13. In 1910 the French government was faced with railroad strikes that would only increase the imminence of an impending national crisis. To avoid the strikes the government mobilized the railroad workers under a law stating that such mobilization was permitted during national crises. It was questionable whether the nation faced a crisis, but the successful prevention of the strikes made this immaterial.
They seem to realize that transactions of millions of francs, however suspect, are on too large a scale to permit any scruples.

Romains condemns this attitude by implication and one might find this condemnation inconsistent with his relative approach to morality. He condemns the actions of Haverkamp by positing a society of good will as an end that everyone should seek, which, as we have said, seems far from the relativist manner. Romains, however, is basing this universal judgment on his observations of the human spirit. He is aware that men in general desire that sort of society which will ensure the freedom of a great number rather than one which infringes on the rights of the people to the benefit of a few such as Haverkamp.

The seeming inconsistency stems from the differences between the values of each individual and those of society as a whole. Romains is advocating a moral system which will enable the individual to act with the greatest freedom within the framework of society. The success of Quinette's murders does not justify them because such actions do not contribute to the freedom of others. On the other hand, our unanimist morality is justified by its success in keeping

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7Quinette appears in several volumes of Les Hommes de bonne volonté originally as a book binder of small means. Out of a sort of fascinated curiosity, he commits three successful murders. Dying in Volume XXIV, he wishes to tell his story to a writer so as to have it preserved.
men from disturbing the harmony of the general soul.

It is hard to be much more precise in determining the nature of the morality of good will. The highest good for Romains is this harmony of the general soul, a harmony not unlike that in Plato’s *Republic*. What serves to maintain this harmony is good, what attempts to disrupt it is evil. In judging actions according to unanimist morality, this, then, is the formula we must apply.

In arriving at this formula we have, as it were, to read between the innumerable lines Romains has written. There are few if any places where he comes out and says that some action is good or evil. To find him moralizing, we must look mostly to his political writings, but in fact he wants to show that we cannot really make moral judgments in the black-and-white fashion we think we can, to show that good and evil are not so clearly separated as most moral systems contend.

A good example of this is shown in the relationship between Laulerque and Mathilde.* Before the war, Mathilde

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8Laulerque is seen first as one of a group of socially inclined young people. Highly intelligent and quite cynical, he joins a secret reactionary group in order to protest against the condition of society.

9Mathilde Cazalis is another member of the young people’s group to which Laulerque belonged. She, too, is intelligent and becomes Laulerque’s mistress a second time when she finds her husband Clanricard spending too much time with a young Russian woman.
had become Lauwerque's mistress for a short time, but in a quest for security had married the school teacher Clanricard.\textsuperscript{10} Lauwerque returned to Paris after the war and, remembering the pleasures he and Mathilde had shared, sought her out and proposed that they resume their relations. To overcome her scruples about being unfaithful, Lauwerque told Mathilde the story of a man who, when he could no longer satisfy his wife sexually, asked his best friend to provide for the fulfillment of her desires.

At the same time that Lauwerque is trying to re-seduce Mathilde, Clanricard, her husband, has fallen in love with a young Russian communist, Nania.\textsuperscript{11} She is in Paris on party business and as a representative of a political system which Clanricard believes ideal is very attractive to him. She tries to reconcile him to the affair between his wife and Lauwerque by telling him about a situation in Russia which, ironically, is much like the one Lauwerque described to Mathilde. Her story concerns two Russian couples who lived together in one room divided by a curtain. In order to vary their sexual enjoyment, the husbands frequently exchanged wives. However, he still felt as if he had in some way

\textsuperscript{10}Edouard Clanricard is a young school teacher who believes intensely in Russian socialism in its ideal form. He falls in love with the young Russian and asks her to go to Russia to live with him.

\textsuperscript{11}Nania is Clanricard's Russian lover. She appears only in Volume XIX, \emph{Cette grande lueur à l'est}.
failed Mathilde.

Laulerque, and Romains, too, we may surmise, considered these arrangements sensible rather than "immoral," but Clanricard was less ready to accept them.

Ce qui engourdissait le mieux sa résistance, c'était que ces pratiques lui fussent présentées non comme un abandon au dévergondage, mais comme l'essai d'apporter une solution normale à de vieux problèmes jamais résolus, comme un rajeunissement hardi et tranquille de la moralité presque comme une victoire de la raison.12

Certainly the situations related by Laulerque and Nania kept all the individuals involved happy and illustrate for us the elasticity, so to speak, of unanimist morality. There was no cause for any bitterness on the part of either the husband or the wife which might have led to discord. We can see here that reason or perhaps sensibility is the main tool of Romains' morality which enables us according to our formula to determine whether an action is good or not. Using the means he gives us, we must decide for ourselves what to do in each particular case.

We must mention that not every action is moral or immoral according to unanimist morality. Romains says in Le 6 Octobre, the first volume of Les Hommes de bonne volonté, "Je désire même qu'on s'aperçoive en me lisant que

Men do some things just to exercise their ingenuity, just, as we say, "for the hell of it." Such a feeling motivated Benin and his cohorts in Les Copains. In another sense, Romains means to show that many actions have no moral consequences.

Such, then, is the type of moral system which Romains gives to us: no real, categorical list of "do's and don'ts," but simply the statement of a goal towards which he feels all men should strive. Reason and common sense will dictate to us the means to achieve this goal.

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CHAPTER IV

GROUP MORALITY

Any society may be analyzed into the various groups which compose it, and, as we can see by looking at our own, there are a great number of different types of groups which contribute to the over-all makeup of the society in which we live. According to Romains it is these different groups which are the secondary manifestations of the general soul whose essence is exhibited in humanity as a whole.

While, as we have seen, there is a simple ethical principle serving to guide humanity, the sets of rules for the groups which compose the collective society differ according to the nature of each one. Each group has its own peculiar personality, and we could characterize each one in any number of ways. For example, Gurau contenst that "la jeunesse n'approve sans reserve que les rates et les impuisants." That is to say, young people hesitate to give their support to those whom they recognize to be stronger, men-

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1Maxime Gurau begins as a member of the Chamber of Deputies and finally becomes Foreign Secretary. He is extremely honest and idealistic in an old fashioned way. He gives up a mistress whom he loves because of the harm any talk might do his political aspirations.

tally or physically, than they are. Mionnet, the young priest who was sent to Rome to report on the political interests of the Cardinal del Val, feels that "l'homme d'église n'est pas astreint à des devoirs de même espèce envers ses pareils et envers le reste du monde. Ce n'est qu'envers ses pareils qu'il est lié par une réciprocité de devoirs."

These differences between the various groups of society, as seen through the eyes of two individuals, would seemingly tend to disrupt the harmony which we posited as an ideal in the preceding chapter; but in reality it is precisely these differences which help, except in some negative examples, to preserve the unity of our unanimist society. As the individual is like a cell in the human body, these groups are comparable to the different organs which must function properly to maintain a healthy metabolism.

As Mionnet pointed out, the duties of each of these groups, their responsibilities towards each other will vary.

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3Mionnet is a brilliant young priest sent to Rome to learn all he can about the Cardinal Merry del Val. He is so impressed by del Val that he feels guilty about carrying out his assignment.

4The Cardinal Merry del Val was elected at a very early age to the post of advisor on temporal affairs to the Pope. He carries a great deal of weight politically.


6Ibid.
The principle of the preservation of the harmony of the general soul remains all important, but each group will seek to achieve and preserve this harmony in ways which might at times seem diametrically opposed.

For example, one particular group of individuals may propose revolution or war as an effective solution to whatever ills might beset a society. On the other hand, a different group, such as that led by Mahatma Gandhi in India, might preach complete pacifism as a means to remedy social evils. Romains himself had no sympathy for the bloodshed which generally accompanies revolution. He illustrates this again with the two main characters in Les Hommes de bonne volonté, Jean Jerphanion and Pierre Jallez. Thoroughly imbued with the unanimist ideal of men living together in peace, the two were deluded into thinking that the communist theory promulgated by the Bolsheviks would become practice. Their trips to Russia showed them both where they were wrong, "qu'une révolution politique est assez peu de chose, reste en surface."\(^7\) Political revolution is indeed a superficial means of preserving the unity of a society. The fact that one group wins out over another does not mean that the original end of the revolutionary conflict has been reached. On the contrary, this goal is quite often lost in the confusion

resulting from the clash of two different moralities. *Unanimisme* prescribes a revolution which cuts much deeper and hence which has a much more durable effect. Until cultural standards and tastes have improved, social, economic, and political revolutions are nothing. These are only steps in a recurring pattern.

The only revolution compatible with *unanimisme* is the one which affects moral or cultural standards, the standards which govern our own personal values. What each group must do to accomplish such a revolution depends again on the nature of the group. Romains makes a very interesting distinction between two different levels of society which he calls *les superbes* and *les humbles*. These two groups, which coincide in many ways with the Nietzschean "slaves and masters," differ in several ways but mainly in the fact that the former reacts passively to life; it does not seek to stretch the limits of reality in any way. *Les superbes*, however, "say yes" to life. They realize that "la vie est

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8 These respectively are the titles of the fifth and sixth volumes of *Les Hommes de bonne volonté*.


une réussite compliquée; qu'il ne suffit pas de naître pour être déjà vivant, mais qu'il faut marcher vite et arriver à la vie le plus tôt possible, en sueur.\textsuperscript{11}

Les superbes show us that "il y a une hiérarchie naturelle des groupes."\textsuperscript{12} While it is certain that not everyone can actively contribute to the formation of cultural standards, Romains wants men to participate consciously and positively in the collective soul. Les superbes are not always in conformity with the ideals of unanimisme, but they demonstrate the importance of the active life in the morality of good will.

The best kind of activity is that which we see carried on by another group which Romains calls les créateurs.\textsuperscript{13} This group is exemplified by such men as the doctor Viaur who tried to show that man can consciously break down the barriers separating, in this specific case, the control of the functioning of the voluntary and the involuntary organs of the body. Quite by chance he came across a man in his practice who could at will reduce the rate of his pulse almost to zero, to a point where the beating of the heart was imperceptible. Viaur, by way of experiment, tried suc-


\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 150.

\textsuperscript{13}The title of Volume XII of Les Hommes de bonne volonté.
cessfully to teach other subjects to do the same thing.

A strange case to be sure, and perhaps not entirely plausible; however, its importance lies not in its strangeness but rather in the manner in which Viaur, taken by an idea, tries to re-shape conventional thinking to fit this idea. This is the kind of individual a man of good will must be. This group of men is the one which dictates morality to the passive group, the one which, in a sense, controls the limits to which concepts of morality may be stretched.

We find the "creators" at the top of the "natural hierarchy of groups," legislating the means by which the general harmony of society is achieved. And this group itself may be divided into several others. Different groups may evidently overlap from any number of directions. The group of political actives--to which Gurau and Jerphanion, fictitiously, and Briand and Poincaré, in reality, belonged--is also a part of the "creator" category. And we might also classify Gurau as un superbe because he sought personal glory through his actions, while on the other hand Jerphanion belongs to a less selfish class.

To operate at this level of the natural hierarchy, we need a much broader moral perspective, a set of principles which can cope with a more varied complexity of problems. Romains says, "Le jour où le premier groupe saisira son âme entre ses propres mains, comme un enfant qu'on soulève pour le regarder en face, il y aura un nouveau dieu sur la
It is hard for an individual to look at himself in such an objective fashion, to accurately evaluate his position in a group, and it is even harder for a group to stand off and to consider disinterestedly itself in relation to the society of which it is a part.

If ever a group should succeed in thus viewing itself, it will be les créateurs because they are characterized by the ability to compensate for the defects they find in society. Furthermore, as the active components of this society, they realize the necessity of the constant re-evaluation of standards in order to achieve harmony.

At the other end of the scale we find les humbles, whose morality is less complex because it need not cope with such a variety of situations. They are not entirely abject individuals, though, because "les humbles, c'est-à-dire ceux qui ne participent point au privilège social ni à la culture, peuvent connaître les mêmes intensités et perf ec tions de souffrance que les lectrices de M. Bourget." They are in this respect equal to les créateurs, but they are not as aware of their place in the general scheme of the group.

Maillecottin, for example, is content to be a good lathe operator; he does not feel a need to answer for the actions of other men, while, on the contrary, an individual like Jerphanion realizes a much vaster responsibility. The needs of les humbles tend to be more physical than spiritual; they correspond, if we may make the comparison, more nearly to the quantitative pleasures to which John Stuart Mill opposes the qualitative ones.  

Each group can also be considered, then, according to the needs which might cause it to act in a certain way. Just as society as a whole has need of our unanimist morality to assure its peaceful continuation, each group has needs which help to establish its personality and to determine the kind of morality its members will follow. It is typical of les créateurs to be more self-sufficient. They construct in a large part their own standards and depend mainly on themselves for their morality. Here is another way in which they differ from les humbles who, perhaps due to a less refined rational instinct, must look outside their own group for guidance in politics, economics, etc. They

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16 Edmond Maillecottin is a lathe operator who takes intense pride in his job. He helps support his sister Isabelle and despises her lover, the pimp Romuald Guyard.

17 Vide John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), pp. 10-12. "It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone."
are fundamentally unconcerned, for example, with the intricacies of higher politics except where such politics directly affect the course of their everyday lives.

The idea of the group in society gives us a chance to emphasize the differences which are so essential in the unity of society and it also illustrates another principle which is inherent in unanimist morality. This is the idea that the individual realizes most fully that he shares in the "âme diffuse" when he acts with his fellow men in a group. Even if this action should have no particular moral end, it enables man to communicate almost intuitively with those who are in the same group. In this group action there is a special sense of the fraternity which is one of the most appealing elements of "good will."

Such is the nature of the morality of the groups which make up any given society. We can see that, depending on the basis of classification, we can find any number of different types of people in society. Each group will avail itself of a morality which is peculiarly suited to its own distinct personality. But no group should lose sight of the principal tenet of unanimist ethics, that the harmony of the general soul is the highest good. Mionnet offers a rule to follow in coordinating the morality of each group with that of society: "Travail d'organisation patiente et systématique profondément social dans sa nature et ses moyens, bien
qu'il évite avec soin le jargon socialisant." It is this human element in its individual forms which we will examine in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER V

INDIVIDUAL ETHICS

Although unanimisme and the ethical system which it embodies are concerned primarily with society, the individual in his various aspects plays in life a role the unanimist significance of which Romains wants to stress. There would be ideally a unanimist society composed of various groups which function, each in its own particular way, to preserve what we have termed the harmony of the general soul. In similar fashion, the groups are made up of individuals who in their own ways contribute organically to the function of the group. The analogy drawn in an earlier section between the group and the organs of the body and between the individual and the body cells is seen again to be pertinent.

Cuisenier, in the first volume of his critical study of Romains' works, describes each individual as sharing in the general soul: "Son âme participe de cette masse d'âme, de ce continu psychique, dont les différents unanimes ne sont que des condensations provisoires." ¹

The individual self, this "condensation provisoire," is called the moi by Romains, perhaps in order to denote the

particularly personal approach he wishes to follow to convey the idea that each person is, in the Kantian sense,\(^2\) an end in himself. Deeper analysis of the unanimist moi than this would require delving into psychological realms which we are not equipped to explore. Suffice it to mention that there is the familiar, clearly defined self whose limits are traced by the rational, conscious faculties, and there is also a less well known self which lies beyond the reaches of introspection, the unconscious self. As a writer, Romains is concerned with both.

The unanimist self, in its composite form, is outwardly no different from any other type of individual; Romains has no desire to destroy conventional concepts, but rather to enlarge them. This is essential to an understanding of his ethics, and the best illustration we can use is the one Romains himself gives us through his experiments with extra-retinal perception. These experiments dealt, as the phrase implies, with man's ability to perceive, to visualize physical and emotional states, by the use of organs other than the eyes. After several tries and conditioning

\(^{2}\)Vide Immanuel Kant, _Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals_, trans. Thomas K. Abbott, from Kant's _Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics_ (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895), pp. 30-31. "Now I say: man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, but in all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, must be regarded at the same time as an end."
stages, Romains did claim some success. Using himself as the subject, he claims to have succeeded in perceiving colors and objects through the skin on his chest.

We can see the two-fold importance of this experiment when we realize that such perception might be the forerunner of more advanced psychical perception which, in turn, would have a very decided impact on the morals of our society. Advanced psychical vision would enable each individual to share the mystical nature of unanimisme and to recognize the highest good of unanimist ethics.

That Romains' experiments did not establish conclusively man's ability to perceive psychically may seem obvious, but they did show that the limits of perception, assuming the validity of the experiments, are not entirely categorized. Just as many new sensory organs used by man have been discovered in the past century, so might there be still more which, conditioned by such training as that to which Romains submitted himself, will open new horizons in the study of perception. Unanimistically, if we may, the culmination of such perception would be a state in which every man, or better every individual soul, became aware of its relation to the other particles and to the great mass of the general soul.

At this point, unanimisme becomes quite technical and seemingly at times far-fetched. However, at the center of the technicalities of extra-retinal vision and the intuition
of the general soul lies the personal, human individual. Around him revolves the whole of unanimist ethics. Each individual has a specific personality which is his contribution to the groups of which he is a member. The group depends on him for its character as does the society on the group; the sequence is obvious but essential.

We can look at the individual from as many different positions as we like, and each viewpoint will give insight into the shaping of his ethics. Let us arbitrarily, however, set up the following points of departure: (1) the relation of the individual to himself, (2) the relation of the individual to other individuals, (3) the relations of the individual to society, and (4) the relation of the individual to a Supreme Being.

(1)

In Les Hommes de bonne volonté there are any number of examples of the first relation we mentioned. Marie de Champcenais, the wife of the industrialist, becomes prey to an inner conflict between her religious training and her desire for love when Roger Sammêcaud seeks to make her his mistress. Marie comes from a very wealthy family where her husband, a business associate of Sammêcaud, gives her little of the affection a wife may claim as her due. If these were the only facts we had to consider, it would be hard to see why Marie hesitated; but we also know that she has never
really stopped to examine her own beliefs and to formulate a moral code which she will follow. Romains shows us this during her affair with Roger Sammécoud:

Marie se demanda tout à coup si une catholique pouvait commettre un adultère sans attirer sur elle l'attention spéciale de Dieu, et une disapprobation durable, de nature à tout gâcher. Rien n'interdisait même de supposer un blâme préventif. Tel avertissement secret de l'organisme n'avait-il pas cette profonde raison? Une sotte pudeur détournait de le penser. Mais y avait-il pour Dieu des zones défendues? Existe-t-il une pudeur entre une femme et Dieu? D'ailleurs certains points de nous même, précis et terribles, ne sont-ils pas comme la jonction sensible de la chair et de l'esprit? L'idée de condamnation, d'ensorcellement, reparaissait ainsi, mais de superstitieuse devenant religieuse, et d'absurde, presque raisonnable.

Chez Marie, toutefois, rien ne tendait au tragique. La religion elle-même devait plus à la sagesse moyenne d'une société policée depuis des siècles qu'aux visions sombrement progressives de la solitude.

Every individual must come to terms with himself in order to cope with the rest of reality, and Marie had never taken the time to look at herself and to see where she fit into her environment. As is the case with so many people, she was raised on vague concepts, religious and social, that required precise definition before they had any real significance. Entering her affair without any definition of morality, she had no inkling of the many scruples which would complicate her relations with Sammécaud.

Roger, on the other hand, is something of a man of

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the world even though he too is married; he wants Marie and knows quite well the devices he must use to get her. There is nothing malicious about his attitude although he is certainly looking at the affair with a purely sensual eye. Just as Marie has needs which her husband won't satisfy, Roger no longer gets what he wants from his wife. At times, Romains, far from condemning what seems to our Puritan heritage flagrant libertinage, appears to sympathize with the adulterers.

Marie finally overcomes her scruples for a time and gives in to Roger. Pregnant before long, she refuses to tell Roger of the condition and has an abortion. The abortion, however, is too much for her conscience to bear and she returns to the Church for absolution and consolation.

The nature of the self-to-self relation should be clear. Marie has constructed out of her religious training and the teaching of her family a vague set of ideals pertaining to marriage and to love. She has been disillusioned with these ideals by her husband and at once changes them to satisfy her own physical and emotional needs. But the teachings of the Church which she had apparently renounced are too strong to remain silent. When, towards the end of the affair, Roger begins to become cold toward her, Marie has no alternative other than the Church.

This episode between Marie and Roger also illustrates Romains' tendency throughout Les Hommes de bonne volonté to
leave judgment to the reader. There is very little explicit
moralization. Naturally, we are more sympathetic with some
of the characters than with others, but our bias is due to
our own ethical backgrounds. By being objective, Romains
lets these backgrounds have their say. To get his point of
view, *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* must be looked at in toto.

Incidents like the love affair between Roger Sammécoud
and Marie de Champcenais give us the raw material to be
molded by the ethical system of which Romains is the prime
exponent. Marie is portrayed struggling with herself, her
religious code conflicting with her desire for affection and
physical love. Into this relation of the two different parts
of the individual enter practically all the others we have
mentioned. God, social convention, the demands of Roger,
all influence the decisions Marie makes. We have arbitrarily
sought to separate all these different relations, but it is
obvious that any individual ethical system arises from a
complex of factors. The individual is the prism which
gathers all these different influences and reflects them in
his own peculiar way.

We have used the term "conscience" in connection with
Marie's struggle, but Romains would not admit this use with­
out some comment to clarify the meaning of the word. Some­
thing, to be sure, did tell Marie that she was wrong and did
offer her a way out of the plight. To call that something
the conscience brings to mind the traditional image of a
small being who lives inside us and rings a bell whenever we begin to deviate from the "straight and narrow." Could a materialist allow such a concept to persist?

It would be more in keeping with unanimist psychology to use the term "subconscious," which is more thoroughly indicative of the nature of the self-to-self relation, the division of the individual into parts. The subconscious also indicates that this relation can become extremely complex because into it enter a huge variety of experiences and a fund of learned information. The struggle required to come up with a consistent ethics out of such a conglomeration is emphasized by the torment through which Marie de Champcenais went. The maternal desire to have Roger's child and the realization that doing so would drive him away from her help to make the conflict so strong that Marie cannot solve it consciously and must resort to the support of the Church.

In the ethics of good will, this display of an inability to solve one's problems by oneself is a kind of weakness. In a caricature of the man of good will we would have to portray him as the type who could defy the dictates of training and teaching if they seemed irrational or senseless. The man of good will is also a man of strong will who attempts actively and positively to affect whatever course of events of which he is a part.
In this respect, contrast Vorge\textsuperscript{4} or even Laulerque to Marie. Vorge contrived for himself an ethics of negation, becoming Quinette's disciple because he thought the bookbinder, in murdering people, was consciously exercising a principle of destruction in accordance with such an ethics. He was surprised and thoroughly disappointed to find that the "Master" was acting more out of curiosity towards functional crime than through strength of will. Laulerque, rational and often cynical, felt a need to be a part of the forces which were operating to produce the Europe of 1914. To this end he joined a secret society, whose name we aren't told, a move which was strictly in conformance with the principles he had imposed upon himself.

(2)

At this point, the second relationship we mentioned, the individual-to-individual one, begins to be evident. Both Vorge and Laulerque worked out rules of action which were in particular accordance with their own personalities. But obviously they could not help but affect the lives of other individuals when acting according to the principles. The morality of good will, in order to promote general free-

\textsuperscript{4}Vorge is a young poet and student who finds out that Quinette has committed murder without detection and seemingly as an \textit{acte gratuit}. He takes this as an indication of Quinette's being a sort of satanic Messiah and becomes his disciple.
dom, asks that we consider the effects of our actions on others and that we restrain ourselves frequently so as not to restrict them. The main problem in relation to this system, then, is casuistic, applying the principle of harmony to specific cases to see if they tend to destroy this harmony.

In applying the rules of unanimist ethics, we should keep two ideas in mind: an individual must always remember in his affairs with others that each man is intrinsically important and that each individual contributes in his own way to the make-up of the groups to which he belongs. These will help to account for the way Jallez and Jerphanion act in regard to each other and to the various individuals with whom they deal throughout Les Hommes de bonne volonté. However, they are in a sense ideal cases, being the main spokesmen for Romains himself; most men fail to consider the actions of their fellows in the light of these two above ideas. In the unanimist society the general soul is more important than any individual, and frequently personal desires will have to be suppressed out of consideration for this âme diffuse.

5Compare with this notion, the existentialist concept of responsibility where each individual is responsible for his action not only to himself but also to other people. According to existentialist precepts, man, because his life is one of continual choosing, is condemned to freedom. Romains, however, does not conceive man as being "condemned" to freedom.
Many times, one person is bound to consider the effect of his conduct on those around him simply because he is concerned with his own well-being. It is only in rare cases that such consideration reaches a general level where the welfare of the whole society is taken into account. It is among the men of good will that we find these cases.

For example, Jerphanion and Jallez are particularly responsive to the sentiment of humanity viewed as a whole. To act as they do, one would have to abstract from each individual's character those traits which make him a human being and look at his conduct in relation to them. By lifting a man out of the context of humanity, we destroy the perspective to which he is entitled.

It is somewhat harder to categorically condemn an individual when we are aware that no man can be perfect and when we consider him in his relations to the rest of society and to the universe as a whole. The realization of each man's importance must help to shape our own ethical standards.

The two most important individual-to-individual relations are love and friendship, love, arbitrarily, being an attraction between members of the opposite sex, friendship, attraction between members of the same sex. The best examination of the former and perhaps the example Romains would like taken as the ideal, is given in the three-volume work Psyché. Here he describes a fusion of spiritual and carnal
love where the sexual act becomes almost holy in nature.

There is a communion between Pierre Lefebvre and his wife, Lucienne, which might, examined more closely, give evidence of bringing into play some of those means of perception whose nature Romains sought to determine in his experiments on extra-retinal perception. At any rate, he shows us what he considers to be the morality of sex, the morality of a relation between a man and a woman.

It is this relation that Romains seems to call love; we find no evidence of any more ideal situation except perhaps that between Jerphanion and his wife, Odette, who, however, remains quite in the background. It is the physical type of love which causes women their anguish and their joys in Romains' work; their desires seem to be essentially erotic ones.

Lucienne is attractive to Lefebvre because she is intelligent and has artistic talent, but she appeals to him mainly in bed where he feels a sort of protective superiority over her. They enter mutually into the act of intercourse, but Pierre, feeling responsible for her concept of "le royaume charnel," acts the part of a guide, initiating Lucienne slowly and delicately into a sexual relation which eventually leads to an almost spiritual bond between the two.

Such is the love that Romains would have a man and woman share. The friendship of Jerphanion and Jallez is cast on an equally ideal plane. Their relation is the stan-
dard given to us by Romain to measure the other individual-
to-individual relationships in his works and in our own lives.

The two men come from almost entirely different back-
grounds. Jerphanion was born in the mountains where his father was a school teacher. He received his early educa-
tion from his father who apparently fostered in him a taste for good literature. Jallez, on the other hand, is Parisian to the core. His poetic inclinations seem to be born of the city's influence; he is sophisticated and sometimes romantic. He is a perfect complement to Jerphanion who socially still retains much of his provincial manner. Yet the two are alike in ways which turn out to be the most important in their lives. Both are interested in literature, in ideas, and both are concerned about their fellow men.

This concern for mankind is perhaps what binds Jer-
phanion and Jallez together most strongly, even though they give evidence of this concern in different ways. Jerphanion, as we have said before, becomes a teacher, marries, and goes to war. Jallez becomes a writer and journalist, and stays at home, a pacifist. Like Romain, he cannot bear to see men killing each other. He is content to write, trying to bring men together through his poetry and novels.

There is in this relationship between Jerphanion and Jallez an ideal sort of communication. In the presence of something which elicits their common admiration, they feel
the bond which is typically that of unanimité. Even when they are not together, this bond which has united them in the past frequently brings them together in thought. The essence of this bond is the doing of something together, the sharing of an experience. "Il n'y a pas unanimité, là où il n'y a pas, à la base, une certaine expérience spécifique que rien ne remplace."

One particular habit which has nourished this relation between Jerphanion and Jallez is that of taking extended walks together through the various quarters of Paris. We can see the city's influence operating again. By bathing themselves in its atmosphere, the two young men become aware of its basic unity, of the necessary role each individual plays in this hive of humanity. The city draws them closer to each other through a common desire to solve its mysteries.

Ils descendaient la rue Claude-Bernard, par le trottoir de gauche. Le ciel était nuageux; l'air, d'une grand douceur pour un matin de la mi-octobre. Jallez regardait cette rue très ordinaire, en se demandant si quelqu'autre que lui pouvait y déceler les influences, les signes, les rappels, les allusions au Paris total, dont il lui semblait qu'elle était pleine. Il se le demandait moins par orgueil que par inquiétude. Il n'était pas de ceux qui s'attendent à retrouver chez autrui comme un dû, l'équivalent de leur propre sensibilité. Et il admettait fort bien que certaines choses qui avaient une valeur éminente, mais peu explicable n'en eussent aucune pour d'excellents esprits. En outre, il se méfiait de la politesse, des accords illuminoires de

sentiments qu' elle favorise, surtout quand l' y pousse une amitié naissante."

Jallez is a unanime and is particularly sensitive to the magnetism of a city like Paris. To Romains Paris is a manifestation par excellence of unanimisme and, as such exercises a special attraction for those whom he terms unanimes. Jallez feels strongly the presence of the city and relishes the prospect of being able to share it with a friend. He feels, in a sense, bound to tell Jerphanion his innermost thoughts, to become a brother who shares not the blood of the same parents but rather l'âme diffuse. He is led to declare to Jerphanion:

"Figure-toi que je suis très content que nous nous soyons rencontrés ce matin. J'ai idée que c'est un bon hasard. Je ne sais pas si nous serons toujours de même avis. Mais ce n'est pas ce qui compte le plus. A nos âges, et dans nos milieux, nous sommes encombrés de camarades qui ont des avis; qui n'ont que ça. Ce qui est difficile à trouver, c'est quelqu'un qui soit capable de s'ouvrir à des choses sur lesquelles il n'a encore aucun avis. Ce que j'appelle un homme sérieux. Les autres sont des pédants frivoles."

We are getting a deeper insight into the man of good will; we see more clearly now how he acts and, what is more important, how he thinks.

Romains gives us another good example of the bond between the unanimes in his novel Les Copains. In this book

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8Ibid., p. 172.
a group of friends, drinking in a bar, are taken with a desire to do something. This desire results in the playing of two hoaxes by the group on two small provincial towns, Issoire and Ambert. First the group will make a false inspection of the barracks at Issoire with Bénin posing as a deputy, and then they will all rendezvous at Ambert where Bénin will deliver a sermon as a religious dignitary returning from Rome.

Of course, these hoaxes are most appealing to us because of their humor, but they also illustrate how tightly the sharing in such incidents can bind a group of individuals together. At one point three of the comrades are cycling to meet the rest of the group and the feeling of being alone, of each having a part in a plan to play a trick on a large group of people, of being quite self-sufficient, seizes them. "Ces trois copains qui s'avancent sur une ligne n'ont besoin de personne, ni de la nature, ni des dieux." Bound together unanimistically, sharing each other, as it were, these three buddies are ethically quite self-sufficient. The accomplishment of their project and the maintenance of this unusually acute communion between them are all that

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9 Ambert (pop. 41,200) and Issoire (pop. 60,700) are two of the main cities in the department of Puy-de-Dôme in south central France.

It might seem after noting this last example that *unanimisme* promotes in many cases loss of consciousness by the individual or the group, that they are part of a larger system which depends for its preservation on their obedience to its laws. Vorge and Quinette, to cite an extreme, act out of defiance to conventional morality. The problem of the individual's conformance to the laws of society is one that Romains is particularly interested in.

Much of his work is devoted to politics itself, to the social problems which beset the people of Europe and the rest of the world. *Problèmes d'aujourd'hui* (1933) and *Problèmes européens* (1931) are two of the books which seek directly to answer political questions.

Two questions which specifically concern the individual in society are foremost in the author's mind: (1) Is revolution justified? and (2) What is the nature of crime? We have a general rule, the harmony of the general soul, which would seem to make the answers to these questions quite clear; but, as in most human affairs, there arises the problem of casuistry. It is not always clear how the principle is to be applied in specific cases. Crime would, obviously, be action that tends to disrupt the harmony of the general soul, but it is difficult to tell whether an
action, in the long run, may not promote harmony, and there is also the problem of degree of crime. Revolution would seem quite clearly to be condemned by *unanimisme*—unless, however, we realize that this harmony must ideally penetrate to men's minds. Discord of the mental type is just as injurious to the welfare of the society as political and economic discord. Revolution is generally a result of this intellectual dissatisfaction.

Political revolution is the subject of Romains' play *Le Dictateur*[^1] which appeared in 1926. The problem here is how to effect the changes which will create for each individual the freedom that Romains feels to be consistent with the tenets of unanimist ethics. Two of the characters, Féréol and Denis, have long been friends, but their friendship is beginning to dissolve because Denis realizes that violence will have no lasting effect in achieving an equitable society. Does the end justify any means? Romains is particularly acute in recognizing that violence is frequently the end as well as the means of revolution.

Denis and Féréol both belong to the revolutionary party, but the former seeks peaceful means and finally is put into a position to use them. Féréol is sceptical. Just before deciding to become prime minister, Denis pleads with

[^1]: Two other contemporary French plays, Camus' *Les Justes* and Sartre's *Les Mains sales* treat the question of revolution in a somewhat similar fashion.
Féréol to have faith in him.

**Féréol** - Croire en nous! Est-ce que cela signifie quelque chose?

**Denis** - Ah! ... Cela signifiait quelque chose au temps du Camille et l'orgue. Féréol, tu demandais hier: "Où est notre loi?" Je n'ai su te répondre. Eh bien, je sais maintenant, je sais. Notre loi, c'est la même chose que nous! Ne hausse les épaules. Je sais aussi pourquoi cette vision me revient si souvent. ... La lune au-dessus l'horloge, la cérémonie, le reste ... À ce moment-là, il nous suffit de causer, de penser avec plaisir, de laisser nos idées se mettre d'accord ou se tracer leur intervalle, pour nous sentir en règle, pour avoir la conscience tranquille. N'importe quoi pouvait se présenter. Nous le laissions entrer dans cette sorte de territoire circonscrit où nous étions les maîtres, et l'accueil à faire se décidait tout seul. Notre loi intervenait d'elle-même, comme dans un pays policé, sans remue-ménage inutile. Et je crois que rien n'avait pu nous étonner, nous décontenancer. Que c'était beau! Oui, on nous aurait offert je ne sais quoi, le commandement d'une armée, deux sièges de cardinaux à Rome, un trône à occuper par imposture, nous étions prêts à voir ... à accepter un tête-à-tête avec l'événement, sans perdre une miette de notre présence d'esprit ni de nos moyens. Nous n'avions pas cette nuée de peur devant les yeux, cette crainte honteuse de ne pas être "de taille" qu'on connaît plus tard, et qu'on est bien content de pouvoir colorer par des principes, par des scrupules, ou le prétexte d'une discipline étrangère.  

The beauty of friendship is no longer the most important thing in the lives of the two men, as Denis says. He regrets that it can no longer be, but he realizes that before friendship can mean so much some of the differences between

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groups will have to be ironed out. Society has caused men to be afraid of not being "de taille," that is, mature, thinking men. Denis thinks back on the time when he and Féréol were children and sees it as sort of an ideal existence. But he has a responsibility to society which stems largely from a contrast of this seemingly idyllic period with the society of today. Then he was unaware of the problems; now he must try to solve them.

We may ask ourselves what exactly Romains means by saying that our law is the same thing as ourselves. Such a statement might be taken as evidence of extreme relativism in regard to ethics. Can it also sanction revolution as a means to political ends? At times Romains' ethical system seems to be two-sided; he appears to want an absolute principle as guide and yet speaks frequently in relativist terms.

Denis and Féréol on the surface want the same thing, the betterment of the conditions of the people in their state. But they have different laws to govern their actions in reaching this goal because they are different people. We sympathize with Denis because his attitude is more in keeping with what we have been conditioned to by democracy. He wants friendship, to be sure, but not at the price of streets filled with blood.

Denis realizes that he has a responsibility to others as well as to himself. He is his law; he is so constituted that he cannot permit the strikes and riots that Féréol
advocates unless there is no other means of achieving the goals of his party. As an individual he is passionately concerned with society as it presents the broad, personal face of his people. He too recognizes that political revolution is not the answer to the plight of humanity, that the change must take place deep within the people and those who rule them. And it seems that Romains senses that, in striving to create this inner revolution, Denis will become a lonely man. His last words at the end of the play are spoken to his wife and give us a hint of what is in store for those who manifest a selfless interest in other men: "Eh bien, laisse-moi seul." ¹³

Political revolution is only too often instigated by a minority group, fanned to flame by a few demagogues who have their own interests in mind. Romains shows in humorous fashion in Dr. Knock how a few men by careful, rational planning control a whole town and secure their fortunes. Such power is dangerous, but when properly channeled it can do a great deal to benefit society.

This power is used positively in Le Bourg régénéré. Here one man descends from a train into an unknown city that has become morally stagnant and whose industrial wheels, so to speak, have slowed almost to a halt. The factories have shut down and the people are in the throes of disunity. The

¹³Ibid., p. 164.
man who has come to town writes a sentence on the wall of a building and soon the whole town is noising about the words of the sentence. "Celui qui possède vit aux dépenses de celui qui travaille; quiconque ne produit pas l'équivalent de ce qu'il consomme est une parasite sociale." The slogan, to be sure, has a unanimous tone and in fact, even sounds as if it might have been lifted directly out of the Communist Manifesto. Its effect caused by one individual is stupendous. Soon the people of the city are friends again, working to make the city productive both morally and materially. The process of regeneration has begun.

Crime is perhaps another phase of the same power which we have seen used by Dr. Knock and the man in Le Bourg régénéré, the power Mionnet seems to define in Recherche d'une église. We have seen Vorge violating the laws of society on the basis of an ethical system he created for himself. Crime is the negative use of this force. Romains, however, does not seem to condemn Vorge too strongly; there is another sort of crime which receives the brunt of his criticism. This is organized crime, crime on a large scale carried out consciously to increase the power of the few at the expense of the liberty of the many. War to Romains is

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15 Cf. ante n. 5, Chapter IV.
the most heinous manifestation of this type of crime. Romains condemns war vehemently in his political writing and throughout much of his fiction. He pleads the cause of a united states of Europe, denying categorically the value of war in attaining a lasting peace and abhorring the prospect of man killing man in an effort to give their children a harmonious world to live in.

Individual crime in the style of Quinette and Vorge is hard to condemn. We almost want to see Quinette, who is in ways quite likeable, successful in his crime. We tend to sympathize with the man who revolts against authority because there any many times when we would like to do the same. We are likewise thoroughly taken with Bénin and the other copains, even though they are committing a crime in the nature of fraud.

Frequently as in this last case Romains' characters seem to be asserting their unanimity by committing a crime or what Bénin might call an "acte pur."\[16\] There seems to be something of unanimisme in an act which is calculated to serve the will. But Romains does not condone those acts which on a large scale destroy personal freedom. There is a

\[16\]Again we may compare with existentialism. This "acte pur" is in essence much like the "acte gratuit" by which existentialists seek to engage themselves in life. The "acte gratuit," however, is intrinsically valuable, while the "acte pur" of unanimisme is a means to affirm the bonds between unanimes.
huge difference between good and bad will.

(4)

The nature of good and evil is perhaps the most pressing question of contemporary life, and in an age where many admit the loss of the Christian ethic, Romains is trying to define good and evil in order to fill the gap which this loss has left. The strict materialism or positivism that has arisen during the last century does not seem to have been able to do this. There is a vast difference between good and bad will. Most of us recognize this instinctively, but few can articulate the nature of the difference.

Isn't there in unanimist ethics some Supreme Being or law on whose dictates we can rely to solve the question of the nature of good and evil? In the traditional concept of a Supreme Being, the answer must be no, for Romains is, as we have said, a materialist. He offers us two things in his ethical system, the principle of harmony we have discussed, and a new god--Man.

We have seen Marie de Champcenais struggling with herself because of an inability to solve her own problems by act of will. She finally falls back on God. This climax to Marie's conflict is quite inconsistent with Romains' position and confronts us with the enigma of Les Hommes de bonne volonté: Who is speaking for Romains? The puzzle necessitates the reading of the whole work and much of the rest of
the author's writing in order to extract a consistent ethical system.

One of the works which helps us to find Romains' views on religion is the play *Cromedeyre-le-vieil*. This play, published in 1920, is called by Madeleine Israël, "Poème d'une race et d'un pays, il décrit le triomphe de la nature sur la religion, de l'homme sur la femme, du puissant Cromedeyre sur le mol et informe Laussonne, mais surtout il montre, avec Emmanuel, un chef par vocation--chef qui agit sur la société, la pétrit selon son désir." It concerns a small community high in the mountains in the country of the Mezenc which was originally founded many years before the time of the action by the venerable *Cromedeyre-le-vieil*. Quite self-sufficient and living almost without connection to the outside world, the present community finds itself lacking a priest to administer its religious needs and sends one of its young men, Emmanuel, to seminary to be educated. Emmanuel, however, cannot abide the teachings of the seminarists and returns to *Cromedeyre-le-vieil*.

While Emmanuel has been gone, the community has also realized that its female population is diminishing. Emmanuel visits his sweetheart in the village below and plans to come soon to get her and bring her back to *Cromedeyre-le-vieil*.

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A leur place, je voudrais que personne
N'eût en son pouvoir de m'en remontrer.

C'est comme si quelqu'un venait m'apprendre
A dresser un trebuchet pour les grives
Ou à coincer la truite entre deux doigts. 18

Emmanuel wants to give us a natural religion. Living
high in a mountain fortress, gleaning from natural sources
the largest part of their subsistence, the inhabitants of
Cromedeyre-le-vieil need a god who embodies all the traits
they can respect. It is this respect that materialist soci­
ety has destroyed.

Unanimisme seeks to evolve an ethical system practi­
cal for such a society. It does not deny that men have
tendencies which apparently do not stem from any materialism,
that they seem to need to believe in a reality larger and
more permanent than the one surrounding them. Romains would
have the general soul satisfy this need.

18 Jules Romains, Cromedeyre-le-vieil, in The Contem­
porary French Theater, ed. S.A. Rhodes (New York: S.F.
CHAPTER VI

THE MEANS TO HARMONY

In the preceding chapters we have seen unanimist ethics operating on the basis of its principal tenet, the harmony of the general soul. Jerphanion and Jallez, in particular, have shown us how Romains conceives the individual to fit into society, how those whom he designates unanimes conduct themselves in relation to other individuals and to the groups of which they are essential parts. But this illustration has been by way of describing certain people in connection with a certain environment. There are several means which unanimist ethics uses to achieve its end and which we can discuss directly. These are (1) reason, (2) intuition, and (3) the acte pur. We have mentioned them briefly before, but their importance warrants a more lengthy analysis.

(1)

Reason in unanimist ethics derives its importance from the fact that unanimisme rests solidly on a materialist foundation. To be sure, it exhibits many of the traits of an idealist system, such as a mystical tendency and a belief in an almost pantheistic soul (which, however, has an entirely natural source); but there is no reliance on the
supernatural or belief in a life after death\(^1\) of the sort claimed by Christianity.

It is through reason that we determine what actions tend to promote the harmony of the general soul. Clanricard realized that the situation described to him by Nania was quite reasonable and harmonious, even though it was not compatible with the ethical system to which twenty centuries of Christianity has conditioned Western Civilization. And yet it is Western Civilization that has given the greatest impetus to the development of materialism. In an Atomic Age fostered by western culture, it is extremely difficult to deny the value of reason and logic in the solution of many problems.

The big question, however, is whether man can solve ethical problems simply by the application of logic. Romains, obviously, feels that he can, that common sense would erase many of man's difficulties if he were only willing to use it. Indeed, what other means does he have if there is no absolute ethical system on which he can rely, if he has to find the answers, and perhaps even ask the questions, himself? The most admirable aspect of \textit{unanimisme} is

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{1}}\text{In a short novel, \textit{La Mort de quelqu'un}, Romains shows an old man whose death causes him to receive more attention than he had ever had while living. His life is prolonged, so to speak, in the memories of those who knew him. As he is dying, he feels that he will pass after death into a great soul that never dies.}\]
its deep confidence in man's ability to settle his differences within the boundaries of reason.

There is, then, as can be seen, a basic dichotomy\(^2\) in the types of problems with which man must cope; one type involves controlling or dealing with the "physical universe" in the normal sense of the words, while the other requires the handling of those complexities which arise in man's nature itself. In Romains' opinion the dichotomy is only apparent; those questions which at present refuse to submit to natural explanation can and eventually will be answered on a material basis. In view of the advances made by reason in the form of science even during the last half century, such a position does not seem entirely untenable.

But, of course, we cannot let reason dominate without some indication of its ethical supremacy. There are some inconsistencies which seem to arise when reason is given such prominence and which we must permit it to solve.

For example, if reason or sensibility is to be the guide for our conduct, where will we stop? Will not everything be permitted? From Nania's Russian sensibility to orgiastic living is it not but a short step? The answer of \textit{unanimisme} is, of course, an emphatic "no!" We must be aware that the harmony of the general soul is the final

\footnote{This dichotomy is seen to stem from the duality discussed in Chapter II. Cf. pp. 12-16.}
expression of Romains' faith in reason, that its sensibility denies the right to indulge the senses without reservation. Each individual must always be wary of infringing on the freedom of his fellows; he must strive continually to preserve that harmony which is the highest good of unanimisme. Wanton indulgence of the appetites causes a man to lose sight of any satisfaction but his own, to subvert other people's freedom to his own advantage.

The tenor of Romains' answer to the above questions is in part quite like Mill's. There are pleasures which far exceed those of the senses, the most desirable of which seems to be that of a friendship based on intellectual compatibility and conscious participation in the general soul, i.e., such a relationship as we have seen between Jerphanion and Jallez. For some reason, these "higher" pleasures are less likely to require sacrificing the freedom of others; we can indulge in them with less fear of deviating from the path unanimist ethics has chosen for us.

We might also wonder at times if we cannot frequently find rational justification for crime. To choose an example from literature, couldn't we condone Raskolnikov's murder of the old lady on a rational basis? The answer here is "yes." Again we have to apply the general rule; if the

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3Cf. ante n. 17, Chapter IV.

4The hero of Dostoievsky's novel Crime and Punishment.
benefits of such a crime extend to a large number of people, if there is more freedom created than is destroyed, the crime is justifiable. Romains does stop short of condoning what we would consider crime when he comes to organized crime. War, organized crime at its worst, can never solve man's problems and hence is entirely unreasonable.

(2)

While reason is the means by which we apply the principle of harmony, there is another faculty that helps the unanime to follow unanimist ethics. This is intuition, which enables the individual to be aware of his part in the general soul and to preserve its harmony by engaging himself with his fellows in active participation in the âme diffuse.

Through intuition the individual gets an almost mystical sense of communion with his fellow men, a feeling which Romains likes to think is strongest in groups or crowds. This intuitive communication among the unanimes is the hardest part of the system to explain. It relies on the universal diffusion of the general soul, best characterized in Romains' poetry. In Un Être en marche he describes an individual walking through the streets of Paris and portrays him as a part of a soul that is extended even to objects which are usually thought to be inanimate. Romains pictures man in general as sharing in this soul, but some men are more aware of it than others:
Chaque homme se dit qu'il est seul,
Que le monde est autour de lui,
Inconscient et familier
Comme le brouillard d'un pipe.
L'eau miroite devant ses pieds;
Elle n'est pas une autre chose;
C'est une âme qu'il a dehors,
Qui est moins chaude, qui ne bouge
Pas tant que l'âme intérieure
Mais qui s'étale encore plus;

Une âme plus lente et plus sûre,
Où les rêves deviennent vieux,
Où l'heure passe avec des rames;
Un prolongement végétal
Que l'âme pousse par les yeux.

The **unanimes** are cognizant of this "prolongement végétal" and know that they as human beings are more complex, perhaps more advanced manifestations of the general soul than trees or stones or other non-human objects. It is by intuition that they gain this cognizance. There is an ineffable quality to the way in which they acquire a deeper insight into reality, a broader perspective of their place in the universe.

The **unanimes** are intuitively bound to each other, feeling intensely an inner communion with each other that gives their lives a purpose beyond the interests of each individual. Bergson defines intuition as the "kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and

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consequently inexpressible.⁶ This is exactly what the unanime does with his companions; he places himself, in a sense, within each one, letting them share his feelings as he shares theirs.

(3)

One way in which the unanime places himself within the souls of his friends is by the sharing of some experience,⁷ by participating with them in an acte pur which strengthens the unanimistic bond between them. This sharing in a particular action makes the diverse personalities of the unanimes fuse into one. Romains indicates the nature of this fusion in Les Copains. After the comrades had enacted the hoaxes at Ambert and Issoire,⁸ they went into the mountains to a small cabin where they had a feast to celebrate their success. Bénin, as the leader of the group, spoke, complimenting them on their achievement:

Vous avez joui avec impudence de plusieurs choses réelles. Ce que les hommes ont de sérieux et de sacré, vous en avez fait des objets de plaisir, vous en avez taillé les pièces d'un jeu. Vous avez, sans ombre de raison, enchaine l'un à l'autre des actes gratuits. Vous avez établi entre les choses des rapports qui vous agréaient. A la nature vous avez donné des lois, et si provisoires!

⁷Cf. ante n. 6, Chapter V.
⁸Cf. ante p. 62.
Acte Pur! Arbitraire Pur! Rien de plus libre que vous! Vous ne vous êtes asservis à quoi que ce fût, fût-ce à vos propres fins. Et pourtant vous ne contrariez pas la destinée. Elle est dans un mystérieux accord avec vos caprices.

... "Vous possédez encore, depuis ce soir, l'Unité Suprême."

Bénin has given the best possible characterization of the acte pur and also some of the traits of the man of good will. The acte pur is a result of a combination of reason and intuition; the plans of Bénin and his friends to dupe the people of Ambert and Issoire required a good deal of thought and ingenuity, but it is hard to imagine those plans ever being initiated or carried through without the intuitive communion which allowed the seven men to achieve a "Unité Suprême."

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CHAPTER VII

THE RECENT NOVELS

The bulk of Remains' writing was done before his election to the French Academy in 1946 and in recent years he has not been nearly so active as he was during the period which saw the production of Les Hommes de bonne volonté. But in the last three years, Romains has written two novels which show that he has not lost the voice which gave him a seat among the "Forty."

However, when examined as part of the stream of unanimisme which carries along the rest of Romains' work, these last two novels cause some disturbance. It is hard to fit them smoothly into the tradition which started with the publication of L'Âme des hommes in 1904.

The first of these two novels, Le Fils de Jerphanion, appeared in 1956. Romains has chosen for his main character Jean-Pierre Jerphanion, the son of the Jean Jerphanion who was one of the principal characters of Les Hommes de bonne volonté. Young Jean-Pierre has gotten into some legal difficulties and has been sent to the country to await news from his lawyer about his pending trial. During his stay at Boussoulet in the Haute-Loire, he writes to Maître Dézobrit, the lawyer, relating something of his life.

Early in the second World War he had become a pris-
oner of the Germans and after some months working on a farm for them had escaped. With the help of a man called Zeigler and a friendly Austrian family, he and another prisoner crossed the Rhine to safety. Later, after the war, Jerphanion returned to visit the people who had helped him to escape.

Young Jean-Pierre is pictured throughout most of the book as a sceptic who admits that he is without any firm moral convictions. "Je n'ai jamais eu . . . de principes de morale très solides." But towards the end he seems to change, expressing a sort of resignation to the pressures which are trying to force him into a conventional way of living. Jean-Pierre realizes that he has done nothing with his life, and that perhaps it would be better to "engage" himself even if it means doing only what others have planned for him.

D'autres, dans le passé, ont raté la première partie de leur vie. Ils prenaient, comme on dit, de bonnes résolutions; et la suite allait mieux. Moi, je ne suis pas seulement le produit dévié, mal équilibré, d'une suite de temps affreux. Ce qui me coupe les jambes, c'est la difficulté de croire à l'avenir, même en cherchant bien. Je ne parle pas de mon avenir spécialement à moi. Ce métier que mes parents m'ont trouvé. . . . Oh! moi, je veux bien. . . . Même cette femme qu'ils m'ont trouvée. . . . Après tout, pourquoi pas? Elle vaudra bien deux ou trois affreuses créatures que le hasard avait mises sur ma route."

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2 Ibid., p. 304.
We can see a Romains here who has been shaken by a war even more bloody than "the war to end all wars." Even the unanimisme, the deep confidence in mankind, which had been his life's thought seems somewhat tarnished in the face of the contemporary ethical chaos. This is perhaps the reason for the break from the tradition he had established from 1904 until after World War II.

Une Femme singulière came out in 1957 and seems even more removed from Romains' earlier writing than Le Fils de Jerphanion. The story concerns a young man who has just received his majority and wants the patrimony that his mother has been keeping for him so that he may get married. He suspects that his mother has been spending this money and goes to a lawyer to find out. The young man, Henri Chauverel, learns that his mother is really his stepmother; his father had never told him about his second marriage.

Henri spends the rest of the book verifying this information and clearing up the mystery which surrounds the deaths of his father and mother. The stepmother is found to have a past that is not entirely without suspicion and which is filled with intrigue. During the story we see very little of her directly, but she is in the background all the time, so that the narrative is always governed by her presence. The novel ends rather incongruously with Henri's mother entering a convent.

There is a real moral crisis in Le Fils de Jerphanion,
however hard it may be to find any deeper significance to *Une Femme singulière*. Jean-Pierre Jerphanion is an intelligent man whose parents are liberal-minded people who realize the value of education and of knowing something about the world in which they live.

Young Jerphanion is left pretty much alone to construct his own ethics after being given the tools to do it. He is intelligent and educated and, either as a result of this or in spite of it, becomes quite cynical. During the war he is capable of heroics, but these seem to be reflex actions more than deeds committed out of a sense of moral duty.

After the war Jean-Pierre undertakes some apartment house construction with a friend whom he had met during his stint in the prison camp. The houses are built on soft ground because the friend had hired an irresponsible engineer to survey the land. Jean-Pierre, the friend, and the engineer are all indicted. Jean-Pierre is exonerated, however, of any criminal action when his friend skips town, leaving a note saying that he is at fault.

Throughout his war experiences and his nearly disastrous business adventure, Jerphanion seems rather impersonal and detached from the events that take place around him. When he finally learns that he will not be held responsible for the money people have invested in the apartment houses, he returns to Austria to visit the German friends who had
helped him escape. Here he finds out that some time after he had reached safety the Nazis had taken Zeigler and the son of the Horscher family at whose house he had found refuge.

It is these experiences, this coming face to face with the loss of two men he had loved and admired, that change Jerphanion from a sceptic into a man resigned to whatever life has to offer, placing little real value on anything.

Again, as in Le Dictateur and many of his other works, Romains is trying to show us the urgency of our need for some system by which we can differentiate where values are concerned, a system which will give life at least some theoretical meaning. This is the problem that faces us all since the last war; we must give our lives new meaning in an existence which so many claim to be absurd. The recent novels\(^3\) etch this problem clearly against a contemporary background.

\(^3\)The most recent of these novels, Le Besoin de voir clair, has not yet appeared. Its title, however, seems to indicate its connection with the problem of morality in contemporary society.
An accurate, detailed criticism of unanimist ethics as found in Romains' works would entail a voluminous study, but there are a few major points that can be covered in this chapter. Like any ethical system, *unanimisme* has to provide answers for all the questions being asked today and, like any ethical system, has a hard time doing so. It is some of these shortcomings that we want to point out.

To begin with we can ask a question that may seem quite out of place at this stage in our discussion of Romains' works. Is *unanimisme* an ethical system? Romains answers this question in his collection of essays, *Problèmes d'aujourd'hui*: "Je pourrais répondre qu'ici nous changeons de plan, que nous entrons dans l'ordre des jugements de valeur et des catégories morales; et que si, en fait, l'unanimisme peut donner naissance à une ou à des morales, il n'est pas essentiellement une attitude morale, et laisse à la raison toute liberté pour se prononcer sur la valeur et les droits respectifs des existences qu'il nous montre sous de nouveaux rapports."¹

It may easily be that **unanimisme** is not essentially a system of morals or even a moral attitude, but Romains is shunning responsibility that is most definitely his when he tries to remove any ethical implications from his philosophy. The fact that **unanimisme** leaves judgment on values to reason is a rather outstanding value judgment in itself. Certainly Romains in his writing does not explicitly attempt to give us an ethics which will replace Christianity or the other moral laws that Western Civilization has evolved. What he does do, though, is give us certain precepts in which an ethics is implicit and which, when carried to their necessary conclusions, result in the system we have tried to describe.

Romains also says that "**arrêter l'esprit dans un credo ou dans un système, c'est donc, de toute évidence, le condamner à perdre le contact avec la réalité.**"² This is often the greatest fault of systematic philosophy, that it loses itself in metaphysical problems and obscures the concrete and human aspects of a given issue in a cloud of abstractions. Romains leans to the opposite pole, where it becomes hard to abstract any general rules from the vast quantity of personal experience which constitutes his writing.

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It is difficult even to determine in Romains' work who are the "men of good will" which serve as a subject for the title of his roman-cycle, to ascertain who are the unanimes that speak for the author. Some of them, such as Jerphanion and Jallez, are quite easy to recognize if we know a little about the author's personal life. However, we meet over a thousand characters in the course of Les Hommes de bonne volonté, some very minor to be sure, who present us with a variety of attitudes that we might expect to find in such a complex of individuals.

Cuisenier points out that the key to the recognition of the "men of good will" lies in the preface to the huge work. Here we find, he says, an introduction not to "un traité de morale, à un ensemble de contes bleus, de récits édifiants qui récompensent la vertu et punissent le vice; mais à une peinture, aussi fidèle que possible, du monde moderne et qui l'exprime dans sa diversité, son foisonnement, son tumultueux devenir." Cuisenier assumes that we all know what virtue and vice are. He doesn't seem to recognize that this is one of the basic problems which every writer must deal with, even if it is only to re-word the definitions in modern terms. The title of Les Hommes de bonne volonté is a value judgment itself by nature of the word "bonne."

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There are moral implications to the work.

On top of our confusion in trying to pick out the "men of good will" in Romains' literature comes another question which provides perhaps the central conflict of our author's writings and of unanimisme in any form. This is the question of the individual versus society. There are at times in the earlier books of Romains very definite overtones of communism or at least of radical socialism, as in Le Bourg régénéré. However, the center of Romainsian unanimisme is Man rather than the State; the state's function is to serve society or man in general.

The greatest inconsistency between Romains' literature and the unanimisme which extols collective man and attributes the origin of human institutions to society rather than to any individual or group of individuals is that Romains' writings deal mainly with individuals. In Les Hommes de bonne volonté, in the plays such as Le Dictateur, Jean le Maufranc, and M. Le Trouhadec, it is the single personalities that carry the action along.

Romains is perfectly aware of the problem which the position of the individual in his works presents. Again in Problèmes d'aujourd'hui, he says, "Mais, me dira-t-on, si la connaissance de l'individu n'est pas appauvrie [in his works], la valeur, l'importance le sera. Et dans le monde actuel,

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\[\text{Cf. pp. 67-68.}\]
l'individu n'est-il pas déjà menacé d'assez de formes et de forces d'écrasement, pour que vous diminuiez encore ses titres à la résistance?"5 This is the crux of the problem: What is the importance of the individual in society? Romains counters the above question with the following statement: "Mais s'il y a antagonisme entre les deux conceptions, l'individualiste et l'unanimiste, il n'y en a aucun entre la vie individuelle et la vie unanime, et la connaissance de l'unanime n'exclut à aucun degré celle de l'individu."6

Most of us live in terms of the individual and are little able to govern ourselves according to a general view of man in which each person is no more than a cell in an organism. Individual differences make our lives interesting. The main complaint against unanimisme is that it tends to level these differences, in spite of Romains' protest that there is no antagonism between the individual life and the unanimist. Man's nobility is in part derived from the fact that he can and frequently does express a desire to be more than human, to set himself apart from society by magnifying his difference.

This tendency is the greatest obstacle for unanimisme. Man often wants to be alone and to cut off all communication

5Jules Romains, Problèmes d'aujourd'hui, p. 176.
6Ibid., p. 175.
with his fellows. Such a desire is the antithesis of unanimisme. "Car il faut admettre que l'isolement psychique est une tentation pour l'individu, peut-être la tentation suprême, celle qui se retrouve aux seins de toutes les autres, qui est la nourriture secrète de tous les vices—de même que le monadisme de Leibnitz est l'hérésie maîtresse—et il semble que la folie, dans quelques-unes de ses formes les plus tragiques, ne soit que la satisfaction effrénée et douloureuse de cette tendance." 7

It is absurd to say that a desire for solitude is the nourishment of all the vices unless we wish to consider some of the finest examples of man's greatness a propensity toward vice. The creation of a Beethoven symphony or a polio vaccine are results of a certain psychical isolation from the mass of humanity, of an elevation beyond the standards of the mean. Certainly men like Beethoven or Salk possess many of the traits of the "average man," but they also have a spirit which isolates them entirely from the bourgeois outlook of the "average man."

Romains might conceivably reply that these men who are so thoroughly individuals are simply "des condensations plus serrées de l'âme diffuse." In this we might concur, adding that he is doing nothing more than affirming the importance of the individual.

7Ibid., p. 176.
The idea of solitude gives us an opportunity for a final comparison with existentialism, a comparison which, however, we must be sure not to extend too far. The emphasis in existentialism is, of course, on the individual rather than on man in general and there is the expression of solitude's desirability in consolidating one's individuality. There is also in unanimisme a sense of despair that is much like that we find in so much of the literary treatment of existentialism, an awareness "de l'absurdité essentielle qui est la trame même de la vie."\(^8\) This despair stems from the very materialism on which Romains' philosophy rests. Without God life has no meaning, or rather we cannot find any meaning in life without reverting to Christian terms. Two wars have shown Romains that there is perhaps no point in trying to give meaning to life because the future is so uncertain. Jerphanion asks Jallez some time before the First World War, "Qu'est-ce qui nous attend?"\(^9\)

The principal value of Romains' literary achievement beyond its contribution of a philosophical concept is the fact that he makes us ask ourselves questions which are universally important. Indeed, what is to become of us?


CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Concluding a discussion of the ethical system in such a work as Romains' appears to be an imposing task because there is so much to sum up. In reality, however, barring a few exceptions, there is a consistency to his writing which enables us to provide that summary in one word, unanimisme. The twenty-seven volumes of Les Hommes de bonne volonté, the dozen or so plays, the quantity of poetry and miscellaneous works, all present a unified front. This unanimisme is not "une école littéraire, au sens où l'on entend ce mot de nos jours." Romains explains to us that "unanimisme tend bien plutôt à être une attitude général de tout l'être pensant, capable de donner les produits les plus divers—ou encore un style de l'esprit qui se manifeste dans toutes sortes d'œuvres."

The ethical precepts of unanimisme rest on Romains' notion of an âme diffuse which, universally extended, has its most perfect condensation in the form of man. From this

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1 Cf. 82-84.
3 Ibid., p. 157.
concept we have abstracted a general principle which governs morality and which pervades Romains' writings, the harmony of the general soul. In accordance with this principle, Romains places society above the group and the group above the individual on his scale of values.

In his writings Romains attempts to illustrate his philosophy through the lives of a great number of characters. This means of illustration gives to his ethical system a personal quality that is generally lost by other philosophers in metaphysical jargon.

Romains does not escape criticism entirely, though; there are many places where the critical reader and thinker will find reason to raise a protest against unanimisme. The most obviously disagreeable aspect of unanimist philosophy is its apparent diminution of the individual's importance in society. It is stranger still that Romains in his life and work has shown how important the influence of one man can be.
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