

THE INFLUENCE OF FALSE PHILOSOPHIES UPON CHARACTER AND CONDUCT.¹

Thoughtful men who read the various schools of philosophy are struck with one feature common to the erroneous theories. This is the lofty assumption by their authors of complete irresponsibility for results. Let the corollaries of their positions be destructive to either ethics or theology, that does not concern them. They say, philosophy has its supreme rights, let them prevail, whatever else perishes. This, of course, clearly implies the cool assumption by each author that his philosophy is the absolutely true one; which again implies that he believes himself infallible in it. Yet each contradicts the sound philosophers, and also each of his fellow heretics. Schwegler disdains all the great scholastics, pronouncing them incapable of real philosophy, because they avowed the supremacy of the Roman theology over all speculation. He evidently knows little about them, or he would have been aware how little their license of philosophic speculation was really curbed by pretended respect for Bible, councils, or popes. They could always evade their restraints by their distinction—that what was theologically true, might yet be philosophically false.

Now it is as plain as common sense can make it, that if there are any propositions of natural theology logically established, if any principle of ethics impregably grounded in man's universal, necessary judgments, if any infallible revelation, any philosophy that conflicts with either of these is thereby proven false. Now, I believe there is an infallible revelation. Therefore, unless I am willing to become infidel, the pretended philosopher who impinges against revelation has no claim on me to be even listened to, much less believed; unless he has proved himself infallible. There are also fundamental moral principles supported by the universal experience and consent of mankind, and regulating the laws of all civilized nations in all ages. All

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human history and God's Word testify, moreover, that the dominancy of these moral principles is the supreme end for which the universe exists, and for which Providence rules (read Butler's "Analogy"). The rule of God's final judgment is to be: everlasting good to the righteous, condemnation to the wicked. Here then is a criterion, as firmly established as the foundations of human reason and the pillars of God's throne. He who discards this criterion makes man a reasonless brute, and the world an atheistic chaos; that man has no longer any right to any philosophy, any more than a pig. For has he not discarded the essential conditions of all philosophy, intuitive reasons in man, and rational order in the series of causes and effects? We may, therefore, safely adopt this criterion as a touchstone for every philosophy—that if it unsettles conscience and God, it is erroneous.

I have now brought my reader to the eminent point of view from which he sees that the real tendency of all false philosophy must, in the end, be against good morals and religion. Lord Bacon has nobly said that all the lines of true philosophy converge upward to God. The ethical criterion, which is the final, supreme rule of God, mankind, and the universe, must be the apex of a true philosophy. The philosophic lines which curve aside from God and right morals must therefore, in the end, pervert character and conduct.

I shall be told that many speculators, whose philosophy I hold wrong, lived better lives, perhaps, than mine. A Spinoza, a Fichte, a Littré, a Stuart Mill, a Tyndall, were virtuous men; even Helvetius was an amiable neighbor, and an honest fiscal officer. Granted. Again, they resent my conclusion, as a bigot's insult, and a tyrannical bond upon philosophic freedom of thought. I reply: Nobody has any freedom rightfully to think against God and righteousness. I reply again: I have asserted this evil tendency, as only a tendency, in many, not always a present result. Personally, I am glad to give full credit to the good character of individual opponents. Again, the virtues of these errorists were really the fruits of the side influences and social habitudes of the very religion and philosophy which they tried to discard. Spinoza was reared by Jewish parents under monotheism and the ten commandments. Fichte, like Kant, was a candidate for the Lutheran ministry. Tyndall and Dra-

per were both sons of pious non-conformist ministers in England. But the real question is: What of the moral influence of their philosophies on the untrained and ignorant masses? Lastly, whatever the civic virtue of these gentlemen, none of them ever pretended to spiritual sanctity; which is the higher and only immortal phase of virtue. The character which regards man, the less, but disregards God, the greater, can not be wholly sound, and can not retain its partial soundness permanently. This is the inspired argument; and it is *a fortiori*:

“A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name” (Mal. i. 6).

I. A question concerning the influence of a false philosophy may be tried historically. Here are the facts. The national philosophy of China is that of Confucius, which, we are told, is simply modern agnosticism. The civil administration of China, and the domestic morals, are rotten with corruption. Lying, opium drunkenness, cruelty, bribery, cheating, infanticide are current. India has a great and ancient philosophy—pantheism. Her religions, Brahmanism and Buddhism, are pantheistic. When the British went there, despotism, bribery, polygamy, the suttee, infanticide, official plunderings, lying, and cheating were prevalent institutions. Oaths in court counted for nothing at all in administering justice. Thuggism was a religion. In Greece, the sounder philosophy was supplanted by that of the Epicureans, Sophists, Sceptics, and the New Academy. Then the glory departed, and Greece became vile enough for her slavery. Then Roman virtue also died, and a vast moral rottenness brought on the “decline and fall” of the empire. In the eighteenth century, France adopted the sensualist philosophy of Voltaire, and the selfish ethics of Helvetius. The fruit was the Reign of Terror. In Russia, the Nihilism of Bakunin is a philosophy, that, namely, of materialism and agnosticism; its products are anarchy, prostitution, and assassination. The same philosophy has shown us the same fruits in Paris, New York, and Chicago. Lastly, everybody sorrowfully admits the decadence of political, commercial, and domestic virtue in this country. We need not detail the melancholy instances, or paint the contrast between the Americans of to-

day and the America of Monroe and J. Q. Adams. Since the latter epoch, the philosophy of Comte, Stuart Mill, and Darwin has been rapidly gaining ground.

Shall I be told that these are only chance coincidences and not causal sequences? According to the inductive logic, sequences so regularly recurring raise a strong probability, if not a certainty, of a true causal relation. Again, could instances be adduced of the reverse order, where the incoming of a true philosophy resulted in a decay of morals, our opponents might have some offset to our facts: but there are no such cases.

II. And I now proceed to show that the sequences are causal, by disclosing in these false philosophies obvious causes of corruption.

Here an important fact should be brought forward. Man's moral nature is diseased. Some perversion of will is inherited by every man. Hence, farther moral decay is natural and easy; while the ascent back toward a higher virtue is arduous. Human souls are like a loaded train upon a down grade, whose slight inclination, below the horizontal, increases as it advances. The natural tendency of the train is to descend slowly at first, then with accelerated speed toward the final crash. A good brake (a true philosophy) is quite efficient to keep the train stationary; thus much of good it can do. But the best brake can not push the train up grade, while a false one, failing to lock the wheels, insures the descent and ruin of the train. Divine grace furnishes the only sure power for driving the train upward against nature.

I know that it is the trick of all erroneous philosophies to omit or deny this natural evil qualifying the moral disposition of man; to pretend not to see it, to philosophize as though righteousness were as natural to man as sin is. To this arrogance I shall not yield an inch. As a philosophic analysis, it is false; it dishonestly refuses to see a fact in human nature as plain and large as any other fact in psychology. This evil disposition now qualifying man's *essentia* is as clearly proved as any other fundamental instinct, faculty, or appetency. How do they find out that man, unlike the pig or the ox, is an esthetic creature? In the very same way, were they consistent, they should find out that he is by nature a sinning creature. All human experience, all expedients of legislation, all history, every candid con-

sciousness, confirm it. I say, therefore, plainly, that I shall postulate, throughout this discussion, this tendency in man toward moral decadence. It is a fact, and my argument shall be that every dogma in theology, philosophy, politics, or business, which lifts off the soul any form of moral restraint, tends to moral corruption. Let us see whether each of these false philosophies does not abolish some moral check.

The key-note of Buddhism is, that since feeble man's pursuit of the objects of his appetencies results in failure and pain, his true virtue is to annihilate all appetencies, and thus win *nirvana*. Then, of course, not only the animal, but the social appetencies—sympathy, benevolence, pity, friendship, conjugal, filial, and even parental love—must be expunged out of the philosopher's soul in order to make him holy, forsooth! For the appetencies set in motion by these affections are the occasions of far the deepest and most pungent griefs of human existence. That is to say: the Buddhist saint, in order to be perfect, must make himself a cold, inhuman villain, recreant to every social duty. Such, indeed, their own history makes their chief "hero of the faith," Prince Gautama, who begins his saintship by absconding like a coward, and forsaking all his duties to his wife, his son, his concubines, his parents, and his subjects. But they say he afterward showed sublime altruism by offering his body to be eaten by a hungry tigress, which had not succeeded in torturing and devouring enough antelopes to make milk for her cubs. Bah! methinks he would have done better to care for his own deserted human cub!

Once more, the scheme founds itself on an impossibility. Man can not by his volition expunge native appetencies, because these furnish the only springs of volitions. Can the child be its own father? Eating results in dyspepsia; therefore, not only cease eating absolutely, but cease being hungry. That is the recipe for the distress of dyspepsia! But first, it is impossible; second, were it done, all mankind would be destroyed in a few weeks. Common sense says that when a man goes to professing the impossible he begins to be a cheat. And this is the practical trait of Buddhism.

They say the doctrine of transmigration is a great moral check, teaching the Hindus to avoid sin by the fear of migrating at death into some more miserable animal form. Is it not a

better check to teach them that at death they will at once stand in judgment before an all-wise, just, and almighty Judge? May not that Buddhist doctrine also frequently incite living men to the fiercest brutality to animals, by the supposition that those animals are now animated by the souls of hated enemies?

The pantheism of China, India, and the moderns has common moral features. And the fatal influences are so plain that, while they are of vast and dreadful importance, they may be despatched in few words.

Then, first, when I act, it is God acting. You must not condemn me, whatever villainies I act, because that would be condemning God! Second, whatever men and devils act is but God acting. Then where is the possibility of God's having, in himself, any rational standard of right, by which to condemn our sins? Does God's will in himself judge and condemn his same will emitted in our actions? Or can that will be any moral standard at all which is thus self-contradictory? Such a moral ruler would be worse for the pulpit, than none at all—atheism less confusing and corrupting than pantheism. Third, God's existence and actions are necessary, if any actions are; but God acting, I have no free agency. But if not a free agent, I can not be justly accountable. Fourth, God is an absolute unit and unchangeable being, eternal and necessary. Therefore, if all happiness and misery in creatures are, at bottom, God's own affections, there can be no real difference between happiness and misery (Spinoza's own corollary). What will be the effect of this inference upon that excellent quality, mercy? The dogma must breed indifference to others' suffering, as much as stoicism under one's own. Its tendency is toward a hard-heartedness as pitiless as the tiger, the fire, and the tempest. Fifth, if God is all, there is but one substance in the universe. All other seeming personal beings are modal manifestations of the One. Hence, each creature is but a temporary phenomenon, a wavelet upon this ocean of being. Death, therefore, is a re-absorption into the One. It is *nirvana*, the absolute, eternal extinction of personality and consciousness—thus all pantheists. Then for this other reason there can be no personal responsibility, or reward, or punishment in the future. All the moral restraints of the doctrine of future judgment are as much swept away as by atheism.

We must be brief. Hartmann and Schopenhauer have shown that idealistic pantheism must lead to pessimism. But all our new-fangled philosophies seem to think pessimism a very naughty thing. It is their favorite bad word, with which to pelt a Calvinist, a conservative, or any other whom they dislike—to cry: “Oh, he is a pessimist!” But seriously, is pessimism a hopeful or healthy outlook for a good man? What room does it leave for the trio of supreme virtues: faith, hope, and charity? On this head it is enough to name the charge, often and justly made against the Darwinian doctrine of the “survival of the fittest,” and the fated extinction of the naturally weaker; that it tends to produce a pitiless hardheartedness. The inference is logical; look and see.

The old saw, “Extremes meet,” was never truer than it is of pantheism and atheism. The latter says: “There is no God at all”; the former: “Everything is God.” But the moral results of both are closely akin. In this, my indictment includes genuine Darwinism; for there is now no doubt that Dr. Darwin, like his most consistent pupils, Haeckel, Buchner, etc., believed that the doctrine ought to exclude both spirit and God. Their logic is consistent; for if all teleology is banished out of nature, and if that in man which thinks, feels, and wills is but an evolution of brute impulses, inherent in sensorial matter, there is no spiritual substance. We must have materialistic monism. Then every moral restraint arising out of the expectation of future responsibility, rewards, and punishments, is utterly swept away. Why should men conclude anything but, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die?” To borrow Carlyle’s rough phrasing: “If mine is a pig’s destiny, why may I not hold this ‘pig philosophy’?” Again, if I am but an animal refined by evolution, I am entitled to live an animal life. Why not? The leaders in this and the sensualistic philosophy may themselves be restrained by their habits of mental culture, social discretion and personal refinement (for which they are indebted to reflex Christian influences); but the herd of common mortals are not cultured and refined, and in them the doctrine will bear its deadly fruit.

Our opponents say that they can discard these old-fashioned restraints of theologic superstitions, and apply better and

more refined checks upon the coarser vices, viz., by showing men that the refined pleasures of temperance, esthetic tastes, culture, and altruism are higher and sweeter than the coarse pleasures of vice; and that the two classes are incompatible, so that the lower should be sacrificed for the higher. Yes; the world has known of that subterfuge from the days of Epicurus; and knows its worthlessness. Here is the fatal reply; and its logic is plain enough to be grasped by the coarsest: "*porcus de grege. Epicuri cute bene curata.*" Refined Mr. Epicurus, it depends entirely upon each man's natural constitutional tastes which class of pleasures shall be to him highest and sweetest. You say that to you music, art, letters are such; you were born so. I am so born that these are but "*caviare*" to me, while my best pleasures are gluttony, drink, lust, gambling, and prize-fights. The philosopher is answered.

Little space remains to me for unmasking the evil tendencies of other sensualistic, expediency, and utilitarian philosophies. The reader must take hints. Their common key-note is: no *a priori*, common, ruling intuitions of necessary, rational truths, either logical or moral. *Nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu.* Very well! Neither spirit nor God is cognized by any sense-faculty. Therefore, philosophy should know nothing about either. Secondly, the concept of the moral good, or virtuousness in actions, is not cognized by any sense-faculty. Is it seen as a fine color, smelled as a perfume, heard with the ears as a harmony, tasted with the mouth as a savor, felt with the fingers as satin or velvet? No. Then philosophy should know nothing about it. It should say there are no such things in the soul as distinctly ethical feelings; nothing but sensitive ones and their combinations. For mind can only feel as it sees; where it sees nothing it should feel nothing. Then there are two results; there is no science of ethics, nothing but a psychology of sensibilities, which being merely personal, there is no source for any altruism; it is a silly fiction. And, next, since the sensibilities are only moved by objective causes, there is no free agency. Look and see. Hume was logical in becoming fatalist and atheist. So Hobbes, the father of modern sensualism.

Finally, there is a modern class of professed religionists who seem to regard Mill, Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley as very

apostles of philosophy (why, we know not); and when thereafter proclaiming their agnosticism, add, that they still leave room for religion; that while religion has no standing-ground in philosophy, she may be admitted in the sphere of feeling. Our pious neighbors are very thankful! This is the "advanced thought" destined to sweep everything before it; and we are so grateful that it still leaves us a corner for our dear religion! But common sense says: "Thank you for nothing, Messrs. Agnostics. You have not left any corner for our precious religion. Better speak out as honest atheists. The universal law of mind is that it can only feel normally as it sees intelligently. Where there is no logical ground for credence, there should be no source for feeling."

In truth, they let me keep my religion at the price of turning fool!