

LECTURE X.

ETHICAL THEORIES.—Concluded.

SYLLABUS.

1. What the true theory of the moral Distinction and Obligation? Compare it with that of *Jouffroy*. Is the moral Distinction seen by the Reason, or by a distinct faculty?

Bp. Butler's Sermons, viz: Preface and Sermon on Rom. xii : 4, 5. Cousin, *Le Vrai, Le Beau, Le Bien*, Leçon 14th. Alexander's Moral Science, ch. 2-7, inclus., and ch. 10. Jouffroy, *Introduc. to Ethics*, Lect. 1 to 3. Thornwell, *Discourses on Truth*, i, ii.

2. Explain the moral Emotion involved with the moral judgment, and in connection criticize the schemes of Hutcheson and Brown.

Cousin as above. Alex. Mor. Sc., ch. 6 to 11. Dr. Thos. Brown, Lect. 81, 82. Jouffroy, Lect 19, 20.

3. State the true doctrine of the supremacy and authority of conscience

Butler's Sermon on Rom. ii : 14. Alexander, ch. 8, 9.

4. What qualities are necessary to moral agency and responsibility?

Alexander, ch. 13, 14. Dr. Thos. Brown, Lect. 73.

ARE moral distinctions intrinsic; and are they intuitively perceived? We have now passed in review all the several theories which answer, no; and found them

1. Moral Judgments are intuitive.

untenable. Hence, alone, we derive a strong probability that the affirmative is the true answer; e. g. All the chemists endeavour in vain to analyse a given material substance into some other known one; but fail. It is, therefore, assumed to be simple and original.

We must assume this of the moral sentiment; or else it is unintelligible how mankind ever became possessed of the moral idea. For every original and simple idea, whether sensitive or rational, with which our souls are furnished, we find an appropriate original power; and without this the idea could never have been entertained by man. Had man no eyes, he would have never had ideas of light and colours; no ear, he could never have had the idea of melody; no taste, he would forever have lacked the idea of beauty. So, if the idea of rightness in acts is not identical with that of truth, nor utility, nor benevolence, nor self-love, nor love of applause, nor sympathetic harmony, nor any other original sentiment; it must be received directly by an original moral power in the soul. To this, in the second place, consciousness testifies: the man who calmly and fully investigates his own mental processes, will perceive that his view and feeling of the rightness of some acts arise immediately in his mind; without any medium, except the comprehension of the real relations of the act; that their rise is unavoidable; and that their failure to rise would be immediately and necessarily apprehended by all, as a fundamental defect of his soul. There is, indeed, a great diversity in the estimation of the more complex details of moral questions. And man's

intuition of those distinctions is often disturbed by three causes, well stated by Dr. Brown—complexity of elements, habits of association, and prevalent passion. But, allowing for these, there is just the universal and immediate agreement in all sane human minds, which we expect to find in the acceptance of necessary first truths. In the fundamental and simple ideas of morals, men are agreed. And in the case of any other intuitions, we have to make precisely the same allowance, and to expect the same disturbing causes. These, with the remarks I made in refutation of Paley's objections, I think suffice to sustain the true theory on that point.

I hold, then, that as there is, in some propositions, (not in all—some are truisms, many are meaningless, and some so unknown as to be neither affirmed nor denied,) the element of truth or falsehood, original, simple, incapable of analysis or definition in simpler terms, and ascertainable by the mind's intellection; so there is in actions, of the class called moral, an intrinsic quality of rightness or wrongness, equally simple, original, and incapable of analysis; and, like simple truth, perceived immediately by the inspection of the reason. This quality is intrinsic; they are not right merely because God has commanded, or because He has formed souls to think so, or because He has established any relation of utility, beneficence, or self-interest therewith. But God has commanded them, and formed these relations to them, because they are right. Just as a proposition is not true because our minds are so constructed as to apprehend it such; but our minds were made by God to see it so, because it is true.

But understand me; I do not assert that all moral distinctions in particular acts are intuitively seen, or necessarily seen. As in propositions, some have primary, and some deductive truth; some are seen to be true without premises, and some by the help of premises; so, in acts having moral qualities, the rightness or wrongness of some is seen immediately, and of some deductively. In the latter, the moral relation of the agent is not immediately seen, but the moral judgment is mediated only by the knowledge of some other truths. If these truths are not known, then the moral quality of the act is not obvious. From this simple remark it very clearly follows, that if the mind's belief touching these truths, which are premises to the moral judgment, be erroneous, the moral judgment will also err. Just as in logic, so here; false premises, legitimately used, will lead to false conclusions. And here is the explanation of the discrepancies in moral judgments, which have so confused Ethicks.

2. But there are several writers of eminence, who, while they substantially, yea nobly, uphold the originality and excel-

lence of man's moral distinctions, err, as we think, in the details of their analysis. A moment's inquiry into their several departures from my theory, will best serve to define and establish it.

(a) Seeing that the moral distinction is intrinsic; what is the faculty of the soul by which it is apprehended? (Bear in mind a faculty is not a limb of mind, but only a name we give to one phase or sort of its processes.) Does it apprehend it by its reason; or by a distinct moral faculty? Says Dr. Hutcheson, an English writer: By a distinct, though rational perceptive faculty, which he names, the moral sense; and describes as an internal sense—i. e., a class of processes perceptive, and also exhibiting sensibility. Says Dr. Alexander; The perceptive part of our moral processes, is simply a judgment of the reason. It is but an intellection of the understanding, like any other judgment of relations, except that it immediately awakens a peculiar emotion, viz: the moral. Now, it might be plausibly said that the reason is concerned only with the judgment of truth; and we have strenuously repudiated the analysis which reduces the moral distinction to mere truth. But it should rather be said, that the proper field of the reason is the judgment of relations; truth existing in propositions is only one class. There seems no ground to suppose that the moral judgment, so far as merely intellective of the distinction, is other than a simple judgment of the reason; because, so far as we know, wherever reason is, there, and there only, are moral judgments. 2d. If the faculties were two, the one, we might rationally expect, might sometimes convict the other of inaccuracy, as the memory does the reason, and *vice versa*. 3d. The identity of the two processes seems strongly indicated by the fact, that if the reason is misled by any falsehood of view, the moral sentiment is infallibly perverted to just the same extent. The moral motive is always a rational one. Some rational perception of the truth of a proposition predicating relation, is necessary, as the occasion of its acting, and the object of a moral judgment. The reason why brutes have not moral ideas, is that they have not reason. In short, I see nothing gained by supposing an inward perceptive faculty called moral sense, other than the reason itself.

(b.) Next we notice the question: at what stage of its perceptions of the relations of acts, does the reason see the moral distinction? In each separate case immediately, as soon as the soul is enough developed to apprehend the relations of the particular act? No; answers Jouffroy; but only after a final generalization is accomplished by the reason.

His theory is: 1. That in the merely animal stage of existence, the infant acts from direct, uncalculating instinct alone. The rational idea of its own natural good is the consequence, not origin, of the

Jouffroy's Scheme.

experienced pleasure following from the gratification of instinct. 2. Thus experience presents the occasions upon which the reason gives the general idea of personal good; and the motives of self-calculation begin to act. But 3d. The child also observes similar instincts, resulting in its fellow-men in natural enjoyment to them; and as it forms the general idea of its own natural good (satisfaction of the whole circle of instincts to greatest attainable degree) as its properest personal end, reason presents the general truth, that a similar personal end exists for this, that, the other, and every fellow-man. Here, then, arises a still more general idea; the greatest attainable natural good of all beings generally; the "absolute good," or "universal order;" and as soon as this is reached, the reason intuitively pronounces it the moral good; to live for this, is now seen to be man's proper end; and rightness in acts is their rational tendency to that end. This is rather a subtile and ingenious generalization of the result of our moral judgments, than a correct account of their origin. This generalization, as made by the opening mind, might suggest the notion of symmetry, or utility as belonging to the "absolute order," but surely that of obligatoriness is an independent element of rational perception! If the idea of rightness and obligation had never connected itself in the opening mind with any specific act having a tendency to man's natural good, how comes the mind to apprehend the universal order as the obligatory moral end, when once the reason forms that abstraction? It seems to me that the element of moral judgment must be presupposed, to account for the result. Again; the supposed process is inconsistent with a correct idea of the generalizing process. The process does not transmute, but only colligates the facts which it ranks together. The general attributes which the mind apprehends as constituting the connotation of the general term, are precisely the attributes which it saw to be common in all the special cases grouped together. So that, if a moral order had not been already apprehended by the reason in the specific acts, the mere apprehension of the universal order would not produce the conviction of its morality. Experience would strengthen the moral idea. But usually the most unhackneyed have it most vividly. But it is right to say, that Jouffroy, notwithstanding this peculiarity of his theory, deserves the admiration of his readers, for the beauty of his analyses, and the general elevation of his views.

(c) The ethical lectures of Dr. Thomas Brown, of Edinburgh, are marked by great acuteness, and nobility of general tone; and he has rendered gallant service in refuting the more erroneous theories. He makes moral distinctions original and authoritative; and yet allows the reason only a secondary function in them. The whole result of this analysis is this: when certain actions (an

Sentimental Scheme
of Dr. Thomas Brown.

action is nothing more than the agent acting) are presented, there arises immediately an emotion, called, for want of a more vivid term, moral approbation, without any previous condition of self-calculation, judgment of relation in the reason, &c. This immediate emotion constitutes our whole feeling of the rightness, obligation, meritoriousness, of the agent. As experience gathers up and recollects the successive acts which affect us with the moral emotion, reason makes the generalization of them into a class; and thus, derivatively forms the general idea of virtue. Man's moral capacity, therefore, is, strictly, not a power of intellection, but a sensibility. The reason only generalizes into a class, those acts which have the immediate power of affecting this sensibility in the same way. And Brown's system deserves yet more than Adam Smith's, which he so ably refutes, to be called the Sentimental System. The moral sentiment is with him strictly an instinctive emotion.

Now, it does not seem to me a valid objection, to say with Jouffroy, that thus, the moral emotion is made one among the set of our natural instincts: and there no longer appears any reason why it should be more dominant over the others out of its own domain, than they over it; (e. g., more than taste, or resentment, or appetite.) For the very nature of this moral instinct, Brown might reply, is, that it claims all other susceptibilities which have moral quality, are in its own domain.

The truer objections are: that this notion does not square with the analogies of the soul. In every case, our emotions arise out of an intellection. This is true, in a lower sense, even of our animal instincts. It is perception which awakens appetites. It is the conception of an intent to injure, which gives the signal to our resentment, even when it arises towards an agent non-moral. And in all the more intellectual emotions, as of taste, love, moral complacency, the view of the understanding, and that alone, evokes the emotion in a normal way. The soul feels, because it has seen. How else could reason rule our emotions? Surely this is one of our most important distinctions from brutes, that our emotions are not mere instincts, but rational affections. Note, especially too, that if our moral sentiments had no element of judgment at their root, the fact would be inexplicable, that they never, like all other instinctive emotions, come in collision with reason. Again: Dr. B. has very properly shown, in overthrowing the selfish systems of human action, that our instincts are not prompted by self-interest. He seems, therefore, to think that when he makes the moral emotion an instinctive sensibility, he has done all that is needed to make it disinterested. But an action is not, therefore, morally disinterested, because it is not self-interested. Then would our very animal appetites, even in infancy, be vir-

Objection. 1st. Soul always sees, in order to feel. 2d. No virtue without rational, impersonal motive. 3d. There would be no uniform standard.

tues! The truth is: in instinctive volitions, the motive is personal to the agent; but not consciously so. In selfish volitions the motive is personal to the agent; and he knows it. Only when the motive is impersonal, and he knows it, is there disinterestedness, or virtue. Last; if Brown's theory were correct, moral good would only be relative to each man's sensibility; and there would be no uniform standard. An act might be good to one, bad to another, just as it presented itself to his sensibility; as truly as in the sense of the natural good; one man calls oysters good; and another considers oysters bad. Whereas the true doctrine is, that moral distinctions are as intrinsic in certain acts, as truth is in certain propositions: and eternal and immutable. Even God sees, and calls the right to be right, because it so: not *vice versa*. Dr. Brown foresees this; and attempting to rebut it, is guilty of peculiar absurdity. Why says he, does it give any more intrinsic basis for moral distinctions in the acts (or agents acting) themselves, to suppose that our cognizance of them is by a rational judgment, than to say, with him, that it is in the way they naturally affect a sensibility in us? The capacity of having the intuitive judgment is itself but a sort of rational sensibility to be affected in a given way; and, in either case, we have no ground for any belief of an intrinsic permanence of the relation or quality perceived, but that our Maker made us to be affected so! Thus, he betrays the whole basis of morals and truth, to a sweeping skepticism. Does not intuition compel us to believe that reason is affected with such and such judgments, because the grounds of them are actual and intrinsic in the objects? Dr. Brown goes to the absurd length of saying, that the supposed relations ascertained by reason herself, are not intrinsic; and exist nowhere, except in the perceiving reason! e. g., the relation of square of hypotenuse. Says he: were there nowhere a perceiving mind comprehending this relation, the relation would have no existence, no matter how many right-angled triangles existed! Is not this absolute skepticism? Is it not equivalent to saying that none of the perceptions of reason, (i. e. human beliefs,) have any objective validity? There need be no stronger refutation of his theory, than that he should acknowledge himself driven by it to such an admission.

The correct view, no doubt, is this: that our simplest moral states consist of two elements: a judgment of the understanding, or rational perception of the moral quality in the act; and an immediate, peculiar emotion, called approbation, arising thereupon, giving more or less warmth to the judgment. In our moral estimates of more complex cases, just as in our intellectual study of derived truths, the process may be more inferential, and more complex. It has been often, and justly remarked, that the parallel between the rational æsthetic functions of the

The moral State complex. Illustrated by Taste.

soul, and its moral functions, is extremely instructive. Psychology teaches us that rational taste (for instance, the pleasure of literary beauty in reading a fine passage,) consists of a judgment, or cluster of judgments, and a peculiar emotion immediately supervening thereon. The sentiment of taste is, then, complex, consisting of an action of the intelligence and a motion of the sensibility. The former is cause; the latter is consequence. After the excitement of the sensibility has wholly waned, the judgment which aroused it remains fixed and unchanged. Now, it is thus with our moral sentiments. A rational judgment of the intrinsic righteousness or wrongness of the act immediately produces an emotion of approbation, or disapprobation, which is original and peculiar. The whole vividness of the sentiment may pass away; but the rational judgment will remain as permanent as any judgment of truth in propositions. The great distinction between the æsthetic and ethical actions of the soul, is that the latter carries the practical and sacred perception of obligation.

Conscience, as I conceive, is but the faculty of the soul

3. Conscience, just described, acting with reference to our
 what? Obligation, own moral acts, conceived as future, done, or
 what? remembered as done. When we conceive
 the wrongness of an act as done by ourselves, that judgment
 and emotion take the form of self-blame, or remorse; wherein
 the emotion is made more pungent than in other cases of
 disapprobation, by our instinctive and our self-calculating self-
 love, one or both. So of the contrasted case. And the merit
 of an action, looked at as past, is no other than this judgment
 and feeling of its rightness, which intuitively connects the idea
 of title to reward with the agent. i. e. Our ideas of merit and
 demerit are intuitions arising immediately upon the conception
 of the rightness or wrongness of the acts; connecting natural
 good or evil with moral good or evil, by an immediate tie.
 Our ideas of desert of reward or punishment, therefore, are
 not identical with our sentiments of the rightness or wrongness
 of acts, as Dr. Brown asserts, but are intuitively consequent
 thereon. Dr. B. also asserts, as also Dr. Alexander, that our
 notion of obligation is no other than our intuitive judgment of
 rightness in acts, regarded as prospective. Therefore, it is
 useless and foolish to raise the question: "Why am I obliged,
 morally, to do that which is right?" it is as though one should
 debate why he should believe an axiom. This is substantially
 correct. But when they say: whatever is right, is obligatory,
 and *vice versa*, there is evidently a partial error. For there is
 a limited class of acts, of which the rightness is not propor-
 tioned to the obligation to perform them; but on the contrary,
 the less obligation, the more admirable is the virtue of doing
 them gratuitously. Such are some acts of generosity to
 unworthy enemies: and especially God's to rebel man. That

God was under no obligation to give His Son to die for them, is the very reason His grace in doing so is so admirable! Obligation, therefore, is not always the correlative of rightness in the act, but it is, always, the correlative of a right in the object. This is the distinction which has been overlooked—i. e., a multitude of our acts have a personal object, God, self, a man, or mankind, one or more; and the conscience in many cases apprehends, not only that the act would be right, but that such are the relations of ourselves to the object, that he has a right, a moral title to have it done, in such sense that not only the doing of the opposite to him, but the withholding of the act itself, would be wrong. In every such case, the notion of obligation arises. And that, stronger or weaker, whether the object's right be perfect or imperfect.

The most important thing, however, for us to observe, is that every sane mind intuitively recognizes this moral obligation. The judgment and emotion we call conscience, carries this peculiarity over all other states of reason or instinct; that it contains the imperative element. It utters a command, the rightness of which the understanding is necessitated to admit. Other motives, rational or instinctive, may often (alas!) overcome it in force; but none of them can dispute its authority. It is as impossible for the mind, after having given the preference to other motives, to think its choice therein right, as it is to think any other intuition untrue. Conscience is the Maker's imperative in the soul.

Hence, it must follow, that the dictate of conscience must always be obeyed; or sin ensues. But conscience is not infallible, as guided by man's fallible understanding: it is clear, from both experience and reason, that her fiat may be misdirected. In that case, is the act innocent, or wrong? If you say the latter, you seem involved in a glaring paradox; that to obey would be wrong; and yet to disobey would be wrong. How can both be true? If you say the former, other absurdities would follow. 1st. Truth would seem to be of no consequence in order to right; and the conscience might just as well be left uninformed, as informed, so far as one man is personally concerned therein. 2d. Each man's view of duty would be valid for him; so that there might be as many clashing views of duty, as men, and each valid in itself; so that we should reach such absurdities as these: A has a right to a given object, which B has an equal right to prevent his having; so that B has a moral right to do to A what is to him a moral wrong! 3d. Many of the most odious acts in the world, reprobated by all posterity, as the persecutions of a Saul, or a Dominic, would be justified, because the perpetrators believed they were doing God service.

Imperative of Conscience is intuitive.

Must conscience, misguided, be obeyed.

The solution of this seeming paradox is in this fact: that God has not given man a conscience which is capable of misleading him, when lawfully and innocently used. In other words, while lack of knowledge necessary to perceive our whole duty may often occur, (in which case it is always innocent to postpone acting,) positive error of moral judgment only arises from guilty haste or heedlessness, or indolence, or from sinful passion or prejudice. When, therefore, a man sincerely believes it right in his conscience to do what is intrinsically wrong, the wrongness is not in the fact that he obeyed conscience, (for this abstractly is right,) but in the fact that he had before, and at the time, perverted conscience by sinful means.

We intuitively apprehend that all agents are not proper subjects of moral approbation or disapprobation. Hence, the question must be settled: what are the elements essential to moral responsibility! This can be settled no otherwise than by an appeal to our intuitions. For instance: we may take an act of the form which would have moral quality, if done by a moral agent — e. g., inflicting causeless bodily pain; and attributing it to successive sorts of agents, from lower to higher, ascertain what the elements are, which confer responsibility. As we walk through a grove, a dead branch falls on our heads; we feel that resentment would be absurd; much more disapprobation; the thing is dead. We walk near our horse, he wantonly kicks or bites. There is a certain type of anger; but it is not moral disapprobation; we feel still, that this would be absurd. Here, there is sensibility and will in the agent: but no conscience or reason. We walk with our friend; he treads on our corns and produces intolerable pain; but it is obviously unintentional. We pass through a lunatic asylum; a maniac tries to kill us. Here is sensibility, free-will, intention; but reason is dethroned. In neither of these cases should we have moral disapprobation. A stronger man takes hold of our friend, and by brute force makes him strike us; there is no anger towards our friend; he is under co-action. We learn from these various instances, that free-agency, intention, and rationality are all necessary, to constitute a man a responsible moral agent.

4. What constitutes
Moral agency.