

# SENSUALISTIC PHILOSOPHY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ISSUE STATED.

**E**NGLISHMEN and Americans frequently use the word "sensualist" to describe one in whom the animal appetites are predominant. We shall see that it is a just charge against the Sensualistic philosophy, that it sometimes inclines its advocates to this dominion of beastly lusts. But it is not from this fact that we draw the phrase by which we name it. The Sensualistic philosophy is that theory, which resolves all the powers of the human spirit into the functions of the five senses, and modifications thereof. It is the philosophy which finds all its rudiments in sensation. It not only denies to the spirit of man all innate ideas, but all innate powers of originating ideas, save those given us from our senses. It consequently attempts to account for every general and every abstract judgment, as an empirical result of our sensations, and consistently denies the validity of any *à priori* notions. Such was the philosophy which was dominant in France at the close of the eighteenth century; and which, untaught by the frightful results it produced there, is now striving again to establish its dominion among us towards the close of the nineteenth age.

The great men who, in France, raised again the

standard of a truer philosophy, *Maine de Biran*, *Royer Collard*, and later, *Victor Cousin*, were called by contrast "spiritualists." Their characteristic doctrines were the distinct assertion of a separate, spiritual substance in man, soul, spirit, or mind, a simple monad in each person, immaterial, and contrasted with all material masses in its essential attributes; the relation of all organs of sensation as instruments to this intelligent spirit; its capacity of existing and acting after separation from the body; and the innate power of this substance to originate for itself, upon occasion of the particular ideas presented by sensations, valid abstract notions, valid primitive judgments of reason and conscience, and free desires and volitions. I should be perfectly willing to retain this name. And none, perhaps, could be found more appropriate, had not a coarse imposture, which has very recently become current, so usurped and defiled the word "spiritualism," as to endanger confusion of ideas; and had not some earlier writers perverted the term to express the false theory of the pure idealist. Let it then be understood, that the philosophy which I maintain against the Sensualistic, or exclusively empirical, and which has just been described, shall be called the Rational. It holds that the human intelligence is not a bundle of organs, but a pure spirit; it asserts for man a Reason, and not merely senses and their modifications.

- ✓ In the eighteenth century, the Sensualistic philosophy appeared under many phases; it does so again in the nineteenth. But it always has its characteristic traits, and carries its own dangers to truth, virtue, and happiness. One attempt of this criticism of it will be to show that it always involves tendencies to erroneous logic, vitiating even the physical sciences, which it is wont to claim as its peculiar clients; to universal scepticism; to idealism; to nihilism; to the obliterating of moral distinctions, and the destruction of moral responsibility;

to materialism ; to a denial of the supernatural ; and thus, to atheism. Let us be understood : we do not charge that every Sensualistic philosopher holds to all these results, or approves them ; we charge that they are all latent in the system, and that one or another of them is continually making itself patent in the outgrowth of this philosophy. Of this, one of the most instructive proofs is the historical ; for there "the tree is known by its fruits." We shall, therefore, prepare the way for the stricter criticism, by a brief, but perspicuous review of the chief movements of Sensualism, especially in our own age.

The chief point which I aim to make, however, in this introduction, is my emphatic protest against the assumption, now so common among the Sensualistic school, that no metaphysic is valid. All who are tinctured with "Positivist" errors, continually exclaim, "No psychology ; away with metaphysics ! Only the phenomenal is true !" They wish to give no heed to the testimony of consciouness ; they would ignore all subjective first truths, and confine true science to what sensations reveal, alone. They limit the light of "Experience," that safest of guides, to their experience of the objective. Now to this injustice we "give place by subjection ; no, not for an hour." For, what is any science but a system of cognitions ? But a system of cognitions must imply principles of cognition of some sort ; and what are these but a metaphysic ? These physical Positivists cheat themselves, in supposing that by ignoring separate spiritual substance with *à priori* laws, they can get rid of this truth. Let the something which knows be a spirit or a group of organs, one must have principles of cognition, all the same, in order to have systematized thought. Nothing can be more obvious than that the successful use of any implement implies some knowledge of its qualities and powers. And this is as true of the mind as of any other imple-

ment. It is simply impossible that one can construct any other branch of knowledge, without having some science of psychology and logic of his own. In other words, he must have accepted some laws of thought *a priori*, in order to construe his own thoughts. If he has not done it in words, he must have done it in fact. This is true of all common men. When the mechanic assumes, without present experiment, that a new steel blade will cut wood, has he not assumed two metaphysical truths; the presence of the same substance under the same properties, and the validity of his own memory concerning past experiments? When the gourmand argues, "I may not eat minced pies to-night for my supper, because they gave me frightful dreams last night," has he not posited a logical law of the reason? Every man is a virtual psychologist and logician (unless he is idiotic); he cannot trust his own mind, except as he believes in some powers and properties of his mind; these beliefs constitute, for him, his metaphysic. Even the Positivist, of course, has his psychology, although he repudiates it in words. And this is the Sensualistic psychology. No writers, of any school, go farther than the leaders of the Sensualistic philosophy, in speculations which have every trait which is expressed by the word "metaphysical" when used by the people in an evil sense. Nowhere on earth can writings be found more psychological, (that is, fuller of a false psychology,) more abstruse, more subtle, more obscure or more illogical and unpractical, than those of the most recent leaders of this school. All these philosophers love to applaud the inductive laws of Lord Bacon, and to contrast them with the unprofitableness of metaphysics. But Bacon does not undertake to establish physical laws; he proposes to settle those principles for reasoning from facts of experience, by which any and every physical law are to be established. In a word, it is metaphysics; only, it is true *reality*:

physics. So, nothing is easier for the perspicuous reader, than to take any treatise of any votary of the Sensualistic philosophy, and point to instances upon every page, where he makes a virtual appeal to some principle of metaphysics. Says this writer, concerning some theory of accounting for a group of phenomena: "This is not valid, because it is only hypothesis." But what, I pray, is the dividing line between hypothesis and demonstrative induction? And why is the former, without the latter, invalid? The answer is, metaphysics. "The *post hoc* does not necessarily prove the *propter hoc*." Tell us, why? It cannot be told, without talking metaphysics. "Nothing," says the Positivist, "is demonstrable except what is experienced in sensations." There is, then, one *à priori* principle, at least, of the human intelligence; this namely, that the intuition of sense-perception is valid, if all other intuitive judgments are baseless. For it is only by assuming the validity of that intuitive judgment at the outset, that the Positivist ever learned anything valid by sense-perception.

But above all do we insist, that the facts given by our subjective consciousness shall be admitted into the rank of experimental evidences. They shall be granted to be even more empirical, when observed with due care, than any objective empirical knowledge. The Sensualistic philosophers will be compelled to look them in the face, and to admit their force. For first, in claiming this, we are really pursuing the very process which they profess to approve. We observe and compare the experienced facts of consciousness, and make inductions from them. And second, we show that it is only by recognizing the validity of the facts of consciousness, that any one can receive the testimony of sensation. If I do not know certainly, that there is a conscious, intelligent self, who sees with the eyes, still less can I know that the thing seen by that self has any reality. If I am not

certain beforehand, that the self who saw the landscape last year is the self who recollects it now, still less have I any assurance that memory is not playing me false, in seeming to reproduce the same conception formerly perceived by my eyes.