

Report on the Recent Literature of Ethics and Related Topics in America

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REPORT ON THE RECENT LITERATURE OF ETHICS AND
RELATED TOPICS IN AMERICA.

1. PHILOSOPHY AND PHYSICAL SCIENCE. An Inaugural Address, delivered March 1, 1892, as Professor of Philosophy in Adelbert College of the Western Reserve University. By Matoon Monroe Curtis, Ph.D. Cleveland, Ohio, 1892. Pp. 53, 16mo.
2. THE RELATION OF PHILOSOPHY TO PSYCHOLOGY AND TO PHYSIOLOGY. By Joseph Le Conte. Read before the Philosophical Society of Washington, January 30, 1892. Reprinted from the Bulletin of the Society, vol. xii. pp. 19-38. Washington, 1892.
3. THE ORIGIN OF PLEASURE AND PAIN. By Dr. Herbert Nichols. Reprinted from the Philosophical Review, vol. i.: No. 4, pp. 403-432; No. 5, pp. 518-534.
4. PLEASURE-PAIN AND SENSATION. By Henry Rutgers Marshall. Reprinted from the Philosophical Review, vol. i. pp. 625-648.
5. THE CONCEPT OF LAW IN ETHICS. Thesis accepted by the Faculty of Cornell University for the Ph.D. Degree. By Ferdinand Courtney French, Fellow in the Sage School of Philosophy of Cornell University. Providence, R.I.: Preston & Rounds, 1892. Pp. 51, 8vo.
6. THE VALUE OF A STUDY OF ETHICS. An Inaugural Lecture. By James Gibson Hume, Ph.D., Professor of Ethics and the History of Philosophy in the University of Toronto. Toronto: The J. E. Bryant Company (Limited), 1891. Pp. 24, 8vo.
7. POLITICAL ECONOMY AND ETHICS. Same author and publisher. 1892. Pp. 40.
8. OUR MORAL NATURE. Being a Brief System of Ethics. By James McCosh, D.D., LL.D., Ex-President of Princeton College. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892. Pp. vi, 53, 8vo.
9. PRACTICAL ETHICS. By William Dewitt Hyde, D.D., President of Bowdoin College. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1892. Pp. xii, 203.

1. The Professor of Philosophy at Adelbert College of the Western Reserve University, in his inaugural address, seems to show himself as one intending to bring into the world of his studies not peace, but a sword. Philosophy, he says (p. 3), is to-day in no congenial circumstances. "By Theology and Physical Science, her natural children and associates, she is often reproached, and sometimes severely handled." The public enjoy the brawls thus occasioned. Our author, for his part, hopes to maintain "for philosophy its central position among the disciplines, and its fundamental importance in all intellectual culture." As against theology, Professor Curtis insists that "the human reason protests against its own elimination or expulsion from the concerns of life" (p. 5), and that the "nature of Protestantism tends to lose itself in rational and empirical philosophy, and to surrender the claim that the Bible is the ultimate authority." As against those partisans of the exclusive importance of physical science whose

"ire" is aroused by a "reference to ontology or metaphysics" (p. 6), the author maintains that "Physical science . . . is in its main principles and features metaphysical and speculative." In philosophy, and, in fact, in all human thinking, "the subjective or introspective method" is to be paramount. Upon the basis of such considerations the author goes on, in a cheerfully pugnacious fashion, to attack a number of the most significant modern doctrines, in particular the doctrine of organic evolution as commonly received, and to sketch his own philosophical programme. The lecture has a decidedly controversial but also a very manly tone. The opinions expressed are frequently rather entertaining as curiosities of our period of transition than important as contributions to reflective insight; but, on the whole, the lecture awakens a decided interest as to the possible future outcome of Professor Curtis's thinking, which has pretty evidently not reached a very permanent stage.

2. Complete maturity, on the other hand, is sure to be indicated on every page of Professor Le Conte's publications. The present address, delivered before the Philosophical Society of Washington, brings together once again, with the author's well-known literary and reflective skill, the results of his life-work so far as they seem to him to bear upon the general definition of the relations between philosophy and psychology. A considerable portion of the paper is taken up with discussing the fundamental differences between the brute and the human mind. Professor Le Conte is already on record as an evolutionist who still recognizes the occurrence of great and stupendously significant transitions in the evolutionary series. It is in man's "spiritual nature," in his reason, in his ethical insight, in his reflective power, in his freedom of will, that Professor Le Conte places the great contrast between his mind and the minds of animals. In consequence, the line of distinction between philosophy and psychology is drawn very wide and deep. Psychology, as a science of the mere natural history of mind, "will eventually be identified with nerve-physiology; but philosophy, which is the science of free, self-conscious spirit, belongs to man alone. There is a psychology in man, too, for man is also an animal; but all the activities of self-conscious, self-determining spirit, such as abstract thought, unselfish love, and free moral choice, and all that flow from these, belong to philosophy. There is, therefore, a comparative psychology, as there is a comparative anatomy and a comparative physiology, and these comparative sciences include man also as a subject-matter; but there is no comparative philosophy." Readers of Professor Le Conte's well-known and most admirable monograph on "Evolution and its Relations to Religious Thought" will recognize the drift and significance of these views. One may disagree; but Professor Le Conte is a man not easily to be disposed of in a critical note.

3 and 4. The attention of students of the psychological aspect of ethics ought to be drawn to the interesting discussion now going on in the pages of our contemporary, *The Philosophical Review*, on the nature and psychological basis of pleasure and pain. The question of the relation of these our "taskmasters"—as Bentham once called them—to the will can never be finally settled until the psychology of the pleasure-pain group of experiences is in a far better condition than at present. Dr. Herbert Nichols, much impressed by the importance of the physiological doctrine of "specific energies," has been led, upon the basis of certain recent experimental

work of Goldscheider's, as well as upon the basis of observations of his own, to advance the view that there pretty certainly do exist special "pain-nerves" (*i.e.*, sensory nerves which, when excited, give as their specific sensations only pains), and that there also exist, less demonstrably, but very probably, special "pleasure-nerves." With considerable expository skill, and with a wide control of the physiological facts, Dr. Nichols accordingly argues that in the original pleasures and pains, if we could now get at them, we should have, not mere "qualia of other mental contents" or "tones" of our experience, but, at bottom, true sensations, capable of being experienced apart from all other sensations, just as colors are capable of being experienced apart from tones. To be sure, these pleasure and pain experiences have now become associated, often indissolubly, with others, and so in mature life they come to appear as mere colorings of our whole experience. But the physiological basis of all our "tones of feeling" are our pleasure- and pain-nerves (whence come the original sensations), together with the associative apparatus of central organs, whereby the excitements of these nerves get interwoven with all the rest of our nervous life, and get their actual and highly-complex relations to our "desires." The speculations on the evolutionary aspects of his theory which fill Dr. Nichols's second paper seem to the present reviewer very questionable; and the general thesis of both the papers so far published is still far from being demonstrated. On the other hand, the papers are certainly important, and, in case further experiment should tend to confirm and extend this "sensation" theory, they may prove epoch-marking. It is much to have risked so noteworthy an hypothesis in so obscure a region of psychology.

In answer to Dr. Nichols, Mr. Henry Rutgers Marshall, author of several valuable papers in *Mind* upon "Pleasure, Pain, and Æsthetics," briefly restates, in No. 4 of our list, his own very different hypothesis as to the physiological basis of the feelings in question, and sets forth at some length several objections to the argument of Dr. Nichols as thus far revealed. The "pain-nerves" of Goldscheider and Nichols prove, indeed, to be serious stumbling-blocks in the way of the opponent, whose hypothesis to account for these curious phenomena is itself obviously so far very questionable. But, on the other hand, the more theoretical and speculative parts of Dr. Nichols's doctrine invite rather telling criticism, which Mr. Marshall utters with the greatest courtesy of manner and with interesting vigor and skill. A suspension of judgment as to the theory of pleasure and pain is certainly called for, and it is to be hoped that the next writer of a text-book of ethics will bear this fact well in mind.

5. Dr. French's thesis for the doctorate is composed of four chapters. The first three are historical, and deal respectively with the "Concept of Law" in ancient, in mediæval, and in modern ethics. The fourth chapter sets forth, in some twelve pages, the author's view of the nature of the moral law, its source, ends, and motive. The historical part of the thesis is good, although, in view of the now easily accessible literature, whose careful use Dr. French very constantly acknowledges, this sort of work has been a good deal shorn of its greater difficulties. But Dr. French is an industrious expositor, and many of his presentations of doctrine are well worth reading. The closing and positive chapter is hurried and disappointing. The last sentence of the thesis runs, "That our moral nature should demand of us an absolute self-sacrifice seems impossible to

believe." Schopenhauer skilfully and deliberately ended the first exposition of his system with the word *nichts*. Dr. French's last three words are almost as ominous, but are possibly not deliberately chosen as last words. As to the sentiment of the sentence quoted, it suggests a curious dimness of mind as to the central issue of all ethics.

6 and 7. Professor Hume's inaugural address on "The Value of a Study of Ethics" deserves more attention than our brief space permits, and we must also regret that it has so long remained unnoticed in our pages. Opening with a general defence of the value and place of ethical study in the academic curriculum, Professor Hume passes to the somewhat familiar topic of the relations of philosophy and science, and then, through the statement of a contrast between theoretical and practical philosophy, prepares the way for a brief exposition of his own programme as a teacher of ethics. Both science and theoretical philosophy, he tells us, despite their otherwise so different points of view, have, in common, a tendency to "hypostatize," the one our ideas of the truth of experience, the other our ideas of the "laws of thought," and so to view the truth "abstractly," as something mysteriously related to us the knowing subjects, as something far off, unknowable, or independent of us, or sundered from us. Either the "non-mental" or the "laws of thought" are thus set up as the ultimate reality, and our ideas of the world become dualistic. But the philosophical study of ethics reintroduces us to the unity of the world, and is thus wisely monistic in its tendencies. Man, as an active being, is a creator of unities because he is a realizer of ideals. He brings together the world of his knowledge, with its abstract laws of thought, and his world of feelings, with its multiplicity of brute facts, and, by setting facts into reasonable shape, he illustrates to himself that this world is one where personality is at home, where the real is not a mass of unknowable data, but where it rather gives us the plastic stuff for ideal work, and where the business of thought is not merely to think ideas, but to direct conduct. These general philosophical considerations open the way to a sketch of some fundamental principles of ethics, which Professor Hume states with considerable effect, although with no attempt at great originality. As a "person," man lives in relation to other "persons." His conduct, therefore, must be essentially public-spirited. He lives in relations if he lives at all, and this he must make the very principle of his ethical life. But, in consequence, "unselfish" conduct, which the moral law counsels, is not conduct which "abandons the claims of personality." "It is unfortunate that many writers are falling into the habit of describing unselfish and generous conduct as 'impersonal.' If we were speaking of a falling stone as acting, we might say that it acted impersonally. When a man sneezes he acts impersonally. What those writers mean is, probably, that a man in his actions should recognize that he, as an individual, does not and cannot exist as a person in isolation from his fellow-men. That he should remember that he is a member of the social life. That he should treat other persons as also persons. . . . But this is not the renouncing of personality. It is simply recognizing the true character and significance of personality. The citadel which ethics must defend is personality. The only defence required, however, is elucidation."

In the essay No. 7 of our list Professor Hume proceeds to apply his ethical

doctrines to the vexed question of the ethical aspect of political economy. The present writer would be going beyond his province should he attempt to give any special estimate of this portion of Professor Hume's undertaking, in so far as such a judgment would involve well-considered economic opinions. The essay is largely taken up with a sketch of the critical history of the questions concerned. Professor Hume, however, places a great part of the significance of his paper in its effort to contribute "to an organic view of ethics" (p. 36), an effort in which he is not unsuccessful. That "society is an organism," and that the individual is nevertheless not to be lost or forgotten in this organism,—these, as will appear from the foregoing, are Professor Hume's two principal points of view.

8. Dr. McCosh's final statement of the doctrines to whose exposition his life has been devoted has now reached the point where the little volume "Our Moral Nature" follows in order his previous books upon the "Cognitive" and "Motive Powers," and upon metaphysics. When one is entirely at variance with so distinguished a teacher and writer as Dr. McCosh concerning the very beginnings of theoretical philosophy, concerning all the most important doctrines of metaphysics, and concerning all the most significant inductions of psychology, what can one hope to say of a treatise like this, except that it undoubtedly expresses the views of a good man, and of one who for a lifetime has been doing good, concerning certain fundamental virtues? The virtues here set forth are themselves undoubtedly of the noblest. The man who teaches them is also well worthy to be their teacher. But the theory here very briefly suggested concerning their basis and their relations seems to the present reviewer to be, when judged from a purely theoretical point of view, and when considered in the light of the present state of philosophical inquiry, absolutely insignificant. But then the course of a very great deal of modern inquiry seems to Dr. McCosh equally insignificant. It is a case of Lessing's fable of the rings. Let the judge decide.

9. President Hyde adds one more to the already numerous books on practical ethics. This volume is intended as an attempt "both to satisfy the intellect and quicken the conscience at that critical period when the youth has put away childish things and is reaching out after manly and womanly ideals." At the basis of the whole exposition is placed a table of duties and of virtues arranged in columns, and contrasted, after the Aristotelian fashion, each one with the corresponding "Vice of Defect" and with the "Vice of Excess," which occupy their places in later columns of the table. A "Reward" is placed opposite to each virtue; a "Temptation" is also defined corresponding to each; and, finally, a "Penalty" finds in each instance its due position in the last column of the table. The world of the conscience having thus been tabulated, the detailed exposition begins. The text is arranged with formal headings for each topic. The titles of paragraphs, and often a sentence or more at the beginning of a paragraph, are printed in broad type. He that runs may read. The further Aristotelian device of illustrating moral principles by sketching an abstract or typical "character" is often used (*e.g.*, the description of "the sentimentalist" on p. 113). Very various sources of the wisdom of life are freely cited, but there is no unnecessary obtrusion of learning. A great many of the author's own observations escape with much skill that constant danger of seeming too obvious which often tends to render books on these topics such tedious reading. Kant's dove that wants to

fly in the vacuum escapes from her Platonic and erudite associations in the "Critique of Pure Reason" and flies into Professor Hyde's book (p. 109), to illustrate why the friction and annoyances of our life with our fellow-men are, after all, necessary evils, while the vacuum of a lonely life would be wholly intolerable. This is only one example of the relatively unexpected and therefore interesting quality of our author's illustrations and observations. In short, it is to be hoped that President Hyde's youthful readers will often, if not always, find themselves awakened both to curiosity and to earnestness by his devices.

After all, however, it is the table of the virtues, and of their corresponding rewards, temptations, and vices of excess and defect, with the penalties of this latter—it is this table which, after all, constitutes the real weakness of the book. The special virtues are indeed many, because life, with its variety of fortunes and of accidents, of things and of people, gives us many special tasks. But a table of virtues—it is an old notion, yet to see it formally carried out sets one's teeth on edge. It is, with all its literalness, so false to the spirit of life! To mention one only amongst its unhappy consequences, it may lead one to count over his own virtues, to see how many he has. There are twenty-three virtues on President Hyde's list. Neatness and holiness, loyalty and orderliness, conscientiousness and economy, thus get co-ordinated. It is in vain that our author's text wisely and justly distinguishes these virtues from one another as to their dignity and their scope. There they are in the table, one under another in a column. Let one count over the list. "How many have I of them?" the conscience-stricken youth may say,—yes, almost certainly will say. For tables have a great effect upon many youths. "I have already, say, sixteen out of the twenty-three. Is that enough for my age? When I add the seventeenth, say orderliness (for holiness is evidently hard, and must be left unattained until I am older), shall I not feel proud? My fellow, yonder, can only count up fourteen of the virtues as his own, and some of those he doesn't possess as well as I do." Is not such trifling exactly what this inadequate sort of abstract tabulation tends to produce? One need not, of course, insist argumentatively upon the unity of the virtues for Professor Hyde's benefit. In his chapters on "The Self" and on "God" he eloquently and explicitly announces this unity. Our present point is that an abstract tabulation of the virtues may count for more in destroying the unity of a youth's conception of the moral life than a later restatement of this unity is likely to count in piecing together again the fragments. Why not begin with unity, not announcing it abstractly, but letting a pupil feel it from the first,—not tabulating virtues, but illustrating, now here and now there, how a good man works upon this task or upon that?

It must be remembered that the present objection is a pedagogical, not a philosophical one, for, as said, President Hyde fully recognizes the actual unity of ethics. And as to a pedagogical matter President Hyde's experience must doubtless count, on the whole, for far more than the present writer's opinion.

JOSIAH ROYCE.

Reviews of Professor Wright's book "The Human and its Relation to the Divine" (Philadelphia, 1892) and of Mr. Salter's "First Steps in Philosophy" must be postponed until the April number.