

DR. WARD ON FREE-WILL.

In a series of metaphysical discussions contributed, since 1871, to the *Dublin Review*, Dr. Ward has laid particular stress on three topics as more especially involved in the philosophical foundations of Theism. These are Innate Conscience, Necessary Truth, and Free-will. His later papers have reference chiefly to the last-named topic—Free-will, which he has expounded at considerable length, in accordance with his own views; and, in so doing, he has combated the arguments on the other side. In this polemic he has largely involved both John Mill and myself. I replied to some of his criticisms in the present edition of *The Emotions and the Will*, and to this reply he has now made a rejoinder (*Dublin Review* for April, 1879, with supplementary paper in October).

Neglecting the minor objections brought by Dr. Ward against the language that I employed in remarking upon his earlier article in April, 1874, I wish to summarise his positions, as well as I am able, and to consider their bearing upon the controverted points.

I have on every opportunity protested against the use of the leading term "Freedom" as applicable to the Will, or as suitable to express the sequence of motive and act in our mental activity. I see no chance of a reconciliation of the opposing views until this term is abandoned, and the question stated in other phraseology, such as I have repeatedly exemplified. Not only in the leading term, but in many of the subordinate expressions, do I consider that there is an unsuitability that contributes to the entanglement. I remarked upon some of these in a Critical Notice in *MIND* III, p. 393, to which I feel scarcely able to add anything new.

When Free-will meant that actions could arise without any motive, or definite mental antecedent, the issue was tolerably clear; and the polemic of the necessitarians was directed accordingly. The subtlety and penetration of Hobbes led off the fight. Then came Locke, who was the first to comment upon the impropriety of the word "Freedom". But most exhaustive of all is the work of Jonathan Edwards, which, as a powerful advocacy of Necessity in the interest of Theism, might, I think, have received some notice from Dr. Ward. Even Mill, in the *Examination of Hamilton*, considered that "uncaused volition" was the thesis that he had to refute.

Now, however, there is a change of front among the Free-will advocates. They object to being charged with maintaining uncaused volition. For example, Dr. Calderwood, in his *Handbook of Moral Philosophy*, says—"Whatever be the nature of the problem, it certainly does not stand thus:—Is a volition an uncaused event? Are there any facts in consciousness which cannot be attributed to any cause?" In like manner Mr. Alexander, in his very acute polemic with Mill, disclaims the abrogation of the law of cause and effect in human actions. Reid had affirmed very bluntly that acts are often done without any motive.¹

¹ "I do many trifling actions every day, in which, upon the most careful

My chief business at present, however, is with Dr. Ward, who has bestowed more attention upon the controversy than any one that I am acquainted with. I shall commence with endeavouring to set forth his positions as fully and as accurately as I am able to do in a short compass. Although I have read all his articles on the subject, I will not undertake, in my references, to go beyond those of the year just concluded; taking for granted that he has embodied in these whatever he considers important in the exposition and advocacy of Free-will.

My difficulty in arguing the question has always consisted in grasping clearly what Free-will means. I wish the doctrine to be translated into some other terms such as we cannot possibly misapprehend. It is a great convenience, so far, when the phenomenon is represented as an exception to the uniformity of nature. Uniformity is an intelligible fact; and to deny it seems equally intelligible. Yet as every denial supposes something positive, we should like to know a little more about the class of actions that are emancipated from the rule of uniformity. Whether do they begin from absolute nothing; or do they possess antecedents, but shift about from the one to the other, so that from the occurrence of a given antecedent we cannot conclude what the consequent is to be? We should like also to have the region of failure of uniformity closely circumscribed. Where there is no uniformity there is clearly no rational guidance, no prudential forethought.

I come now to Dr. Ward's mode of representing the doctrine of Free-will, and of establishing it from our mental experience. It consists in what he terms "anti-impulsive effort," or what is spoken of more familiarly as "self-control" or "self-restraint". This, of course, is no new phenomenon in human experience; it is spoken of in every account of the constitution of the mind. The novelty lies in treating it as a sure and unequivocal argument for Free-will, considered as an exception to the ordinary law of causation or the uniformity of nature.

That we may understand Dr. Ward's position thoroughly, let me quote, first, his other ways of putting it, and next, some of his characteristic examples. The question is, he says, "Do I, or do I not, at various times act in resistance to my strongest present desire?" The Determinists say "the will is infallibly determined by what they call the strongest motive"; Dr. Ward holds that the strongest motive may be overborne by the will's spontaneous impulse. The Determinists hold, he says, that conduct follows the balance of pleasure and pain; Libertarians believe in a power exercised in the

reflection, I am conscious of no motive." "If a man could not act without a motive, he would have no power at all; for motives are not in our power." (Hamilton's Edition of *Reid*, p. 609.) As to the first remark, I presume Reid refers to the things that we do in a half-conscious mechanical way. Yet, whether or not a motive, in the ordinary sense, be traceable, an antecedent situation is traceable, which arising, the action regularly follows. The second sentence is a manifest confusion of ideas, which Hamilton effectively exposes.

direction of pursuing virtue in opposition to the solicitations of pleasure. The self-restraining exercise of Free-will is put forth with immeasurably greater frequency in the direction of virtue than in that of pleasure. Yet all men—good, middling, and bad alike—are equally free. The Determinist's theory is that no man resists his strongest present impulse; and his theory is refuted if it be shown that a large class of men do often resist their strongest present impulse.

I will now present some of Dr. Ward's examples. "I am walking for health's sake in my grounds on a bitterly cold day. My strongest present desire is to be back comfortably in the warm house; but I persistently refuse to gratify that desire; remembering the great importance of a good walk, not only for my general health, but for my evening's comfort and my night's sleep." Again:—"A is called very early on the 1st of September, and he feels a real 'desire' to sleep off again; nevertheless, his wish to be early among the partridges is a stronger, more influential, more keenly felt, more stimulating desire." Accordingly, "his 'preponderating spontaneous impulse' is to get up at once." "But B, who is no sportsman, has also ordered himself to be called early the same morning, for a very different reason. He will be busy in the middle of the day, and he has resolved to rise betimes, that he may visit a sick dependent. When he is called, his strongest present desire is to sleep off again; but he exerts himself; he puts forth manly self-restraint, and forces himself to rise, though it be but laboriously and against the grain. A starts from bed by a spontaneous and indeliberate impulse; but B resolves weakly and fails, until he at last succeeds by a still stronger and crowning resolve in launching himself on the sea of active life." "A obeys his strongest present desire, while B resists it."

Once more:—"A military officer—possessing real piety, and steadfastly purposing to grow therein—receives at the hand of a brother officer some stinging and, as the world would say, 'intolerable' insult. His nature flames forth; his preponderating spontaneous impulse—his strongest present desire—is to inflict some retaliation, which at least shall deliver him from the 'reproach' of cowardice. Nevertheless, it is his firm resolve, by God's grace, to comport himself Christianly. His *resolve* contends vigorously against his strongest present *desire*, and the latter is brought into harmony with his principles. What a sustained series of intense anti-impulsive effort is here exhibited!" "The two classes of effort mutually differ, not in degree, but in kind."

Such are Dr. Ward's examples of anti-impulsive effort which he identifies with Free-will. They are in themselves perfectly familiar to us all; and the only difference of opinion is as to the mode of rendering or interpreting them. Before entering upon this, however, I wish to complete the statement of Dr. Ward's positions by quoting his view of Causation, which is vital to the discussion. He protests against using the terms "free" and "uncaused" as synonymous; but he differs from Determinists in the meaning that he attaches to cause. In fact, he recognises two kinds of causes; one is cause, as

understood by Determinists, namely, the law of uniform phenomenal sequence. He gives the designations "prevenant" and "postvenant" to express cause and effect, in this sense; and "prevenance" to express causation as uniform sequence. He allows that the physical world, generally speaking, is ruled by this kind of causation, the important exception being miracles; and the moral or psychical world is also ruled by it, with the exception of the human will, which partly participates in it and partly follows another law. The causes of the material world, uniform in their action, are "blind" causes; and such causes are also at work in the mind. By these, "given certain psychical and corporeal antecedents, one definite group of psychical consequents infallibly and inevitably follows". But now we can imagine that there may be an "*originative*" intermediate cause. We can easily imagine that some substance shall not be determined by its superior cause with strict and inevitable necessity to one fixed effect; but, on the contrary, shall be permitted a certain latitude of choice. The very same substance may be necessitated to act as a "blind" cause in regard to one class of its effects, while nevertheless it can act as an "*originative*" cause in regard to another class; it being involved in the whole supposition, that the substance which acts as an *originative* cause must be an *intelligent* substance, such as is the human soul. While this case is clearly imaginable, no one, Dr. Ward thinks, has attempted to show that it is intrinsically impossible. Now the notion of freedom is included in the notion of an *originative* cause.

Dr. Ward does not think it necessary, in explaining Free-will, to introduce, as many Libertarians do, a reference to the human personality, or the "Ego"; and not finding this necessary, he does not think it desirable.

I will remark, first, on Dr. Ward's statement of the second kind of Causation—that wherein uniformity is not the rule. My difficulty is, and always has been, to reduce this position to a definite and intelligible statement. What uniformity is, we understand; its negation or qualification leaves us utterly at sea. There are two alternatives in the denial of uniformity, the one that events can arise from nothing, the other that the sequences of events may vary; the same antecedent situation being followed sometimes by one consequent and sometimes by another. Dr. Ward appears to repudiate the first alternative; he will not allow, so far as I understand him, that Free-will is the same as actions arising from nothing at all. Indeed, the expression—"originative intermediate cause," coming in to counter-work our present impulses and desires, means an antecedent adequate to the result.

The only position, then, as regards our voluntary actions, is, that there is not a strict invariability of sequence in those cases where we put forth a virtuous effort to resist our rash and passionate impulses. The same mental situation may recur; but the outcome may be different—for the better or for the worse. It is necessary to our dignity as moral agents that we should not decide always one way when the same case comes before us. Freedom of choice is illustrated

by our occasionally choosing the less good, like a bold fault in a correct poet.

When Free-will is stated in this form—and it clearly admits of being so stated—we cannot help being staggered by the assumption. Before considering the facts offered by way of proof, we may reflect a little upon the intrinsic difficulties of the statement itself.

It could not escape remark, how dependent we are, in all the affairs of life, on nature's uniformity. If we wish to secure an end, we look to what has happened in the past, and count upon that in the future. Our whole security in the matters of this world is based on the expectation that what is to be may be inferred from what has been; and this not merely in the region of brute matter, but equally so in the region of mental sequences. That there should be any part of the mind, owing to superior sanctity, exempted from the rule of uniformity, must make us very uneasy, until we can trace a circle round it, so as to hem it in and keep it clearly apart from the region where law prevails. We should be very much relieved to think that it was but a very small portion of our mental nature; and, if I may judge from my own feelings, we should be still more rejoiced to find that the whole supposition was a mistake. Of course, we can always make allowance for a margin of uncertainty; being obliged to do so, in many instances, not from the variability of the sequences, but from the impossibility of calculation.

Dr. Ward says that no philosopher, so far as he is aware, has attempted to show that the supposition of an originaive cause, exempted from uniformity, is impossible. This much, however, we may say, that *uniformity is found to be the rule of nature in all cases sufficiently free from ambiguity to be admitted as evidence*. The more plain a fact becomes, the more certain is its testimony to the principle of uniformity. Look at the grand case of gravitation, on which all Astronomy and all Navigation are suspended. There was a time when people might have advanced a doctrine of variability of sequence in celestial phenomena, being sheltered by the imperfection of the then knowledge of the facts. Look at the atomic theory in Chemistry. Look at the doctrine of Life springing from Life. All the clearly ascertained facts point one way; while the facts not clearly ascertained are those alone that give any colour to the supposition of variability of sequence. Now, I humbly submit that, in such a situation, the Ayes have it. The clear facts are unanimous; the obscure facts are at best ambiguous; and an ambiguous testimony can never be set against one that is unambiguous. A hundred clear instances one way cannot have their force impaired by five hundred uncertain instances.

If there be exceptions to the uniformity of nature, they ought ere now to have come to view in some unmistakable cases. A doctrine that can be maintained only in the regions of clouds and darkness, is not competent to establish a negative to another doctrine that is more and more confirmed as we can bring the phenomena into the light of day.

This brings me to Dr. Ward's examples whereby he thinks he can prove that the ordinary law of uniformity does not apply to human actions throughout. Freedom is typified, according to him, by the mind's resistance to the solicitation of present impulses. Now, as I have endeavoured to analyse this situation in the series of chapters that I have devoted to the explanation of the Will, I can do little more than repeat myself in saying that the mind's anti-impulsive efforts are due to the stored-up recollections of the past, and are no more exempted from the law of uniformity than the impulses of the present are so exempted. Take Dr. Ward's instance of walking in a cold wind to avoid sleeplessness and other discomfort. I can say, on this, merely that the recollection of former occasions of discomfort from being too much indoors is a motive power to withstand the urgency of the present discomfort of cold. It is a fact or law of the human mind, constituting what I believe to be the psychological explanation of prudence, that the remembrance of pain is an inducement to avoid re-incurring it; the power of the inducement being in proportion to the vividness of the representation of the past; and this again depending upon repetition and other circumstances that I have endeavoured to specify. When a strong present impulse arises such as to urge us in the direction of the dreaded evil, two powers are in conflict; each having a certain impetus, and the result shows their relative force. Often the present impulse carries the day at once; at other times, there is an even and protracted conflict, which usually consists of a swaying to and fro, owing to the vacillation in the representative power. If, in this nearly balanced situation, the throw is given for prudence at last, we are said to have maintained a fierce struggle, and to have made a great effort for the right. There is no effort when the representation of the past has attained the pitch that time and repetition often brings it to; the virtuous resolution is taken with ease; it is anti-impulsive without effort; it exercises control not by freedom of the will, but by the psychological law of the stronger. He that has had few experiences of catarrhs or of rheumatism from catching cold gives way to his impulses to go fishing, or shooting, or boating in the wet. The accumulation of the painful experiences, the augmentation of their severity and persistence, becomes a power sufficient to arrest the impulses to sport. There is a growing efficacy in such resistance. Beginning in the day of small things when the impulse always conquers, the representation of the pains rises to the point of an equal struggle, when the mind is torn and tossed about for a length of time, showing the anti-impulsiveness in its most painfully conscious form, the form where effort is typically present. A few more additions to the ideal growth, or, it may be, a subsidence of the eagerness for sport (which equally comes by the operation of a psychological uniformity), renders the conquest rapid and sure, and the accompanying consciousness of struggle and effort is less and less. The temperate old man lets the wine-bottle pass again and again without the slightest pang; his so-called liberty of the will is a glorified uniformity of easy resistance to alcoholic temptation.

It is quite true that at the same stage of representative growths of past good and evil, we may not always decide in the same way, even with an equal present impulse. In the wide compass of human motives there are numerous agencies to concur or conflict with the virtuous resolve, and these may not always be evoked. It is part of the operation of circumstances to bring up or to exclude emotional influences and recollections; our prudence, as depending on personal experience, would be greatly augmented by the concurring view of some other victim to the mischief that we are tempted to incur. But such variations have nothing to do with lawlessness, or the breach of uniformity of sequence, in human actions; we can state them to ourselves as the proper and regular course of natural law under the several circumstances.

What I have now stated is but a poor epitome of the detailed explanation of motives in my discussion of the Will. I do not ask Dr. Ward to accept the explanation as in all respects satisfactory and complete. My present argument merely requires that there should be a possible alternative to the supposition that the Will is not subject to the rule of uniformity. So long as there is no unequivocal instance on his side such an explanation deserves to be listened to. It now remains to consider still more closely his instances of anti-impulsive effort, with a view to see how far the exclusion of law or uniformity in the usual sense is thoroughly carried out.

The following is a very remarkable statement:—"We need hardly say that, in our view, devout Theists are immeasurably the most virtuous class of human beings. Consequently, in our view, devout Theists will, with absolute certainty, immeasurably exceed other men in their anti-impulsive efforts; for the simple reason that they immeasurably exceed other men in the vigilant care with which they adjust their volitions with a standard which they consider supremely authoritative."

I call attention to this statement as being, to my mind, an admission that virtuous anti-impulsive efforts *follow certain conditions*, or arise under a certain definite set of circumstances, in whose absence they would not arise. It is, to all intents, a Determinist account of the source of virtuous actions. Given devout Theism, anti-impulsive efforts on the side of virtue follow by a law of human nature. An agent is assigned adequate to an effect. Where is the room for freedom or for any "originative" intermediate cause? The devout Theism is the cause. Any other cause would be either an addition to the force of this cause, or a diversion for the worse. But any addition made to the regular effect of devout Theism may be taken *as part* of that agency; it need not be separately viewed unless it follows an independent course; while such independence would only throw the result into uncertainty; the devout Theism would no longer work out its proper result.

If it be said, as Dr. Ward maintains, that the agent is still free, I can only ask, What does the freedom amount to? The end of all is to make a man perform virtuous acts. If, to illustrate his freedom, he

deviates from this course, what is the gain? and if, in a definite situation tending to virtue, the agent acts virtuously, this is merely a form of Determinism. Why should the devout Theist be ashamed or affronted at being described as following the "law of his being"?

Dr. Ward remarks that the Phenomenist is compelled by his philosophical theory (if he be consistent) to be proof against any amount of testimony which may be adduced for the fact of freedom, viewed as an interruption of the order of cause and effect. But most of us embrace phenomenism because we have never had such testimony presented to us. Dr. Ward justly describes the exception as of the nature of a miracle; now, he will allow that, being so, it demands very clear facts to prove it. What interest can any one have to hush up such an extraordinary circumstance; or how could one possibly hush it up if every man carries about in his own mind the evidence for it?

Thus the standing difficulty in Dr. Ward's whole argument is that he mixes up freedom with other agencies that, for aught we can see, might of themselves produce the whole effect. He cannot isolate the phenomenon of freedom so as to put it to a crucial test. The following passage is a further illustration:—The "devout man—even when his will's spontaneous impulse leads to a virtuous act—proceeds nevertheless by an effort to make his act more virtuous (*i.e.*, more efficaciously directed to the virtuous end) than otherwise it would be. The advantage, then, of virtuous training and habits is not less inestimably great on the Libertarian than on the Deterministic hypothesis." Just so; but then, how are we to separate between what comes from the natural operation of virtuous training and what comes from Free-will? Devout Theism with virtuous training has a definite result on the ordinary law of phenomenal cause and effect; we can apply ourselves to bringing about these antecedents, in order that the effect may follow, and we can do no more. Liberty, as such, is an uncontrollable factor; we accept its behests, but cannot improve upon them. We cannot even measure its range; its amount is not sufficiently great to overpower unmistakably the blind causes; it must be one of those small agents that are swamped by the larger; its amount does not surpass the inevitable errors of observation.

The restraint of passing impulses by the permanent forces of the mind is a fact of incessant occurrence. It arises sometimes in the interest of virtue, sometimes in the interest of vice, and oftener still on occasions that are perfectly neutral. It occurs to everybody scores of times every day. We must all be aware that we are, generally speaking, tolerably uniform in our conduct in these respects; what we resist once, we resist again; what we succumb to once, we succumb to again. There are exceptions, of course; but we are seldom at a loss to account for these. The drunkard is sometimes reformed, yet not without a new antecedent, a moral force that is sufficient to the result. Determinists allege as psychical fact that volitions follow determinate moral antecedents with the same uniformity and certainty as physical effects follow their physical causes; that the will's course of

action is infallibly and inevitably determined at every moment by the circumstances (1) internal, (2) external, of that moment. On the other side, says Dr. Ward, "we have entirely denied this alleged psychical fact; in support of that denial we have appealed to a thousand undeniable mental phenomena". Now, I freely admit the phenomena adduced; I merely call in question the way of reading them. All that I can observe of their workings is in favour of uniformity; and I think that if there were exceptions, they must, at some time or other, appear in a form that no one would or could deny.

Dr. Ward abstains from all reference to the vexed question of Materialism, which is brought forward, in connexion with the present question by many advocates of Free-will. I do not think it requisite to mix the two questions; yet there is a mutual bearing that it is well that we should keep in view. Those that believe that to every mental fact there is a counterpart physical fact, are led to the uniformity of mental sequences on the basis of physical uniformity. Those that affirm Free-will, in the sense of variability of sequence, cannot admit that the mental and the physical go together. Whatever strength there is in the case for the full concomitance of the mental and the physical goes to confirm the doctrine of Determinism as against Free-will.

Dr. Ward is not the only sincere and cultivated enquirer that has been oppressed with the difficulty of reconciling law with our supposed Free-will, or liberty of choosing for our own good. The late distinguished political economist, Cairnes, and Mr. Goldwin Smith, are examples among many that have announced themselves as unable to discover a way out of the apparent contradiction. I have assigned, as one cause of the perplexity, the unappropriateness of the figurative word "Freedom"; and, as another, the awkwardness of the point of view when a man looks at himself in the act of willing between several alternatives. In the Critical Notice already referred to (MIND III., p. 398) I dwelt upon this last point, and have nothing new to bring forward respecting it.

A. BAIN.

VII.—CRITICAL NOTICES.

On the Philosophy of Kant (Shaw Fellowship Lectures). By ROBERT ADAMSON, M.A., Professor of Logic, Owens College, Manchester. Edinburgh: David Douglas. 1879.

In this little book, Professor Adamson has undertaken no easy task. He has attempted, in the space of about 250 pages, to show the general bearing of the work of Kant, and its relation to those philosophical problems which are at present calling most urgently for solution. And in this attempt I think he has attained a high measure of success, allowing for the limits imposed upon him by the Shaw Lectureship.