V.—NOTES AND DISSCUSIONS.

THE SENSE OF SIN AND EVOLUTION.

THE ethical opinions of mankind may be said, broadly speaking, to have found expression in one or other of the rival schools of Intuitionists and Utilitarians. There is little practical difference in the precepts which emanate from these opposite sources, the real point at issue between them being the first principles from which these precepts derive their authority. It is plain that the moral conceptions of the man who regards the right as a large generalisation from the useful must differ widely enough from those of one who believes that the rightness or wrongness of an action is something wholly independent of its consequences ; that though the dictates of virtue and those of utility frequently coincide, they are never confounded ; and that we are enabled to distinguish and do distinguish right and wrong by means of some innate principle which determines our conceptions of these without any reference to utility. But however manifold may be the apparent points of difference, the foundations on which they rest are few and simple, and it is round these that the battle of discussion chiefly rages.

The sense of Sin which accompanies the breach of a moral law is one of the commonest, and at the same time, one of the strongest arguments of the Intuitionist on behalf of the existence of that innate moral sense which is the cardinal doctrine of his school. It is urged, and with considerable force, that the feeling of guilt which invariably follows the commission of an act *recognised* as wrong, is as invariably absent from the feelings which ensue on a mere disregard of the dictates of utility : and from this it is plausibly inferred that the idea of the right is generically different from the idea of the useful. It is hardly necessary to observe that both parties to the discussion seek their facts in the experiences of a moral man ; for the indifference of a man devoid of moral principle is of no evidential value to either. At first sight it might appear that so fundamental a difference must be incapable of removal by any philosophical subtlety ; but the school of Evolution claims to have reconciled these apparently conflicting creeds, and to have fused in a deeper synthesis the superficial antagonism which divided them. The dispute between the two philosophies is declared to be due to an imperfect appreciation on either side of the full significance of a common set of facts, and their reconciliation is effected by showing that, on the one hand, the Utilitarians are correct in referring the *ultimate* origin of moral ideas to the dictates of expediency, and on the other, that the Intuitionists are completely justified in asserting that in the man of the present day, or at least in civilised man, there is a moral sense whose promptings are wholly irrespective of any estimate of pleasure or pain.

Accepting as correct the main points of the Evolutionist explanation, it yet appears to me that no completely satisfactory account of the origin of the sense of sin has so far been given by this school of philosophy, and it is on this subject that I shall endeavour to throw out a few suggestions in the present paper.

As a preliminary step it will be useful to trace briefly the general line of the Evolutionist argument. The moral sense is declared to be not ultimate but derivative, and built up out of slowly organised experiences of pleasure and pain. Now it is clear that, as a rule, pleasure must be the concomitant of acts which are beneficial to the individual, and pain the concomitant of acts which tend to his prejudice, for otherwise the species must infallibly perish : and this is as true of the community as of the individual. But while in the case of the individual, pleasure and pain are the motives which respectively prompt or prohibit beneficial or injurious actions ; in the case of the community the place of these motives is supplied by a sense of right and wrong, that is, according to the Evolutionist explanation, a sense that a certain action or class of actions is beneficial or injurious to the community. That this is a difference not merely of quantity but of kind is evident from the fact that the good of the community and that of the individual may easily conflict. But in seeking for the origin of this sense, we are not to conclude that the moral judgment which we pass on any act is the result of a conscious deliberation as to its effects on the community, for we are instantly confronted by the fact that our approval or disapproval of certain actions is quite instinctive. Nor again is this instinctiveness to be explained, as we might be tempted to explain it, by regarding it as the outcome hereditarily transmitted of a long series of ancestral deliberations to the same effect. Its true origin is to be found in the sense of sympathy, which, when duly developed is as keenly alive to an injury, real or represented, to the community as the individual organism is to a physical injury. The growth of this sense of sympathy, for which most gregarious animals possess a rudimentary capacity, is attributable to a variety of causes, but mainly to the lengthening of the period of infancy which is found to accompany a growing complexity of intellect. It is impossible to enter at length upon this most interesting subject within the necessary limits of the present paper, but it may suffice to say that the point is most ably argued by Mr. Fiske (*Cosmic Philosophy*, II., ch. xxii.), whose conclusions are supported by the experiments of Mr. Wallace. The effect of this prolonged infancy in promoting the development of sympathy is so admirably set forth by Mr. Fiske (*Cos. Phil.*, II., p. 344), that I cannot do better than transcribe the *ipsissima verba* of his explanation.

"The prolonged helplessness of the offspring must keep the parents together for longer and longer periods in successive epochs ; and when at last the association is so long kept up that the older children are growing mature while the younger still need protection, the family relations begin to become permanent. The parents have lived so long in company, that to seek new companionship, involves some disturbance of engrained habits ;

and meanwhile the older sons are more likely to continue their original association with each other than to establish associations with strangers, since they have common objects to achieve, and common enmities, bequeathed and acquired, with neighbouring families. As the parent dies, the headship of the family thus established devolves upon the oldest or bravest, or most sagacious male remaining. Thus the little group gradually becomes a clan, the members of which are united by ties considerably stronger than those which ally them to members of adjacent clans, with whom they may indeed combine to resist the aggressions of yet further outlying clans, or of formidable beasts, but towards whom their feelings are usually those of hostile rivalry."

When this sense of sympathy, which is in effect a sense of collective pleasure or pain, is once called into existence, it becomes to the individual a motive of action generically akin to his sense of individual pleasure and pain, and, like these, gives rise to pleasurable and painful associations, but connected respectively with the furtherance and violation of the common weal. We must be careful however to note this important distinction between the feelings of individual and of sympathetic pleasure and pain, namely, that whereas the feelings connected with individual pleasures and pains are purely egoistic or self-regarding feelings, those connected with sympathy are what Mr. Spencer calls "ego-altruistic" feelings; that is, they concern the happiness of the individual in so far as it depends upon the feelings with which his fellow-creatures regard him. Consequently, we are not justified in describing as selfish the actions which are dictated by sympathy, though all sympathy is in its origin a kind of self-pleasing.

The next stage of moral development is marked by the appearance of the feelings of regret and remorse, which are explained to be the fundamental ingredients of conscience, and which owe their power, if not their existence, to the comparatively transient character of the pleasures attending the gratification of the purely selfish impulses, as contrasted with the permanent operation of incentives to actions beneficial to the community. Consequently, though under the overpowering influence of immediate desire a man may gratify some self-regarding impulse at the expense of the community, the abiding force of the social sanctions forbidding the act (which are ever present to the mind, though necessarily somewhat in the background) will sooner or later cause him to feel that dissatisfaction with himself, accompanied by a resolve to act differently in the future, which is the earliest beginning of conscience. Finally, there comes a class of supernatural sanctions attached to violations of the interests of the community, which, springing from the dread of the savage for the vengeance of his dead chief, finds its latest expression in the Gehenna of civilisation.¹

¹ The above account of the growth of the moral sense has been taken mainly from Mr. Fiske's *Cosmic Philosophy* (II., ch. xxii.), with references to the works of Mr. Spencer, Mr. Darwin, and other writers of the Evolutionist school. From the nature of the present essay it is of course inevitable that I should borrow largely from such sources, and I may perhaps be

Such is the outline of the development of the moral instincts on the principles of Evolution. But while admitting the general accuracy of the account, it appears to me that it offers no adequate explanation of that sense of sin which is the subject of the present essay. The moral feelings and distinctions with which the theory deals rest ultimately on a basis of pleasure and pain, and I for my part agree that this is the true basis. But it seems to me still open to the Intuitionist to maintain that it has failed to explain that particular pain which constitutes, or is at any rate the source of, the sense of sin. The question is indeed touched, though only touched, in the account given above of the genesis of regret and remorse; but the solution offered is meagre and vague, if not wholly unsatisfactory. And here I may remark that I cannot acquiesce in the view that regret and remorse are generically identical; on the contrary it appears to me that their respective origins are perfectly distinct. Strictly speaking, the feeling of remorse follows only on actions which involve a breach of duty; regret on the other hand is constantly felt in connexion with actions which contain no moral element whatever. A man, walking to catch a train, by pure accident loses his way and accordingly misses the train. He is thereby prevented from keeping an appointment, and a series of disastrous consequences is the result. But however much he may regret these consequences, it is impossible that they should cause him any remorse. That he should have occasioned their occurrence is his misfortune but not his fault, and in the absence of fault I submit that the feeling of remorse cannot arise. It is true that this feeling is often accompanied by the feeling of regret, but even where they relate to the same conduct, a careful analysis will show that they are distinct alike in character and in origin, and it behoves us to be on our guard against confounding them. But to proceed with my criticism. These *internal* sanctions of regret and remorse which enforce the observance of the laws of what I may perhaps call social morality, are represented as differing only in massiveness and continuity of operation from those which attend the violation of the good of the individual. In other words, the distinction is one not of quality but of amount. If this be true a similar feeling of remorse ought to attach, at any rate in some degree, to any act tending to injure individual welfare, the commission of which is prohibited by a sufficiently powerful sanction. Under ordinary circumstances death is the most dreaded of evils. It is the last punishment which the vengeance of the community can inflict on the offender who has transgressed its laws, statutory or moral; and of course where the individual alone is concerned, the extinction of his existence, and of the pleasures which existence makes possible, is the very thing which his whole conduct, positively or negatively, aims at averting. Yet we do not find, as a rule, that an unnecessary risk of life entails any regret, and still less any remorse on the individual

allowed, in lieu of a succession of separate references, to acknowledge my obligations to them collectively in this note.

who runs the risk.¹ It is, I think, plain that so far as the dissatisfaction which ensues on a breach of social morality is due to a recognition, inherited or otherwise acquired, of the pains and penalties which the injured community may exact, it contains no trace whatever of that which we now understand by the feeling of remorse. I must not be understood to deny the existence of this feeling as one of the avenging sanctions which visit with swift retribution the violation of a moral law; but I venture to differ from the current doctrine of Evolution in believing that its origin is to be found, not in a dread of the punishment which the community will or may exact for the misdeed, but in the associations connected with a somewhat different source of dissatisfaction. The consideration of this last-mentioned source of dissatisfaction is the ultimate purpose of this paper; but, before proceeding to discuss it, it will be well to pursue somewhat further our examination of the teaching of the Evolutionists on the subject.

A little reflection will convince us that the sense of sin attaches not only to acts which injure the community, but also to many acts whose injurious effects are strictly confined to the individual. Nor does the Evolution-theory fail to take cognisance of this; indeed it is in this fact that it purports to find the connecting link between religion and morality. But the religion here referred to is distinct from the popular anthropomorphic religion, consisting as it does in the recognition of

"A Power to which no limit in time or space is conceivable, of which all phenomena, as presented in consciousness, are manifestations, but which we can know only through these manifestations" (Fiske, *Cosmic Phil.* II., 414). Consequently while "a philosophy of morality has for its subject-matter the principles of action conducive to the right living of the individual so far as the well-being of the community is concerned; so a philosophy of religion has for its subject-matter the relations of the individual to the Inscrutable Power manifested in the universe, and the principles of action conducive to his right living considered as a part and parcel of the universe" (p. 465). Thus, as "on the anthropomorphic hypothesis, sin is an offence against a personal Deity, consisting in the disobedient transgression of some one of his revealed edicts"; so "from the scientific point of view, sin is a wilful violation of a law of nature, or—to speak in terms of the theory of evolution—it is a course of thought or action, wilfully pursued, which tends to throw the individual out of balance with his environment, and thus to detract from his physical or moral completeness of life" (p. 455). "Now when a law of nature has been violated (to use the current phrase) the religion of the scientific inquirer tells him that a sin has been committed; and he is smitten with a sense of self-reproach no whit less keen than that experienced by his mediæval predecessor. . . . Regarded as a product of psychical evolution, this sense of sin, peculiar to the most highly developed organisms, is the analogue of the sense of pain shared in

¹ It must not be supposed that I ignore the moral obligation incumbent on each individual of maintaining his physical well-being, which is so admirably expounded in Mr. Spencer's *Data of Ethics*. But a doctrine which is scarcely yet appreciated in the 19th century, can hardly have been an active force in the genesis of moral ideas.

some degree by all organisms endowed with consciousness. The sense of sin, like the sense of pain, is normally deterrent from actions which tend to diminish the completeness of the correspondence in which life consists. But while the sense of pain is common to those creatures whose incentives to action are purely selfish, the sense of sin can be possessed only by those creatures whose intelligence is sufficiently complex to enable them to recognise the relationship in which they stand to the Omnipresent Power, and whose highest incentives to action are therefore quite impersonal" (p. 456).

I have quoted Mr. Fiske not only to gain the benefit of his able exposition of this account of the sense of sin, but also because he is, so far as I am aware, the only Evolutionist writer who has treated this point at all in detail. The development and justification of the principles of morality have met with ample consideration at the hands of Mr. Spencer and others of the Evolutionist school; but this particular sanction has, I think, as a rule been unduly ignored.

Now it will be seen that the feeling of remorse attending the violation of the laws of social morality, and the sense of sin arising on the commission of an act which is immoral only in its relation to the individual, are referred by the above account to two distinct sources. The feeling of remorse is traced to a dread of the vengeance of the community; the sense of sin is said to be the analogue of physical pain, caused by an injury to what may be described as a moral nervous system. It appears to me that this distinction cannot be upheld. The testimony of individual experience surely declares that the feeling of remorse and the sense of sin, as at present manifested, are indistinguishable. The reproaches of conscience which follow on the commission of a social wrong, *e.g.*, theft, do not differ in kind from those which arise in retribution for our secret sins against our own individuality. Their torments may vary in degree, but in quality they are identical; and if this be so, there is at any rate a *prima facie* presumption that their sources are identical also. I have already endeavoured to show that a dread of the vengeance of the community cannot be accepted as the origin of the feeling of remorse; it therefore remains to consider whether the sense of sin can be correctly referred to a feeling of moral injury to the organism analogous to the sense of physical pain. Now in the first place we must observe that this "psychical analogue of physical pain" appears on the scene rather in the guise of a *deus ex machina*. It leaps into the ranks of moral sanctions like an Athênê in full panoply of war from the brain of Zeus, and, speaking with all the respect that is due to a writer of Mr. Fiske's learning and ability, I must confess that its introduction seems to me a little unscientific. All philosophy worthy of the name strives to base its doctrines on a body of causally connected truths depending as little as possible for their coherence on the presence of uncaused entities. But as Evolutionists we are peculiarly bound to trace with rigorous exactness every step in the theory propounded for acceptance; and in the present instance this necessity seems to have been somewhat overlooked. This account offers no explanation of the different stages in the development of the sense of sin, nor of its presence under condi-

tions which are undoubtedly prior to the possession of an intelligence sufficiently complex to recognise its relationship to the Omnipresent Power. Such an intelligence can hardly be ascribed to mankind as a whole at the present day ; but the sense of sin, so far as we are in a position to judge, dates back for centuries. I am far from denying that the sense of disturbance of our relations with the Absolute entailed by a sinful action would be one of the strongest deterrents against its commission ; but I cannot think that such a complexity has as yet been widely attained even by civilised mankind. I do not say that the explanation is impossible, but I do venture to think that it is at present incorrect.

If then I am right in supposing that the feeling of remorse should not be regarded as distinct from the sense of sin, it remains to inquire to what origin are we to refer the sense of sin. It appears to me that it springs originally from, and even now ultimately rests on the sense of inferiority which is one of the painful results of the violation of a maxim either of social or of self-regarding morality. When an immoral act is committed—be it a wrong to the community or a wrong to the individuality of the sinner—there always follows (except in the case of an ἀκολαστόν where the moral principles are destroyed) a feeling that we should somehow be in a better position if the act had not been committed. This feeling is not, as I imagine, the recognition of a disturbance of relations between ourselves and the Absolute ; nor is it, except indirectly, a dread of the penalties which the act may entail from the wrath of an injured community. The rules of morality which govern our actions, formulated as they are from a registration of the pleasurable or painful consequences by which these actions are followed, are in very truth a formulation of the conditions of a happy and successful life. The imperative power of the law remains long after its rationale has ceased to be present to consciousness ; and accordingly, though the modern sense of sin seems to us primordial and self-justifying, I believe that it ultimately rests on a primitive experience that an act of immorality places us at a disadvantage with our neighbours in the struggle for existence. It is not a fear of what the community may exact in retribution, except so far as the community be held to be entrusted with the execution of that merciless law of the survival of the fittest, which it may be said to enforce in spite of itself. But this is a purely negative effect of social influence, and what we really dread is the natural result of the act upon ourselves. Nor, as I have said, can it be regarded, at any rate in its earliest stages, as a sense of violation of our relations with the Absolute ; for an idea of such complexity as this is quite out of reach of the rudimentary intelligence which accompanies the first growth of moral sanctions. On the other hand, I venture to think that it supplies an adequate explanation of the difficulty to which the Intuitionists triumphantly point as unsolved and unsolvable by any school except their own. The *differentia* of the sense of the sin, whereby it is distinguished from the other internal sanctions of morality, is the peculiar and perhaps indescribable sting which it inflicts, and which it is

utterly beyond the power of mere penalties, however heavy, to produce. But it is precisely this sting which is one of the most marked effects of the feeling of inferiority, as may be seen by a comparison of the torments produced by jealousy, which is another form under which a sense of inferiority, real or imaginary, is expressed, though in a somewhat different connexion.

There can be little doubt, I think, that this sense of inferiority made its appearance at a very early stage in the moral development of man. The first determinants of action are certainly to be found in the pleasures and pains immediately attending the various kinds of conduct possible to primitive man. The dread of retaliation must clearly have operated as a deterrent against the commission of an injury to his neighbour, or to the community. The next stage was reached when injurious actions became classed as things to be avoided in themselves; and at this point the maxims of morality became absolute laws so far as the individual was concerned, because, in addition to the external penalties which their violation involved, their observance was further enforced by the internal sanction of a subjective feeling in their favour, of which a painful breach was caused by a vicious action. It is true that the real origin of the rule became in this way partially obscured, because it was mainly built up of transmitted ancestral experiences wherein the rule survived but not the reason—the *δῖν* without the *διδόναι*; but none the less was its binding force derived from a conviction that in obeying it men ministered in some way perhaps imperfectly understood to their own welfare. In modern times a neglect of individual welfare may be largely counterbalanced by accidental advantages, such as inherited wealth, the assistance of powerful friends, and so forth; but in early communities not only was the struggle for existence much more severe, but the fortune of every individual depended almost, if not quite, exclusively on his own capabilities and conduct. In such a community any neglect or violation of the conditions of success would be followed rigorously by its natural consequences. Cowardice or treachery in battle against the common foe, or a breach of such rude faith as might obtain between savages would bring immediate retribution in the shape of retaliatory injuries or even death. But apart from these, there would be a further punishment in store for the offender in the fact that his past misdeeds would stand in the way of his future advancement. The coward or traitor if not killed outright would be deprived of his share of future spoils, as well as of any prospect of pre-eminence in his clan, with the concomitant privileges and benefits which such pre-eminence might confer. In the same way the perpetrator of a private injury would find himself thwarted, not only by the animosities which his actions had kindled, but by the withdrawal of the confidence (however rudimentary it might be) of those whom he had injured. At this stage no doubt any extensive failure of the external penalties which accompanied misdeeds might have caused a disappearance of the feeling that such acts were bad even in the absence of these penalties; in which case the internal sanctions,

including the sense of inferiority, must have perished also. But our knowledge, so far as it goes, of the conditions of primitive society forbids us to suppose that such a failure can have taken place; and we may therefore reasonably conclude that the sense of inferiority, as an internal sanction enforcing the maxims of early morality, is at least as early in point of time as the first growth of the feeling that injurious acts are *mala in se* apart from the external penalties which may attend them.¹

If this be so, it is easy to understand the immense value as well as the immense strength of the sense of inferiority as a moral sanction. The moment the conception of immorality as an evil apart from its consequences arises in the human mind, the sanction of inferiority springs up by its side, an ever present and ever watchful guardian of the moral law, a prophet and an avenger, whose warnings are heard in the voice of conscience and whose vengeance is experienced in the pangs of remorse. When this stage of moral progress has been reached, the certainty of external retribution becomes of less importance, so far as the individual is concerned, to the due maintenance of the moral sense; for whether a particular breach of moral law be detected or not, the sanction of inferiority rises up unfailingly in judgment against the offender, and, through the medium of hereditarily transmitted experiences, with ever increasing strength through succeeding generations.

It is this omnipresence and continuity of operation which constitutes one great source of the strength of the sanction. The other is to be found in the desire and dread of power which are feelings common to the whole of humanity, and which are peculiarly prominent among the less civilised races. The reverence of power is sufficiently intelligible under social conditions where might was practically right, and physical conditions which confronted the slender resources of primitive man with the stupendous and untamed energy of the forces of nature. But without dwelling longer on the origin of this reverence, it is necessary to touch briefly on its relation to the sense of inferiority now under discussion. The reverence of power, as I have said, combined the two elements of dread and desire, and to each of these the sanction of inferiority lent a well-nigh imperative force. The desire of power led naturally to a desire of the means of attaining it. These obviously consisted of excellence of all kinds, including of course moral excellence, however scanty the content of the term may have been. Similarly, power being an object of dread as a hostile external influence, every form of inferiority, moral or other, diminished the individual's capacity for resisting its attacks.

Thus it will be seen that the consequences of inferiority are not

¹ It is not impossible that the operation of this sanction may have been felt even at an earlier stage of moral development, but so long as the stern penalties of retaliation were the principal deterrents from injurious action, the more delicate restraint of internal sanctions can hardly have had much practical effect.

limited to a single definite penalty, which may or may not be avoided, but include all the possible injuries which can result to the organism from an imperfect adaptation to its environment. And its efficacy as a sanction lies not only in the wide range of external evils to which it exposes the individual, but in the inward torments of the peculiar sting by which it is normally accompanied. Such I conceive to be the origin, and such the justification of the sense of sin.

In conclusion it may be useful shortly to re-state the position I have sought to establish, in its relation to Intuitionism, Utilitarianism and Evolutionism respectively. The Intuitionist regards the sense of sin as directly due to a violation of the categorical imperative of duty. But to this it may be objected, first, that the existence of this maxim, as something originally innate, has been and still is vigorously disputed; secondly, that its proof or disproof is rendered impossible by the transcendental character claimed for it, whereby it is at once placed beyond the reach of an investigation which could only be conducted under the conditions of relativity. Passing to Utilitarianism, we find that the sense of sin is referred to a conscious or unconscious estimate of pleasure and pain. Against this may be urged the objection of the Intuitionists that, on the testimony of consciousness, the sense of sin which attaches to the idea of the wrong is generically distinct from the sense of pain which is associated with the idea of the unprofitable. Finally, according to the theory of Evolution, the sense of sin is a "psychical analogue" of the sense of physical pain, but, unlike physical pain and the remorse which attends the violation of a law of social morality, can only be felt by an intelligence sufficiently complex to recognise the relationship in which it stands to the Absolute and Inscrutable Power, which, though the cause of all things, is only known to us in its phenomenal manifestations: in short an intelligence which is capable of discerning that the laws of nature are, in the deepest and truest sense, the decrees of God.

In criticism of this view, I have attempted to point out (1) that the distinction raised between remorse and the sense of sin cannot be upheld; (2) that in this account the growth and development of the sense of sin are left in considerable obscurity; (3) that the sense of sin is actually found in societies and individuals where no such complexity has been attained.

My own explanation of the sense of sin I have given above as fully as the necessary limits of the present discussion permit. I cannot of course pretend to have treated the subject exhaustively, nor indeed to have done more than delineate in the barest outline the theory that I advance. But if I have succeeded in representing intelligibly its general character, I shall have attained all that I hoped for, and indeed all that I attempted.

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