

IX.—NOTES AND CORRESPONDENCE.

PROFESSOR SIDGWICK ON "PROGRESSIVE MORALITY".

With the kind permission of the Editor, I purpose to make a few remarks, in reply to Prof. Sidgwick's friendly but acute criticisms, which appeared in the last number of *MIND*, on my recent work, *Progressive Morality*.

Prof. Sidgwick's first criticism is to the following effect: "I do not myself think that what is here [in my chapter on Sanctions] characterised as the 'higher' religious motive, which operates when 'we simply do good and act righteously, because God, who is the supreme object of our love and the supreme ideal of conduct, is good and righteous'—comes strictly under the head of 'sanctions' as defined by Prof. Fowler: that is, I do not think it is clearly a case of pleasure attracting or pain deterring". My definition of a sanction (*Progressive Morality*, p. 4) is 'any pleasure which attracts to as well as any pain which deters from a given course of action'. Now, to a man of lofty religious sentiment, what pleasure can attract to a given course of conduct more effectively than that which accompanies the reflection that it is in accordance with the nature and will of One who is 'the supreme object of his love and the supreme ideal of conduct,' or, on the other hand, what pain can be more deterrent than that which attends the consciousness of thwarting and displeasing such a Being? I own that I cannot perceive the force of this criticism as I do that of those which follow.

On the next point I only find myself to a slight extent in disagreement with Prof. Sidgwick. With reference to my statement that 'in the main we approve of ourselves for having done what is thought right at the time, even though we may have come to think it wrong,' he admits that "this is true as regards the moral judgments of reflective persons," but thinks that "the emotional satisfaction with which we contemplate a past act, performed under a sense of duty, which we have come to regard as mistaken, is at best a very feeble pleasure". What I have myself said (p. 34) is, 'that the subsequent results of our acts and any change in our estimate of their moral character may considerably modify the feelings with which we look back upon them,' though I maintain that 'still, in the main, it holds good that the approval or disapproval with which we regard our past conduct depends rather upon the opinions of right and wrong which we entertained at the moment of action than those which we have come to entertain since'. It is plain that the difference between Prof. Sidgwick and myself on this point is only one of degree, and that not a very important one.

I am obliged to Prof. Sidgwick for drawing my attention to a passage on p. 139, where I have, by implication, made an exaggerated statement. Having on p. 33 stated that 'human nature, in its normal condition, is so constituted that the remorse felt, when we look back upon a wrong action, far outweighs any pleasure we may have derived from it, I speak, on p. 139, as if it were only where the feelings of self-approbation and self-disapprobation are *very* strong, that a man *always* gains more happiness, in the long run, by following the path of duty and obeying his social impulses than by confining himself to the narrow view which would be dictated by a cool calculation of what is most likely to conduce to his own private good'. The word '*very*,' I must acknowledge, has crept into the sentence through carelessness, as is tolerably plain from the fact that it does not occur in the corresponding sentence, which follows immediately upon it. In the 'normally-constituted' mind, then, I do not regard the

feelings of self-approbation and self-disapprobation as being necessarily very or exceptionally strong, though I do regard them as being strong. For by a normally-constituted mind I do not mean simply an average mind, but a mind of which the various faculties are recognised as healthily developed and as being in due proportion to one another. It is not necessarily a mind of heroic or exceptional virtue, but a mind representing a 'norma' or exemplar, which, though not always actually followed, admits of being followed by average men. In the case of such a mind I am prepared to reiterate the statement that the pleasures and pains attendant on the feelings of self-approbation and self-disapprobation are 'far more intense and durable than any other pleasures and pains,' though, perhaps, in order to avoid misconception, I ought to have explained, thus early in the book, that, in estimating relative intensity, I include the elements both of quality and quantity. Nor do I regard this statement as inconsistent with the doctrine ascribed, and rightly ascribed, to me by Prof. Sidgwick that 'sacrifice' is an essential characteristic of acts morally approved. It is true that, if a man consciously and deliberately attempts to forecast his subsequent feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and throws them, as it were, into the scale, he cannot, strictly speaking, be said to sacrifice his 'own good to the greater good of others'. But this, I imagine, is a rare case. Men usually act on much more direct motives than a prospective reference to their own subsequent feelings. Even the best men act, on most occasions, from principles which, indeed, they have learnt to approve, but without any direct regard to the satisfaction they will subsequently experience. And, when they do act on this motive, it seems to me that there is still an element of sacrifice, an element which I have included under that head in my third chapter, namely, the sacrifice of their own lower to their higher good.

The passage which I have quoted from Hume (pp. 40-42) in order to illustrate the analysis of an act of moral approbation was quoted simply and solely for that purpose, and I had no idea that it could be taken (as it has been taken by more than one critic) as committing me to any other parts of Hume's system. I certainly do not agree with the purely subjective 'hypothesis' of Hume, which 'maintains that morality is determined by sentiment,' and 'defines virtue to be whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation, and vice the contrary' (*Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix I.). On the other hand, in reply to Prof. Sidgwick's question, I may say that I do conceive the class to which an action is intellectually referred, before it excites "the appropriate feeling of approbation or disapprobation," as "having ethical characteristics—I mean, as being good or bad, right or wrong". I am sorry if my language is at all doubtful upon this point, but it appears to me that the expressions quoted by Prof. Sidgwick himself, such as 'moral judgment' and the like, sufficiently define my position, and that, had it not been for the quotation from Hume which is supposed to imply more than I intended by it, my opinion could not well have been mistaken. And, even within three short pages (p. 46) of that quotation, I find the following passage exactly pertinent to this question, a passage which Prof. Sidgwick must have overlooked: 'When an action has once been pronounced to be right or wrong, morally good or evil, or has been referred to some well-known class of actions whose ethical character is already determined, the emotion of approval or disapproval is excited and follows as a matter of course'.

There is an apparent inconsistency in my account of the logical process of which the moral judgment is the result, as stated in chaps. 3 and 4 respectively, which I am indebted to Prof. Sidgwick for pointing out,

and which I am glad of the opportunity of correcting. In chap. 3, I speak of referring the actions of ourselves or others to some class, or associating them with certain actions of a similar kind, which are familiar to us, and so determining their character, taking as my instances of such classes a lie, a theft, a fraud, &c. In chap. 4, as Prof. Sidgwick points out, I say that, in the process of forming a moral judgment, there are two possible sources of error. In the first place, the act of reference or association may be faulty, and the action may not really belong to the class to which we refer or really be like the other actions with which we associate it. . . . But, even if the action be referred to its right [proper] head, there remains the second question whether we are really justified in regarding the class of actions itself as right or wrong'. Should my book reach a second edition, I propose, in order to avoid misconception and the appearance of inconsistency, to substitute for the last sentence the two following: 'But, even if the action be referred to its proper head, there remains (in all those cases where the reference is to classes less generic than the ultimate heads of right and wrong themselves) a second and further question. Are we really justified in affixing the ethical stamp of right or wrong to the class of actions under consideration?' The fact is that the process of reference may be to class within class. Thus: Is this a mis-statement; and is every mis-statement or every mis-statement of this kind a lie; and is a lie, or a lie of this kind, wrong? It is only, I should maintain, when we have referred an action to the ultimate head of right or wrong, or to some well-known class of actions whose ethical character has been already determined by or for us, that the emotion of approval or disapproval is excited. But there may be an unlimited number of references to previous heads, before this point is reached.

As regards the test of conduct, Prof. Sidgwick, while praising the manner in which I trace "the progress of morality as the result of the continued application" of the test which I adopt, demurs to my statement (p. 108) that 'wherever any change of moral conduct takes place, unless it be dictated by blind passion, or mere submission to authority, enforced or voluntary, the change is invariably due to some change of opinion on what constitutes the advantage of the persons whom it affects'. "To take Prof. Fowler's own instance," he says, "I should attribute such a change as that which has brought about the abolition of slavery rather to an increased general concern for the feelings of slaves than to a changed opinion as to what constituted their advantage." Surely, if I may venture to say so, Prof. Sidgwick takes the word 'advantage' in a very narrow sense. What can be more disadvantageous to any class of persons than a state of things which constantly degrades them in their own eyes, preventing or checking the growth of any feeling of self-respect, and, at every turn, suggesting their inferiority and dependence? And what can be a greater 'advantage' to them than to deliver them from such a condition? It has been a growing sympathy, I maintain, combined with a fuller realisation of everything that affects the ill or well being (including the 'feelings') of the inferior sections of society that has been mainly instrumental in bringing about the change in the conduct of the higher sections towards them.

Prof. Sidgwick proceeds to say that he has a difficulty in criticising closely my view of moral progress, since he is unable to conceive with any precision the application of the test which I propose. This incapacity appears to arise from two causes: (1) because I 'frankly acknowledge that there are some pleasures and pains which are incommensurable with one another'; (2) because I 'recognise the fact that our pleasures differ in quality as well as in volume'. As respects the first point, I cannot help thinking that he mistakes my meaning, though, perhaps, I may have

failed to make it as clear as I might have done. I do not mean that every pleasure, say, of the moral or intellectual kind, is incommensurable with every pleasure, say, of the sensual kind, but that a particular pleasure or pain of one kind may, in the case of some men, be so intense that no amount of pleasure or pain of some other kind, or possibly even of the same kind, can be brought into comparison with it. To repeat my own instance, a man who is tormented with the recollection of having committed a great crime, will, as the phrase goes, 'take pleasure in nothing'; while, similarly, a man who is enjoying the retrospect of having done his duty, in some important crisis, will care little for obloquy or even for the infliction of physical suffering. Or, again, a man may be so absorbed in some intellectual occupation, or in spiritual ecstasy, or in the furtherance of some religious or political ideal, or even in the pursuit of his own reputation, that he may become utterly careless of his surroundings and indifferent to physical and even social enjoyments. I need not go further than a very recent example. Can we suppose that any amount of physical enjoyment would have compensated Gordon for the remorse subsequent on a plain dereliction of duty? Prof. Sidgwick challenges me to say "how many grades of incommensurability there are, and what pleasures and pains belong to each grade". I do not think, and have not stated, that the various kinds of pleasures can be definitively arranged in grades, and that these are respectively incommensurable with one another; and all, it seems to me, that my language implies is that there may be individual cases where a pleasure or a pain is so intense or so lasting, or both, that some of our other pleasures and pains sink into insignificance by its side. It is usually, I think, the pleasures and pains attendant on the exercise of our moral, religious, social, æsthetic or intellectual nature which answer to this description, but there are, doubtless, cases, amongst men of a lower type, where the pleasures and pains connected with the love of gain or the love of reputation, or the gratification or frustration of some sensual impulse, may have the same effect. It commonly happens, as a fact, that these "incommensurable" pleasures and pains are characterised by their durability, but, "however limited in duration," I imagine that I can enter into the feelings of those who would prefer such a pleasure "to an indefinitely prolonged pleasurable consciousness" of a feebler and less thrilling kind, "and similarly *mutatis mutandis* of pains". I may observe, however, that the comparison is not always between pleasure and pleasure, or pain and pain, but at least as frequently, if not far more commonly, between pleasure and pain. A man is impelled to the gratification of some desire or to some course of conduct or mode of life, and he feels that, if he does not follow his inclination, all else will be as nothing to him; or, on the other hand, that, if he can not resist some particular temptation or surmount some particular difficulty, his life will become embittered or insipid. And, even where this feeling is not vivid in the prospect, it frequently is so in the retrospect.

I will not enter on the immemorial dispute, whether pleasures differ in kind. So much in a question like this depends on each man's interpretation of his individual consciousness and experience, that argument is usually out of place. I will merely content myself with remarking that I can see no more difficulty in equating differences of quantity and quality in the case of pleasures and pains than in other matters, where we have to deal with differences of quality as well as quantity. In all considerations of this kind, the process must, to a certain extent, be a rough one, but men usually acquire by experience the habit of determining, sufficiently for practical purposes, the extent to which deficiency in one respect may be compensated by superiority in the other.

I am ready to acknowledge, and am indebted to Prof. Sidgwick for leading me to observe, that my meaning on pp. 94-6 might be made clearer by some changes in arrangement and expression. I ought to have drawn the distinction between 'quality' and 'volume' before saying anything about 'incommensurability,' and I ought then to have proceeded to remark that, though, in ordinary cases, we can roughly equate differences of quality and quantity, there occur, from time to time, in the lives of some men, cases in which no amount of pleasure of one kind would compensate for the loss of a particular pleasure of another, or possibly even of the same, kind, or for the pain arising from the frustration or neglect of some overpowering demand of their nature. This occurrence is most conspicuous in great crises of our existence, but the recollections of most men, if I mistake not, will also supply them with instances from the more ordinary experience of life.

Prof. Sidgwick further criticises my test, by asking "Why is it to be assumed that men's common judgments as to the 'high' or 'low' quality of pleasures are less open to the charge of 'prejudice, fancy and caprice' than their common judgments as to the goodness or badness of actions?" I can only answer by saying that our judgments on the goodness or badness of actions ought to be matters of reasoning, implying an ultimate reference to some test or standard, while our judgments on the high or low quality of pleasures are matters of direct experience, implying nothing more than a reference to our own consciousness, past or present. Of course, the distinction between 'high' and 'low' forms of pleasure is not consciously drawn till man has attained a certain amount of moral, social, religious, æsthetic or intellectual cultivation; but, when he has attained to this point of cultivation, and entertains the corresponding feelings and ideas, he has the power of passing an immediate judgment on the relative value of the various pleasures and pains he experiences, and, in spite of what Prof. Sidgwick seems to imply, I think he usually adopts the distinction of 'high' and 'low' or some corresponding one. Now the 'common judgments' of men on matters of direct experience are, I submit, less likely to be open to the charge of 'prejudice, fancy, and caprice' than judgments which, requiring the application of a reasoning process, are formed independently of such a process. And it is judgments of this latter kind, I find on turning to my book, and not the 'common judgments' of men on right and wrong, as Prof. Sidgwick's words would seem to suggest, with which I connect the words 'prejudice, fancy, and caprice'. What I say (p. 87) is—'If there is no rule of right and wrong, then morality must be, to a large extent, a matter of prejudice, fancy, and caprice'. That the 'common judgments' of men 'as to the goodness or badness of actions' are, as a matter of fact, determined by such a rule, applied consciously or unconsciously, accurately or inaccurately, by themselves or others, is a proposition which I have maintained throughout my book.

Prof. Sidgwick represents me accurately in saying that I prefer to call my ultimate standard of morality 'welfare' or 'well-being' rather than happiness, but he brings, I think, into undue prominence one of the reasons,—what I may call the historic reason,—which I assign for doing so. Mid-way between independent and more substantial reasons, I say of the words 'well-being' and 'welfare,'—'corresponding, too, almost exactly with the *εὐδαιμονία* of Aristotle, they have the advantage of venerable historic associations'. But I am hardly so devoted an Aristotelian as to have been largely influenced by this reason, which is plainly somewhat of the nature of an *obiter dictum*. Be this as it may, however, Prof. Sidgwick regards this correspondence a reason for objecting to my test; "since I find," he says, "that Aristotle, in determining the particulars of *εὐδαιμονία*,

appeals to just those common moral opinions as to virtue and vice for which a test, in Prof. Fowler's view, is required". If by these words Prof. Sidgwick means that Aristotle accepts these "common moral opinions" without perceiving the necessity of subjecting them to an external test, I cannot agree with his interpretation of the Aristotelian system, and would refer him, amongst other places, to *Ethics*, bk. vi., chs. 5 and 7; *Politics*, bk. i., ch. 2; bk. iii., ch. 12. But I am here evidently touching on matters too remote from my present object to admit of discussion in this place.

As to the 'practical applications of the moral test' in my last chapter, Prof. Sidgwick thinks that they "are, to a great extent, such as ordinary men would admit to be obligatory in any theoretical discussion, however much they may practically neglect them". I entirely agree with this remark; only I think the explanation of the fact that ordinary men practically neglect them, while they theoretically admit their obligation, is that, not being accustomed to apply any external test to their conduct, they do not adequately apprehend the reasons for them, and, therefore, do not realise the importance of observing them in practice. This is the very ground, I think, on which reflective morality is so much better calculated to be of service to men in the conduct of life than what may be called 'intuitional' morality.

The "undue abbreviation" of some of my arguments in this chapter is owing mainly to the conception which I formed of the proper limits of my Essay, but this is obviously a defect which I cannot attempt to remedy in these pages.

I ought not to take leave of Prof. Sidgwick's criticisms without expressing my gratitude to him for the patient attention with which he has followed my arguments and speculations, and, should my Essay ever reach a second edition or be replaced by a larger and more ambitious work, I can foresee the great advantage which I shall derive even from those portions of his review with which I cannot concur. Philosophical criticism, conducted as Prof. Sidgwick conducts it, cannot be otherwise than beneficial to an author.

T. FOWLER.

THE ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY FOR THE SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY.—The examination of Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Idea*, the special subject of the present Session, has been brought to a close by the discussion of papers on Books iii. and iv., read on March 23, by Mrs. Brooksbank, and on April 27 and May 11, by the Rev. E. P. Scrymgeour. Original papers were read, on March 9, by Mr. S. H. Hodgson on "Free-will and Compulsory Determinism"; on April 13, by Miss M. S. Handley on "The Relation of Consciousness to the Organism"; and on June 1, by Mr. E. H. Rhodes on "The Scientific Conception of the Measurement of Time". The papers were in every instance followed by a discussion.

Prof. Höffding, of Copenhagen, on behalf of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, desires space for the following:—

Question de Philosophie. (Prix : la Médaille d'Or de l'Académie).—L'Académie met au concours la question suivante: *Donner un exposé critique des résultats obtenus par la méthode historique dans le domaine de la morale, et développer l'importance de cette méthode pour la philosophie morale en général.* Les mémoires peuvent être écrits en latin, en français, en anglais, en allemand, en suédois et en danois. Ils ne doivent pas porter le nom de l'auteur, mais une devise, et être accompagnés d'un billet cacheté muni de la même devise, et renfermant le nom, la profession et l'adresse de