

insoluble, still the fact of the suggestion of the problem is valid in itself and is part of the situation in which we find ourselves.

I have reached the end of the proposed innovations in phraseology, and in doing so have fully exhausted the space I can expect from the Editor. I will only ask—Were these four terms needed? Are they very formidable? Do they bear marks of any wish to coin new verbiage for novelty's sake? I must leave the answers to the reader. I am not complaining that the terms must of necessity fight their own way. It is on the whole well that some penalty should attach to any meddling with language; and I foresaw that I was incurring the disadvantage, but felt compelled, for what seemed to me good reasons, to submit to it. The future will show what degree of versatility in this respect there is among the class of readers to which the volume addresses itself.

I should not like to conclude without mentioning that I have in another way thanked Mr. Sully for the generous appreciation of his review in respect of the points which he found himself able to approve.

WILLIAM CYPLES.

THE ETHICAL METHOD OF EVOLUTION.

It may be of some service to students of Ethics to have stated in a concise way the principal questions discussed in the *Data of Ethics*, so far as there seems to be originality in the discussion, and further, in the same connexion, to have presented the assumptions that evolutionists must make before they can establish a new method of Ethics. We propose here to review briefly Mr. Spencer's criticism of other views, with the object of arriving at an estimate of the value of his proposed alterations.

I. (1) Mr. Spencer asserts—"There continues to be entire satisfaction with that form of utilitarianism in which the causal relations between acts and their results are practically ignored" (p. 58); and he goes on to say that utilitarians make no use of deduction in their method. With this position it is only necessary to compare the sixth book of Mill's *Logic*, *passim*. We select one or two sentences out of a hundred that would answer the purpose. As to the formation of character, 'The empirical law derives whatever truth it has from the causal laws of which it is the consequence'. 'Now to such cases we have seen that the Deductive Method, setting out from general laws, and verifying their consequences by specific experience, is alone applicable.' The very illustration used by Mr. Spencer in regard to "the course of one who studies pathology without previous study of physiology" as resembling the usual course of moralists, is one used by Mill for precisely the same purpose:—"Students in politics thus attempted to study the pathology and therapeutics of the social body, before they had laid the necessary foundation in its physiology" (*Logic*, B. VI., c. vi., § 1). In fact Mr. Spencer's volume is very curious reading, taken in connexion with the sixth book of the *Logic*.

(2) Mr. Spencer rather cautiously opposes Mr. Sidgwick in regard to the "fundamental assumption of Hedonism," that feelings as feelings can be arranged in a scale of desirability. He gives two reasons for his opposition; first, although "indefinite things do not admit of definite measurements, yet approximately true estimates of their relative values may be made when they differ considerably" (p. 152). Elsewhere we find the statements—"The philosophical moralist is obliged wholly to ignore any deviation from strict rectitude. It cannot be admitted into his premisses without vitiating all his conclusions" (p. 272). Mr. Spencer adduces the analogy of geometry to show that Ethics ought to deal with ideally perfect human relations, and rebukes Mr. Sidgwick severely for maintaining that geometry can deal with irregular lines. It appears that Mr. Sidgwick's offence consists in not introducing the word 'approximately'. Since all lines known to our senses are irregular, it seems not improper to consider that geometry in some sense does not refuse to deal with them.

The second reason given by Mr. Spencer is as follows:—"Even if the relative values of things are not determinable, it remains true that the most valuable should be chosen." "Because I believe that of many dangerous courses I ought to take the least dangerous, do I make 'the fundamental assumption' that courses can be arranged according to a scale of dangerousness" (p. 153). It is enough to say that the word 'dangerous' has no meaning, unless it is possible to compare objects or acts with reference to this quality. Mr. Spencer's own illustrations of the relativity of knowledge make it plain that we could not know that a course was dangerous at all, unless we could measure it against other courses. It is difficult to comprehend how the maxim 'Take the least dangerous course' is supposed to have originated, when no difference between courses in respect to danger could be discerned.

The motive of Mr. Spencer's opposition is his desire to introduce Justice as a principle from which right action may be deduced without calculation of pleasures. But he has himself shown that justice is only a means to happiness (c. iii.), and it is impossible to do this without an acquaintance with the consequences to happiness of just acts. Of course, if Mr. Spencer insists that a just act is one that *must* produce happiness, and refuses any inductive proof, the question becomes merely one of definition, and controversy is profitless.

(3) It is somewhat perplexing after this apparent denial of any direct comparison of pleasurable results, to listen to Mr. Spencer's comments on the 'hedonistic paradox'. He thinks this no paradox, because it is a general law that the pleasure attendant on the use of means to achieve an end, itself becomes an end. No one, perhaps, ever disputed this, but since the paradox holds of pleasures connected with the use of means, the explanation misses the mark. If such pleasures are made the conscious aim, the highest zest and flavour are gone from the pursuit. Probably nowhere is the failure more signal than in the case cited by Mr. Spencer, where the admiration of others causes the pleasure. He seems himself paradoxical when he maintains

that happiness cannot be reached by making it the immediate object of pursuit, and at the same time insists that the pleasure of using means itself becomes an end. This latter pleasure is happiness;—if happiness cannot be reached by direct aim, the happiness derived from the use of means cannot be gained by aiming at it.

Mr. Spencer, in criticising Bentham, remarks that what pleasure is, is an extremely uncertain question. As his theory is based on the principle that pleasure is intimately connected with welfare, it seems to follow that if we cannot tell what pleasure is, we cannot tell what welfare is. If we had any means of determining welfare without reference to pleasure, we might dismiss happiness altogether as an end. But as Hobbes's principle, Pleasure helpeth vital actions, is fundamental to evolution, this way of escape is cut off.

(4) Mr. Spencer's ideas concerning Justice deserve a little examination. It "is concerned exclusively with *quantity* under *stated conditions*, whereas happiness is concerned with both *quantity* and *quality* under *conditions not stated*". It refers to "the relative amounts of actions, or products, or benefits, the natures of which are recognised only so far as is needful for saying whether *as much* has been given, or done, or allowed, by each concerned, as was implied by tacit or overt understanding, to be an equivalent". Overlooking the objection that justice is here confined to the market-place, it is to be observed that it is not a simple matter to determine that one act, or one part of a course of action is equivalent to another. It is impossible, as a rule, to specify all the circumstances that may affect future acts. It is impossible that the understanding of all persons interested in a certain transaction should be the same. Some expectations must always be disappointed, and in such cases the consideration of happiness generally controls the decision. "Differences of age, of growth, of constitutional need, differences of activity and consequent expenditure, differences of desires and tastes," which Mr. Spencer thinks impossible to be estimated by a utilitarian, must all be estimated before any course of action can be said to be *equivalent* to any other course. And if a comparison of pleasures is impossible, this estimate is impossible.

But it cannot be admitted that justice consists simply in the fulfilment of contracts. Very few persons in the lowest ranks of labour, perhaps, regard their wages as an equivalent for their pains. It is all they can get and they take it, but to say that justice is confined to giving them it, is to say that the existing social arrangements are perfectly just, which Mr. Spencer does not maintain. If he is talking of justice in an ideal state, he still has to suppose every person in making a contract to be able to decide what will be an equivalent for his sacrifice and to do this without a comparison of pleasures.

(5) In attempting to expound Absolute Ethics Mr. Spencer seems to be inconsistent with himself. We are told that "the moral law is the law of the perfect man—the formula of ideal conduct—is the statement in all cases of that which should be, and cannot recognise in its propositions any elements implying existence of that which should not be. . . . No conclusions can lay claim to absolute truth, but such as

depend upon truths that are themselves absolute, &c." (p. 271). At the close of the treatise we are informed that "a code of perfect personal conduct can never be made definite. No specific statement of the activities universally required for personal wellbeing is possible." If a code of perfect personal conduct can never be made definite, it can hardly be called absolute. And if personal conduct cannot be defined, race conduct or national conduct cannot be defined. The least objectionable compromises of the claims of an indefinite Absolute Ethics with those of a defective and empirical Relative Ethics, with no standard of objectionableness to appeal to, is all that we have to guide us in weighing the claims of present self against the claims of future self, and our own interests against those of others.

(6) In criticising the expression, 'Every one to count for one, &c.,' Mr. Spencer asks—"Does this mean that, in respect of whatever is portioned out, each is to have the same share, whatever his character, whatever his conduct?" The answer to this question may be found by Mr. Spencer in the quotation that he himself makes from Mill. 'The Greatest Happiness Principle is a mere form of words without rational signification, unless one person's happiness, supposed equal in degree (with the proper allowance made for kind), is counted for exactly as much as another's.' Mr. Spencer goes on to maintain that it would be absurd to divide equally "the concrete means to happiness" (*quantity* under *stated conditions*), because "differences of age, of growth, of constitutional need, differences of activity, &c.," would prevent the greatest happiness from being even proximately secured (p. 223). It is "the conditions under which each may pursue happiness" (*quantity* and *quality* under *conditions not stated*), that are to be equally distributed. It will hardly be thought that such a distribution, which must take into account all the peculiarities of individual character and the possible effects of outside forces, is a simpler task than that of comparing pleasures.

After ridiculing all the attempts of others to attain equality in the distribution of happiness, on account of individual differences, Mr. Spencer proceeds to state that in the case of his theory it will be convenient to disregard this objection. "Though . . . we cannot regard the members of a society as absolutely equal, and therefore cannot deal with problems growing out of their relations with that precision which absolute equality might make possible; yet considering them as approximately equal in virtue of their common human nature, and dealing with questions of equity on this supposition, we may reach conclusions of a sufficiently-definite kind" (p. 285). The objections to equalising the treatment of good and bad seem to have now disappeared. The "differences of age, &c.," that formed an insuperable obstacle to the utilitarian, may be waived by the evolutionist. Mr. Spencer seems to overlook the fact that if he can get sufficiently-definite conclusions by assuming the approximate equality of all men, his adversaries will claim the right to make the same assumption, and get equally definite conclusions; while critics will deny the right to both, upon the ground that it is precisely because

men are not, even approximately, equal, that Ethics is a difficult field of study.

II. We now proceed to consider the assumptions necessary to Mr. Spencer's conclusions. The essence of his theory may be stated in a few words. We are now to employ the deductive method in morals. The immediate object of pursuit should now be conformity to certain principles which, in the nature of things, causally determine welfare. Hence welfare and the principles that determine it must be defined. Conduct is good or bad according as its aggregate results are pleasurable or painful; and good conduct is highly evolved conduct. Conduct is most highly evolved and therefore best, when the making of all adjustments of acts to ends subserving complete individual life, together with all those subserving maintenance of offspring and preparation of them for maturity, not only consists with the making of like adjustments by others but furthers it. The complete life is the life that is the greatest possible both in length and breadth. Length of life perhaps requires no definition; breadth of life varies as the sum of vital activities, or with the number and variety of adjustments of acts to ends. Hence we may suppose that life to be the broadest wherein the number of adjustments, allowing for variety, is the greatest possible.

(1) The first assumption that we will consider is this. *The proportion which variety, in the adjustment of acts to ends, bears to number, is knowable.* Unless we can say whether one life containing a greater number but a less variety of adjustments is more or less broad than another, we cannot tell what breadth of life is. And if not, we cannot define complete life, for life is estimated by multiplying its length into its breadth. If we cannot tell what complete life is, we cannot tell what conduct is most highly evolved or best. The only attempt to remove this difficulty has been already alluded to. If we consider the members of a society as approximately equal, of course we need not trouble ourselves about the breadth of their lives. In regard to the knowableness of length of life, the same assumption is made, and the same criticism will apply.

(2) Supposing that we are able to reduce quality of adjustment to terms of number, it is then necessary to assume that *the greatest possible number of adjustments is a knowable quantity.* We must know the final number of possible complete lives upon the earth, so as to regulate our acts with reference to the production and maintenance of this number. Any miscalculation will result in a diminution of positive happiness or an increase of positive misery. Without this knowledge, we cannot say of any act that it is best.

(3) *The proportion between acts that subserve complete individual life and those that subserve maintenance of offspring is knowable, as well as the relation of this proportion to all similar proportions.* Most of the problems of life require, for their perfect solution, this knowledge. Mr. Spencer's system must suppose that there is no uncertainty about the numerical relations of a single proportion, if it is to be absolute in character.

(4) Absolute welfare being thus established, it is found to be a state where the adjustment of acts to ends results in the adjustment of acts to ends. To connect welfare with happiness the doctrine of the relation of pleasure to welfare is introduced. Mr. Spencer defines pleasure as whatever feeling we desire. This, as Mr. Sidgwick observes, is not a psychological truth, but a tautological assertion. Even if we consider pleasure as agreeable sensation, and admit that all our activity is directed to the attainment of this end, which is certainly more than would commonly be assumed, several additional assumptions are necessary before the doctrine is of service to Mr. Spencer.

(5) It cannot be denied that the choice of a present pleasure instead of a present pain often results in death or diminution of life. But, it is urged, this merely shows "that special and proximate pleasures and pains must be disregarded out of consideration for remote and diffused pleasures and pains" (p. 85). Mr. Spencer's doctrine seems a curious blending of the Aristotelian mean and the Socratic view that virtue is knowledge. But he has elsewhere committed himself against the fundamental assumption that pleasures are measurable, and what guidance we are to have in disregarding special pleasures is not clear.

(6) As the conditions of existence have changed in the past, misadjustments of feelings to the requirements have arisen, and failures of guidance by pleasures and pains. "But lack of faith in such further evolution of humanity as shall harmonise its nature with its conditions, adds but another to the countless illustrations of inadequate consciousness of causation." "Progress cannot cease till complete adaptation is reached." We will not stop to compare this view with that of the Millenarians, and will only suggest that even death is only necessary on the assumption of an arbitrarily fixed vital force that is gradually expended. The assumptions here made are, first,—*Happiness has gradually increased.* This would be denied by an increasing school of pessimists. Secondly,—*The conditions of existence which have hitherto been occasionally changing, will become fixed.* If not, misadjustments and failure of guidance will continue. This assumption requires a host of others as to the infinity of the universe down to the permanence of the supply of coal. Thirdly,—*What the ultimate conditions of existence will be, and when they will be established, is knowable.* Without this knowledge we cannot correct misadjustments, nor distinguish the true value of remote pleasures. And an error of a million years in his calculation might transform a paragon of virtue into a monster of vice. Fourthly,—*The conditions of existence that will intervene between the present and the ultimate conditions are knowable.* Natures adapted to one set of conditions must be gradually adapted to changing conditions and these latter must of course be known.

(7) At the beginning of his treatise Mr. Spencer declares that no part of conduct can be understood unless we understand the whole, not only of human but also of animal conduct, and not only all present but all past conduct. Such being the condition, we welcome some of the criticisms that occur elsewhere in his treatise. "The few factors

in this immense aggregate of appliances and processes which are known, are very imperfectly known, and the great mass of them are unknown." "Throughout a considerable part of conduct, no guiding principle, no method of estimation, enables us to say whether a proposed course is even relatively right."

(8) It would be now in place to consider the principles that causally determine welfare. We have been able to discover but one principle that is not too vague and general to be useless,—the principle of Equity or Justice. But since this principle is fruitful only on the supposition of the equality of the members of a society, it perhaps requires no especial consideration. As to the general value of this system of Ethics, we cannot suppose that Mr. Spencer will be contented with the position of a medical adviser assigned him by Prof. Bain in his review in *MIND*. The system has the strength and the weakness of other systems that assume a knowledge of final causes. Grant to any one the gift of the seer and the elaboration of a system is not difficult. But no such system is favourable to freedom, for it involves the belief in a part of mankind, that the freedom of the rest can lead only to their misery. The only ground of freedom is in the uncertainty of the future. Remove that, and the lives of all men ought to be marked out for them, and any divergence from what is known to be for the general good must be punished. This is the doctrine of the Roman Church. It is also a doctrine to be learned from the *Data of Ethics*.

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BRUTE REASON.

Is the obscurity in which this subject still remains involved really owing to any impenetrable abstruseness of the subject itself, or is it due, even partially, to any mistake in the usual mode of treating it? To many persons the question may seem bold; to some, even frivolous. Mr. Darwin tells us, probably with much truth, that "few persons any longer doubt that animals possess some power of reasoning". Yet, notwithstanding this growing unanimity, one looks in vain amongst the writings of those who favour the notion of brute reason for any defence of it which does not involve the violation of fundamental principles of logic, or of philosophy, or of both. Take a few of the writers of the present century. First, as to *instinct*. Lord Brougham (*Dialogues on Instinct*) held instinct to be the "constant, immediate, and direct operation of the Deity," a conceit the authorship of which he attributed, somewhat gratuitously, to Sir Isaac Newton. Mr. Herbert Spencer defines instinct as "compound reflex action"; while many persons, of various degrees of culture, vaguely imagine it to be an intelligent endowment, or innate intelligence, which they expressively denominate "instinctive knowledge".¹ It is clear that in each of

¹ See an article on "Instinct," by D. A. Spalding, in *Macmillan's Magazine*, No. 160.