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JOURNAL OF  
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EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,  
CAPTAIN F. W. H. PETRIE, F.R.S.L. &c.

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## ORDINARY MEETING, MAY 10, 1880.

H. CADMAN JONES, ESQ., M.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed, and the presentation of the following works for the library were announced :—

“Proceedings of the Royal Society.”  
A Pamphlet. By Dr. J. M. Winn.

*From the same.*  
*Ditto.*

The following paper was then read by the Author :—

*EVOLUTION AND MORAL SCIENCE, BEING OBSERVATIONS ON MR. HERBERT SPENCER'S DATA OF ETHICS.* By the Rev. HENRY WACE, M.A., Chaplain of Lincoln's Inn, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in King's College, London.

1. **M**ANY persons will have welcomed with great interest Mr. Herbert Spencer's recent work on *The Data of Ethics*. He is the recognised exponent of a principle which has of late been asserting a claim to be paramount in all domains of human thought and life. He has projected a comprehensive system of philosophy embracing the whole sphere of existence—animate, inanimate and human—founded upon the hypothesis of Evolution. It was affirmed the other day by Professor Huxley that this hypothesis must now be regarded as conclusively established, and though this opinion is certainly not universal among men of science, there is no doubt that Evolution is the favourite scientific creed of the day. If Mr. Darwin is its chief author, Mr. Spencer may be said to be its chief prophet. He has proclaimed it as the main key to the philosophical and social problems by which mankind have been perplexed, and he does not stop short of putting it forward as the substitute for the religious creed by which our

life has hitherto been moulded. It is to supply us with all the guidance we need, and is in many ways to transform our present views of our duties and capacities. Mr. Herbert Spencer's qualifications for this task do not seem disputed by those who deem it a practicable one. On all hands, indeed, his ability alike in thought and in expression is acknowledged, and we may therefore safely trust his exposition of the bearings of the new philosophy upon the subjects he discusses. Now, so long as the Evolution hypothesis is applied solely within the realm of nature, many of us would be content to leave its value to be discussed by men of science like Professor Huxley. Though the arguments ostensibly adduced in its favour may not seem to us conclusive, we should not feel ourselves competent to intrude into a field where so much special knowledge is required. But when the Evolution philosophy leaves this region and enters a domain like that of Ethics, in which it "comes home to men's business and bosoms," we may assert some competence to judge of its claims, and it becomes a duty to attempt to do so. Ethics include the most important of all questions in human affairs. They affect the simplest matters of daily life on the one hand, and the most momentous questions of religion on the other. They at once supply the foundation and determine the superstructure of human action; and when the exponent of a popular school of philosophy proposes to treat them from an entirely new point of view, we cannot but listen with attention. The subject is one which men of general education are qualified to discuss, and which requires the exercise of the reasoning and reflecting powers rather than special and technical knowledge.

2. In this estimate of the import of the present publication we are following Mr. Herbert Spencer himself. He explains in his preface that it constitutes the first division of the work on the principles of morality, with which his system ends; and he has somewhat deviated from the order he had prescribed for himself in publishing it before some other parts of the system are completed. But he was afraid lest, if he adhered strictly to that order, his health might fail before he reached the last part of his task; and "this last part of the task it is," he says, "to which I regard all the preceding parts as subsidiary." For nearly forty years, his "ultimate purpose, lying behind all proximate purposes, has been that of finding for the principles of right and wrong in conduct at large a scientific basis." To leave this purpose unfulfilled would be a failure of which he did not like to contemplate the probability; and in the present work he

has endeavoured to preclude it, "if not wholly, still partially." Though this division of the work cannot, of course, contain the specific conclusions to be set forth in the entire work, "yet it implies them in such wise that definitely to formulate them requires nothing beyond logical deduction." He adds that he was the more anxious to provide this outline of his final work because he considers that "the establishment of rules of right conduct on a scientific basis is a pressing need. Now that moral injunctions are losing the authority given by their supposed sacred origin, the secularization of morals is becoming imperative. Few things can happen more disastrous than the decay and death of a regulative system no longer fit, before another and fitter regulative system has grown up to replace it." There is a "vacuum" left by "disappearance of the code of supernatural ethics," and in his opinion, "those who believe that it can be filled, and that it must be filled, are called on to do something in pursuance of their belief."

3. These, it may justly be said, are the highest pretensions which a philosopher could well put forward. The "code of supernatural ethics" which Mr. Spencer deems obsolete has been for many centuries the predominant force in the life of the most civilized portions of mankind. It has laid a strong grasp upon the whole of human conduct; it has inspired men in life and has supported them in death. To propose to fill "the vacuum" which would be occasioned by the disappearance of this creed is much more than to offer a new theory on the subject of moral philosophy. It involves little less than founding a new religion. It is an attempt, in Mr. Spencer's own words, to provide for "right and wrong," and therefore for all moral conduct, a new "basis," and that a scientific one. Nor is this his only reason. He is persuaded that the prevalent system of morality is false in tone and injurious in its influence. "Great mischief has been done by the repellent aspect habitually given to moral rule by its expositors; and immense benefits are to be anticipated from presenting moral rule under that attractive aspect which it has when undistorted by superstition and asceticism." "Nor does mischief result only from this undue severity of the ethical doctrine bequeathed us by the harsh past. Further mischief results from the impracticability of its ideal." It upholds a standard of abnegation beyond human achievement, and "the effect is to produce a despairing abandonment of all attempts at a higher life." These observations will seem to many persons to offer a strangely perverted account of a Gospel which promises blessings to all who accept it, and to betray a singular blindness to those "attempts at a higher life" which that

Gospel still stimulates. But our present concern is simply to observe the immense pretensions thus put forward. Mr. Spencer proposes to supersede a Revelation and to regenerate morality. It would hardly be practicable, within the space of a paper to be read before this Society, to offer a complete examination of so comprehensive an attempt; but it will probably not be found difficult to come to a general conclusion as to its value.

4. It need not be said of any work of Mr. Spencer that it contains many interesting discussions, and that the illustrations drawn from his wide knowledge of natural philosophy frequently place the facts of life in a striking light. On the other hand, it is necessary to say that the book contains examples of inaccurate statements and fallacious argumentation which are extremely surprising in a writer of Mr. Spencer's reputation, and which must raise a strong presumption against the trustworthiness of his conclusions on such a subject. Take, for instance, his criticism of Aristotle's view of the relation of virtue to happiness, on pp. 34-37. He is speaking of moralists "who think that the idea of virtue is not resolvable into simpler ideas." "This," he says, "is the doctrine which appears to have been entertained by Aristotle. I say, appears to have been, because his statements are far from consistent with one another. Recognising happiness as the supreme end of human endeavour, it would at first sight seem that he cannot be taken as typical of those who make virtue the supreme end. Yet he puts himself in this category by seeking to define happiness in terms of virtue, instead of defining virtue in terms of happiness." The fallacy of this objection is concealed by the vagueness of its expression. What does Mr. Spencer mean by defining one thing in terms of another? Definition consists in assigning an idea to the class to which it belongs, and specifying the difference which distinguishes it from other ideas of the same class. If, then, Aristotle had said that happiness was a kind of virtue, he would no doubt have treated virtue as a more general idea than happiness. But this is what he does not do. He defines happiness to be "an energy of the soul in accordance with virtue."\* He describes virtue, in other words, as conducive to happiness, not happiness as conducive to virtue.

5. But Mr. Spencer proceeds to show a complete disregard of Aristotle's conceptions on this point. Those, he says (p. 36), which Aristotle calls virtues, "must be so called

\* *ἐνέργεια ψυχῆς κατ' ἀρετὴν ἀρίστην ἐν βίῳ τελείῳ.*—*Eth. Nic.*, i. 5.

in consequence of some common character that is either intrinsic or extrinsic. . . . . Are the virtues classed as such because of some intrinsic community of nature? Then there must be identifiable a common trait in all the cardinal virtues which Aristotle specifies — Courage, Temperance, Liberality, Magnanimity, Meekness, Amiability or Friendliness, Truthfulness, Justice. What, now, is the trait possessed in common by Magnificence and Meekness? and if any such trait can be disentangled, is it that which constitutes the essential trait in Truthfulness? The answer must be—No.” Now, it would be perfectly competent to Mr. Spencer to maintain that this is the true answer; but it is extraordinary he should make no reference whatever to the fact that it is an essential part of Aristotle’s argument to specify not merely a common trait, but a common definition in all these virtues. Aristotle’s discussion of the nature of virtue is one of the most important and elaborate portions of his work, and he defines virtue to be a moral habit subsisting in a mean relative to ourselves, which is determined by sound reason. Thus magnificence is the habit which constitutes the true mean in the expenditure of money, between vulgar profusion on the one side and meanness on the other. Meekness is the mean in reference to the indulgence of anger between undue passion and indifference. Moralists have differed in their opinions respecting the adequacy of this definition of virtue. But it is one of the most memorable contributions to moral science, and if Aristotle’s opinion was to be discussed, it ought not, at all events, to have been ignored. The judgment of so acute an observer deserves at least some respect on a subject in regard to which he stands in the very first rank of thinkers; and it is perfectly certain that he did class the virtues together because he considered them to be marked by “an intrinsic community of character.” That which is to be complained of is not that Mr. Spencer differs from Aristotle. If he could supersede him, so much the better. But we have a right to expect that in treating such a subject, for such a purpose, he would at least attend to what Aristotle says, instead of partly ignoring and partly misrepresenting it.

6. It seemed desirable to draw attention at the outset to this instance of inaccurate statement and argument, because it is intimately connected with one remarkable instance of fallacious reasoning on which, in great measure, the whole of Mr. Spencer’s argument turns. One of the first questions with which a moralist has to deal is the meaning of the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong; and Mr. Spencer’s third chapter discusses “good and bad conduct.” He con-

siders the manner in which the words good and bad are generally applied, and deduces from this general use their meaning as applied to good conduct. He observes that we apply them "according as the adjustments of acts to ends are, or are not, efficient." "The conduct which achieves each kind of end is regarded as relatively good, and is regarded as relatively bad if it fails to achieve it" (p. 22). Accordingly, human conduct is spoken of as right or wrong according as it promotes one of three general ends—the welfare of a man's self, that of his offspring, and that of his fellow-citizens. We do not ordinarily, indeed, Mr. Spencer observes, emphasize the ethical judgments we pass on self-regarding acts—a fact which he explains by the consideration that the self-regarding desires are generally strong enough and do not need moral enforcement. But when we turn to the rearing of offspring, a mother is termed good "who, ministering to all the physical needs of her children, also adjusts her behaviour in ways conducive to their mental health;" and similarly with the father. But "most emphatic are the applications of the words good and bad to conduct throughout that third division of it comprising the deeds by which men affect one another. In maintaining their own lives and fostering their offspring, men's adjustments of acts to ends are so apt to hinder the kindred adjustments of other men, that insistence on the needful limitations has to be perpetual; and the mischiefs caused by men's interferences with each other's life-sub-serving actions are so great that the interdicts have to be peremptory. Hence the fact that the words good and bad have come to be specially associated with acts which further the complete living of others, and acts which obstruct their complete living. Goodness, standing by itself, suggests, above all other things, the conduct of one who aids the sick in re-acquiring normal vitality, assists the unfortunate to recover the means of maintaining themselves, defends those who are threatened with harm in person, property, or reputation, and aids whatever promises to improve the living of all his fellows. Contrariwise, badness brings to mind, as its leading correlative, the conduct of one who, in carrying on his own life, damages the lives of others, by injuring their bodies, destroying their possessions, defrauding them, calumniating them" (p. 24).

7. It will be necessary to return to this passage; but for the purpose of observing the fallacy more particularly in view, let us pass on to the deductions Mr. Spencer draws from these observations. He has argued in a previous chapter that evolution reaches its highest stage when conduct "simul-



taneously achieves the greatest totality of life in self, in offspring, and in fellow men" (p. 26); and this, in accordance with the illustrations just given, he concludes to be good conduct. He next observes that this judgment upon conduct involves an affirmative answer to the question, Is life worth living? "On the answer to this question," he says, "depends entirely every decision on the goodness and badness of conduct" (p. 26). Of course, this is only true on the assumption just made, that conduct is good or bad according as it increases or diminishes the sum total of life. But allowing this to pass for the moment, let us follow Mr. Spencer further. He proceeds to inquire on what ground the question of the desirableness of promoting life is practically determined; and he concludes that all arguments on the subject "assume it to be self-evident that life is good or bad, according as it does, or does not, bring a surplus of agreeable feeling." That which is implied in all views "is, that conduct should conduce to preservation of the individual, of the family, and of society, only supposing that life brings more happiness than misery. Changing the venue cannot alter the verdict. If either the pessimist, while saying that the pains of life predominate, or the optimist, while saying that the pleasures predominate, urge that the pains borne here are to be compensated by pleasures received hereafter, and that so life, whether or not justified in its immediate results, is justified in its ultimate results, the implication remains the same. The decision is still reached by balancing pleasures against pains. . . . Thus there is no escape from the admission that in calling good the conduct which subserves life, and bad the conduct which hinders or destroys it, and in so implying that life is a blessing and not a curse, we are inevitably asserting that conduct is good or bad according as its total effects are pleasurable or painful" (p. 28). "One theory only," he affirms, "is imaginable, in pursuance of which other interpretations of good and bad can be given. This theory is that men were created with the intention that they should be sources of misery to themselves; and that they are bound to continue living that their Creator may have the satisfaction of contemplating their misery" (p. 28). Omitting people of this class "as beyond or beneath argument," Mr. Spencer finds that all others avowedly or tacitly hold that the final justification for maintaining life can only be the reception from it of a surplus of pleasurable feeling over painful feeling; and that goodness or badness can be ascribed to acts which subserve life or hinder life only on this supposition. He concludes, therefore, that "if we call good every kind of conduct which aids the lives of others, and do this under the belief

that life brings more happiness than misery ; then it becomes undeniable that, taking into account immediate and remote effects on all persons, the good is universally the pleasurable.”

8. Now, here we reach that strange fallacy in reasoning which has been referred to as underlying the whole argument. It is evident that if this statement be intended as a definition of moral goodness, it is vague and incomplete in the extreme. It is certainly not every kind of pleasure that is morally good. That only is morally good which involves particular kinds of pleasure, or a particular subordination of pleasures. Although there is some carelessness, from which Mr. Spencer might again have been preserved by Aristotle, in using the words pleasure and happiness as if they were synonymous, it was scarcely necessary, perhaps, to expend so much argument in order to prove that moral goodness leads to blessedness, and that we cannot conceive righteousness ultimately disjoined from happiness. The good belongs to the class of pleasurable things. But what are we to think of a reasoner who concludes from this, as if it were self-evident, that pleasureableness is the one universal test of goodness, and constitutes, in fact, either its definition or its distinguishing property? It is an offence against one of the most elementary rules of logic. Man is an animal, to quote an old logical example ; but no one, probably, ever yet concluded from this that we call an individual a man on account of his possessing an animal nature. Yet this is similar to Mr. Spencer's argument ; and he proceeds to reiterate it in the most confident and positive form. He asserts that “the moralist who thinks this conduct intrinsically good, and that intrinsically bad, if pushed home, has no choice but to fall back on their pleasure-giving and pain-giving effects. *To prove this it needs but to observe how impossible it would be to think of them as we do if their effects were reversed.* Suppose that gashes and bruises caused agreeable sensations and brought in their train increased power of doing work and receiving enjoyment, should we regard assault in the same manner as at present? . . . . Or, again, suppose that picking a man's pocket excited in him joyful emotions by brightening his prospects, would theft be counted among crimes as in existing law-books and moral codes? *In these extreme cases, no one can deny that what some call the badness of actions is ascribed to them solely for the reason that they entail pain, immediate or remote, and would not be so ascribed did they entail pleasure*” (p. 31). In Mr. Spencer's phrase, it should rather be said that “no one can deny” that there is absolutely no consecution in this argument. Without reference to the validity of the conclusion,

the apparent reasoning by which it is reached is a mere sophism. The fact alleged is that we should not consider an act bad unless it entailed pain. It certainly does not follow that we call it bad "solely for the reason that it entails pain." Because a certain result is the property of an action, it does not follow that it is its only property; nor even that it is its principal property. Even if it be allowed that the pain resulting from evil actions is one reason why we call them bad, there is an extreme recklessness of assumption in jumping to the conclusion that this is the only reason. Mr. Spencer cannot consistently contend that there are no characteristic qualities in morally good actions except that they tend to pleasure. He himself, as we shall subsequently have occasion to observe, recognises that justice is a valuable practical test of actions (p. 164). If so, it follows that badness may be confidently ascribed to an action because it is unjust. It must be observed, however, that Mr. Spencer leaves himself no escape from this fallacy. He goes on to say, that, "using as our tests these most pronounced forms of good and bad conduct, we find it unquestionable that our ideas of their goodness and badness really originate from our consciousness of the certainty or probability that they will produce pleasures or pains somewhere." Giving the utmost latitude to his argument, what does it prove about the origination of these ideas? He maintains by a very elaborate method that goodness must lead to pleasure somewhere and somehow. "Pleasure somewhere, at some time, to some being or beings, is an inexpugnable element of the conception." Granting that this may be ultimately involved in the conception, it is a very different thing to assume that it was its origin, and its sole origin. Even, in a word, if the conclusion were right the premises would not carry it. If such a piece of reasoning on such a subject were encountered in a writer of less reputation than Mr. Herbert Spencer, we should be justified in at once laying down the volume. On questions which deal with the complex and delicate organization of the highest part of human nature, accurate statement and strictly logical reasoning are more than usually requisite; and if we find these qualifications disregarded at the very threshold of the subject, we may well lose all confidence in the sequel.

9. The point Mr. Spencer has omitted to notice is indicated by a hasty observation of his own in the passage, already noticed, which refers to Aristotle. "If," he says, "virtue is primordial and independent, no reason can be given why there should be any correspondence between virtuous conduct and conduct that is pleasure-giving in its total effects on self, or others, or both; and if there is not any necessary corre-

spondence, it is conceivable that the conduct classed as virtuous should be pain-giving in its total effects" (p. 37). It would seem peculiarly strange that such a remark should be made by an evolutionist. One of the most interesting features in Mr. Spencer's book is his description of the manner in which, as life becomes more and more developed, the different functions of our nature, physical, biological, psychological, and sociological, each attain their best development. As he expresses it, the "physiological rhythms" become more regular as well as more various in their kinds as organization advances. Activities are fulfilled "in the spontaneous exercise of duly-proportioned faculties." If this be the case, and the implications of the theory of evolution lead Mr. Spencer to lay great stress on it, the perfection of the individual faculties, their harmonious and pleasurable exertion, is necessarily in correspondence with the final result attained in the complete development of the whole social system. In fact, though he ignores it, he sometimes approaches closely to Aristotle's statement, that happiness is an energy in accordance with the most perfect action of our faculties. If, therefore, in any case, it be immediately discernible what is the right action of a given faculty, we may know, without going any further, that this is conducive to the ultimate happiness of mankind. To take an obvious example: it is a matter wholly independent of theories respecting the universe, of religion or of evolution hypotheses, that the virtue of one part of the intellect is to argue according to the rules of the syllogism, and to calculate in accordance with the multiplication table. If then a man maintains that twice two are five, or if Mr. Spencer mistakes a logical *Genus* for a property, can we allow that we have no reason to call the respective procedures bad except that they have painful consequences? They are wrong in themselves. There is something "primordial and independent" in the badness of a false syllogism; and the reason to be given for the ultimate correspondence between good reasoning and good conduct is, that, according to Mr. Spencer's own hypothesis, all things are indissolubly bound up together; so that an error in one entails an error in all. Now, if we are thus capable of detecting an intellectual error, without reference to its ultimate consequences, why not a moral error? If we are capable of detecting a false argument, in itself and as it stands, why should we not be capable of similarly detecting a wrong act in morals? In a word, if nature be one, there is evident reason why all parts of it should be in harmony, and why a defect in a part should necessarily entail defect in the whole.

10. Mr. Spencer's argument appears, in short, vitiated from

the outset by the fatal error of incomplete observation. He has specified a large class of cases in which the words good and bad are applied to actions; and it would seem as if he were too much attracted by the manner in which these instances suited his hypothesis to examine the meaning of the words any further. But let us recur for a moment to the passage already quoted, in which he urges that "goodness, standing by itself, suggests, above all other things, the conduct of one who aids the sick in re-acquiring normal vitality, assists the unfortunate to recover the means of maintaining themselves," and so on. But further reflection cannot fail to point out that the relative goodness, at all events, which we ascribe to such acts depends on something beyond their tendency "to improve the living of a man's fellows." It would depend in a very large degree upon their motive. At the annual dinner of a charitable corporation, a distinguished city magistrate was once presiding; and he urged with much impressiveness a remarkable argument to stimulate the benevolence of the guests. "In the course of a long life," he said, "I have observed that any money a man may bestow in charity has the most curious way of coming back to him." Now supposing two men, equal in all other respects, putting the same sum into the plate, but the one doing so out of sheer benevolence, the other for the sake of "the curious way" in which it would come back to him, would not our judgment of the relative goodness of the two acts be entirely different? The point may be put even more strongly. Cases, it cannot be doubted, have occurred, in which benevolent institutions, which have conferred incalculable good on posterity, have been founded in pursuance of a positively evil motive, in consequence, for instance, of hatred of a relative, or perhaps from an ignominious endeavour to escape the consequences of a life of sin. Whatever the advantages which result from such an act, we condemn it morally by sole reference to its motive. It is as intrinsically wrong as a false calculation or a bad syllogism; and we may thus call precisely the same act good or bad according to the motive which prompts it. These momentous considerations are indissolubly intertwined with our conceptions of goodness; and a book on Ethics would appear self-condemned which starts by disregarding them.

11. But these named notions of goodness and badness form Mr. Spencer's preliminary *data*; and it would be very strange if satisfactory conclusions were reached from such premises. It is difficult, in fact, to discern any ethical data whatever, properly speaking, in a treatise which rejects any other ultimate test of goodness than that of pleasure,

and which, to say the least, relegates to the background the moral conceptions which have been most potent in the loftiest teachers and the noblest races of men. A few passages in Mr. Spencer's book offer a passing explanation, on the basis of the evolution theory, of the origin of our conceptions of duty, and of moral obligations. But these conceptions are treated as merely temporary stages in the development of conduct; and it is expressly argued that they will disappear. They are described as abstract conceptions, due in the first instance to accumulated experiences of the advantage of controlling the feelings which prompt to immediate gratification by feelings which refer to remoter results; while the element of coerciveness has been introduced by experience of the various forms of restraint—political, social, and religious—which have enforced the authority of these remoter and more complex feelings. But as men become more completely adapted to the social state, they will appreciate more clearly the evil consequences which bad acts naturally produce, and the advantageous consequences which good acts naturally produce. This is the only really moral motive (pp. 120-1), and as it becomes distinct and predominant, it loses the associated consciousness of subjection to some external agency—or in other words “the feeling of obligation fades” (p. 127). This leads to “the tacit conclusion” which, as Mr. Spencer says, “will be to most very startling, that the sense of duty or moral obligation is transitory, and will diminish as fast as moralisation increases” (p. 127). Under such a view moral obligation, which has been hitherto deemed the cardinal principle in Ethics, becomes a mere accident of them. It is neither their beginning nor their end. It arises as a temporary illusion in the process of their development, and the highest attainment of man's moral nature is to live in the simple satisfaction of sound impulses without realising that he is subject to a controlling power or is conforming to the will of a lawful authority. Mr. Spencer admits that this will be to most “a very startling conclusion.” It involves, indeed, a denial that conscience is a permanent faculty in our nature; for if it be, there must always be a pleasure in the consciousness of satisfying it. A conclusion which involves this result appears so complete a paradox that it may safely be left to confute itself and to discredit the argument which leads to it.

12. It seemed desirable to insist on these errors in Mr. Spencer's fundamental conceptions and reasonings, because in a discussion of this kind everything turns upon them. We shall now, moreover, be in a better position to estimate the value of the general system which the author propounds.

He starts from the principle that, as the part cannot be completely understood without a knowledge of the whole, it is necessary, for the purpose of Ethics, to study human conduct as a part of the larger whole constituted by the conduct of animate beings in general. It is not easy to see why this should be necessary. It might as well be argued that we cannot have a science of astronomy without a comprehension of the whole system of the stellar universe. All our sciences have grown up from a careful observation of facts on a small scale and in details, and have been gradually extended from point to point, and from the smaller to the larger generalisations. Of course we can never "fully understand" the part until we understand the whole; but if men of science had commenced their researches into natural philosophy with a general theory of the constitution of nature, they would never have made their present advances. In point of fact, this is what they did attempt in the days before the inductive philosophy; and Bacon's great work was to recall them from these vain speculations to a patient observation of the simple facts at their feet. Accordingly, it has been justly observed by a German critic of Mr. Spencer's work, that it is really a retrogression to the old metaphysical methods.\* It is probably, indeed, this attempt to construct a complete scheme of the universe which constitutes the attraction of writers of this school. Every age—every leading school of thought has produced its systematizer, and the modern representatives of the inductive philosophy are as prone as the schoolmen to assume certain absolute principles as their starting-point, and to cut down all the facts of life so as to fit their bed of Procrustes.

13. Professor Calderwood has, however, pointed out forcibly in the *Contemporary Review* for January, that in order to render the evolution theory applicable to moral life, Mr. Spencer has been compelled to modify the hypothesis in a degree which, as implied in an expression used by the author himself, amounts to a complete reversal of it. The operative principle of evolution up to the point at which human conduct begins is "the struggle for existence" between members of the same species and members of different species; and "very generally," as Mr. Spencer philosophically puts it, "a successful adjustment made by one creature involves an unsuccessful adjustment made by another creature, either of the same kind or of a different kind" (p. 17). That

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\* *Schürers Theologische Literatur-Zeitung*, 27 March, 1880.

is to say, a lion makes a successful adjustment of means to ends when he devours a lamb, and this involves an unsuccessful adjustment on the part of the unfortunate lamb. A similar combination of successful and unsuccessful adjustments is seen in a state of war between human beings; and the "struggle for existence" takes its highest form in such conflicts. But Mr. Spencer feels that a state of war cannot be regarded as the ultimate form of human society; and, on the contrary, he lays it down that an absolute standard of Ethics is unattainable except in perfectly peaceful associations. But how is this abandonment of the operative principle of evolution at its highest stage to be reconciled with the maintenance of the hypothesis? It must be confessed that the transition is ingeniously made. "This imperfectly evolved conduct," says Mr. Spencer (p. 18), "introduces us by *antithesis* to conduct that is perfectly evolved. Contemplating these adjustments of acts to ends which miss completeness because they cannot be made by one creature without other creatures being prevented from making them, raises the thought of adjustments such that each creature may make them without preventing them from being made by other creatures." As Professor Calderwood says, "nothing can conceal, or even materially obscure, *the vastness of the contrast involved*" in this transition. It is wholly inconsistent with the principle from which, as has been seen, Mr. Spencer starts, that Ethics "has for its subject-matter that form which *universal conduct* assumes during the last stages of evolution" (p. 20). We are introduced to an entirely new form of conduct—a conduct in antithesis—that is to say, in opposition to the former; and it would seem that such an alteration in the main principle of life would in great measure invalidate the attempt subsequently made to explain human conduct by analogies drawn from the process of evolution in general.

14. It must further be observed, that there is another enormous assumption involved in Mr. Spencer's application of his principle to determine good and bad in human conduct. The principle is, that conduct is good or bad "according as its aggregate results, to ourselves or others, are pleasurable or painful." Now, he refers once or twice, in the reasoning by which he reaches this conclusion, to the view of "the optimist," who, "while saying that the pleasures predominate, urges that the pains borne here are to be compensated by pleasures received hereafter." He cannot, of course, be ignorant that the total estimate of life formed by Christians is mainly determined by reference to life hereafter; and it is obvious that if conduct is to be judged by its tendency to produce pleasure as



a total result, its relation to a future life, if there be one, is a momentous element in the case. But throughout the subsequent argument this consideration is entirely omitted. The "life," by the pleasures of which Mr. Spencer estimates goodness and badness, is that of human beings living in society in this world. The bearings of acts on a future state are not for a moment taken into account. Now, undoubtedly, on ordinary theories, it is possible for very important moral conclusions to be drawn without reference to a future life. One who recognises that virtue has those "primordial and independent" characteristics which Mr. Spencer denies to it, may reach very trustworthy *Data of Ethics*, as has in great measure been shown by Butler, from a simple consideration of the constitution of human nature as we find it here. But if a philosopher starts from the supposition that we must contemplate life as a whole in order to estimate the fitness of conduct in parts; and that the sole test of good and bad, right and wrong, is whether their "aggregate results to self and others are pleasurable or painful," it is absolutely imperative that he should take into account the whole of life, whether here or hereafter, unless he can show that there is no continuity whatever between the two states of existence. Mr. Spencer chooses to seek his ethical data in a certain theory of existence in general. That being his position, he has no right to assume, without a word of justification, that a future life for men forms no practical part of such existence. If a Christian moralist were to commence by assuming a future state of rewards and punishments as the basis of his system, he would probably be denounced by Mr. Spencer as commencing with an arbitrary hypothesis. But a negative hypothesis on this subject is just as arbitrary as a positive one. Mr. Spencer has not got rid of dogma. He has only substituted the dogmas of the evolution hypothesis respecting life in this world for the dogmas of theology respecting life in this world and the next.

15. It might be anticipated that *Data of Ethics* of this vague, arbitrary, and unethical character would furnish no very satisfactory guidance, and would go but a very little way towards filling that "vacuum" which Mr. Herbert Spencer contemplates with apprehension. Such is the result; and as evidence that it is so an unimpeachable witness can be adduced. That witness is no other than Mr. Herbert Spencer himself. In his ninth chapter, after expounding the main elements of his system, after having discussed "the evolution of conduct," "good and bad conduct," "the ways of judging conduct," "the physical view," "the biological view," "the psychological view," and the "sociological view," he proceeds

to offer some "criticisms and explanations;" and he commences with a passage which so clearly exhibits at once the general drift and the failure of his argument that it must be quoted in full. At p. 150, he says:—

"We have seen that to admit the desirableness of conscious existence, is to admit that conduct should be such as will produce a consciousness which is desirable—a consciousness which is as much pleasurable and as little painful as may be. We have also seen that this necessary implication corresponds with the *à priori* inference, that the evolution of life has been made possible only by the establishment of connections between pleasures and beneficial actions, and between pains and detrimental actions. *But the general conclusion reached in both of these ways, though it covers the area within which our special conclusions must fall, does not help us to reach those special conclusions.*

"Were pleasures all of one kind, differing only in degree; were pains all of one kind, differing only in degree; and could pleasures be measured against pains with definite results, the problems of conduct would be greatly simplified. Were the pleasures and pains serving as incentives and deterrents simultaneously present to consciousness with like vividness, or were they all immediately impending, or were they all equidistant in time, the problems would be further simplified. And they would be still further simplified if the pleasures and pains were exclusively those of the actor. But both the desirable and the undesirable feelings are of various kinds, making quantitative comparisons difficult; some are present and some are future, increasing the difficulty of quantitative comparison; some are entailed on self, and some are entailed on others; again increasing the difficulty. *So that the guidance yielded by the primary principle reached is of little service unless supplemented by the guidance of secondary principles.*"

16. Now, what is this but a candid admission of the practical valuelessness of the principle which was insisted upon with such urgency as the cardinal truth of Ethics, as the one sole foundation of our ideas of good and bad in conduct, and for the sake of which Mr. Spencer has treated as of secondary importance such moral principles as the supremacy of conscience? Is it credible that a primary principle of which the guidance "is of little service" should have been, as Mr. Spencer had previously maintained, "solely the reason" for our moral estimate of actions, or that it can be "unquestionable" that our ideas of the goodness and badness of conduct "really originate from our consciousness of the certainty or probability that they will produce pleasures or pains somewhere?"

If, after all, Mr. Spencer has to fall back on the guidance of secondary principles, does he not admit that there are qualities in actions constituting them good or bad, which are appreciable in themselves, independently of the ultimate result of the actions in producing pleasure or pain? His subsequent admissions extend even further than those just quoted. "I go with Mr. Sedgwick," he says, "as far as the conclusion that 'we must at least admit the desirability of confirming or correcting the results of such comparisons [of pleasures and pains] by any other method upon which we may find reason to rely;' and I then go further, and say that throughout a large part of conduct *guidance by such comparisons is to be entirely set aside and replaced by other guidance.*" But what is to be thought of a principle which "throughout a large part of conduct" is "to be entirely set aside"?

17. The case, indeed, would be somewhat different if the secondary principles on which Mr. Spencer is thus compelled to fall back could only be reached by means of the primary. Mr. Spencer reaches some of them in this way, and expends, for instance, much elaborate argument to reach the elementary principle of the duty of faithfulness to contracts. But he does not uphold so wild a supposition as that the apprehension of this elementary duty cannot be reached independently. On the contrary, he proceeds in one of the most effective passages of his book to controvert Bentham's assertion that happiness is a more intelligible end than justice; and he urges the important truth, that all people, however primitive, have some conception of justice. "Though primitive men," he says, "have no words for either happiness or justice; yet even among them an approach to the conception of justice is traceable. The law of retaliation, requiring that a death inflicted by one tribe on another shall be balanced by the death either of the murderer or some member of his tribe, shows us in a vague shape that notion of equalness of treatment which constitutes an essential element in it. When we come to early races who have given their thoughts and feelings literary form, we find this conception of justice, as involving equalness of action, becoming distinct. Among the Jews, David expressed in words this association of ideas, when, praying to God to 'hear the right,' he said, 'Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes look upon the things that are equal;' as also, among early Christians, did Paul, when to the Colossians he wrote, 'Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal'" (p. 164). But if the ideas of fairness and equity are thus recognised among all

people, even in a primitive condition, to such an extent as to afford a practical guidance in life, while ideas of happiness are so vague that they must "be entirely set aside," it seems evident that we have here an independent test of the goodness and badness of actions; and that the real *Data of Ethics* are to be found in those old principles of "doing unto others as you would be done by," and of "loving your neighbour as yourself," which are not sufficiently scientific for Mr. Spencer, and which are a part of that "supernatural code of Ethics" supposed by him to be disappearing.

18. After this practical collapse of the argument, it would seem scarcely necessary to carry the analysis of Mr. Spencer's work further. He proceeds to a prolonged discussion of the relative claims of the principles of egoism and altruism, of which it need only be remarked that the conclusion arrived at rests on the strange supposition that, as life becomes more perfect, the opportunities of rendering aid to others will become fewer. The key to the whole question lies in a consideration of a precisely opposite character. The characteristic point in human conduct, considered from without, is, that whereas other animals live independent lives, except during the transitory periods of rearing offspring, every man is an intimate relation of one kind or another with his fellows; and the higher the life, the more numerous and the more varied the relations. As society develops, the duties of men towards each other become at once more numerous and more complex, and consequently the opportunities for having regard to others must increase. It was the special gift of the Roman to apprehend the conditions of social life; and the title of Cicero's work, *De Officiis*, points to the heart of the subject.\* But it is beyond the scope of this paper to state what are the true *Data of Ethics*, and its necessary limits would exclude the attempt. The object in view has been to examine the claim of Mr. Herbert Spencer to have found "for the principles of right and wrong in conduct at large a scientific basis;" and thus to have superseded, not merely "a code of supernatural ethics," but all previous systems of morality. Respect to the reputation of the author required that such claims should be strictly investigated; and the result seems unmistakable. An ethical system professing to be founded upon the evolution hypothesis commences with assuming the "antithesis" of that theory

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\* See some valuable remarks on this point in the second of the Rev. J. Gregory Smith's *Bampton Lectures*; 2nd edition, 1876.

as the basis of human conduct. It proceeds by immense and arbitrary assumptions respecting the scope of human life; and its primary principle is reached by a logical fallacy. This principle, on being worked out, proves so inapplicable that, by the author's own confession, "throughout a large part of conduct" it must be "entirely set aside;" and we are invited to fall back upon those primary intuitions of equity which are acknowledged to be everywhere operative and intelligible. Such a system will not supersede Revelation; nor is it likely to displace the old *Data of Ethics*, whether Greek, Roman, or English.

The CHAIRMAN.—I need scarce ask whether it is the wish of the meeting to return thanks to Professor Wace for his exceedingly able and interesting paper upon a subject the importance of which it is difficult to overrate. It is now open for any one to offer remarks thereon.

Rev. C. L. ENGSTRÖM.—I have made a few remarks on the margin of my copy of the paper, and, with your kind permission, will briefly refer to the pages thus noted. With regard to what is stated in § 5, as to the argument of Aristotle, a thought occurred to me as to the application of the passages quoted. I think we are apt to overlook the great value of the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and others, and to suppose that they do not come at all into the current of Christian thought, that in fact, having the Bible in our hands, we may dismiss all such books, and treat them as if they had no existence. But the Bible is certainly founded as much on the principles of morality, and as fully presupposes them as it presupposes such elementary things as grammar. It appears to me that the great principles of morality are, in the Bible, taken for granted, and that therefore they are really pre-supposed, just as the Bible pre-supposes the principles of grammar and of ordinary thought. In § 6 of the paper, Mr. Herbert Spencer, who is there quoted, alludes to the doctrine of altruism; I do not know whether he affirms it himself, or whether he does not think that the right view is that of complete self-abnegation. Now here I would refer to an interesting point in the catechism of the Scotch Established Church, which, in going through the last six commandments, lays down the duty we owe to *ourselves*. For instance, in the case of the eighth commandment, the notion there given is that the words "Thou shalt do no murder" are to be understood as including the taking care of our own lives. This, I think, shows the high common sense of the Scotch, and the idea certainly is found in the Bible, because we are not told to love ourselves less than our neighbours, or not at all, but we are all put on an equality, we are to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to love God better. This is a point which, I think, is very much overlooked, and there are many persons who are apt, from *their* study of the Bible, to hold the extreme doctrine that we

ought to take the highest possible view of self-abnegation and act accordingly, which is impossible. I am here reminded of the simile of the planets. We find that the various planetary orbs revolve round the sun : each has its own definite sphere, and has no business to go out of its particular orbit. So is it with ourselves. Each of us has a great duty to perform as regards himself, and in performing that duty properly he is really performing a duty both to others and to God. With regard to that which forms the principal point of this paper—the conclusion arrived at by Mr. Herbert Spencer that goodness is identical with pleasure—I suppose that we as Christians would allow, as Professor Wace says, “that moral goodness leads to blessedness” (§ 8). But why is it so? It is for this reason, we find in that Being in whom we believe a number of perfections which are His own attributes and proceed from Him. We call Him “all blessed” and we mean one who is all good and all blessed, and who made those two things “goodness” and “blessedness” to exist. Then, according to our belief, we should look for these two things as *co-existent* everywhere, and we must naturally expect the greatest goodness along with the greatest blessedness, because those who are best in virtue are likeliest to God, and therefore God will give them the largest amount of blessedness. But this is a different thing from saying that blessedness is the sum of virtue. We regard the two things as being together, we do not know how, but that the two always go together is no proof that they are always the same thing, and that one is caused by the other. There is just one point more on which I would venture a remark. I believe that the only way of understanding Mr. Herbert Spencer’s philosophy is to look into what is his own main idea. The reason why such authors are so much read, appears to me to be this ; and I do not think they need regard it as any cause for congratulation : their ideas are generally exceedingly simple, not to say oftentimes very shallow and narrow. They persuade people to applaud these ideas as very clever, because the novelty and simplicity are very attractive, and they are, of course, able to carry them out to a considerable extent. Now Mr. Herbert Spencer has one admirable gift, I mean that he possesses a wonderful eye for those endless multitudes that are to be found in God’s universe, and which are so often spoken of in the Bible. His whole scheme of thought runs in the nature of parables, and his books teem with them ; this is what makes his works so interesting. But they are not the less shallow and narrow in their philosophic principles. It reminds me of Charles Dickens’s account of Mrs. Gamp’s bedroom. There was no safety in the bedroom if you did not keep in mind one thing, and that was the huge four-poster which nearly filled the apartment. As long as you kept your eye on that you were safe ; but if you turned to look at anything else you were sure to run your head against something. (Laughter.) Such is the effect of Mr. Herbert Spencer’s whole philosophy. It rests on a belief that the atoms are moving about, and that they have a certain tendency when moving in one direction to continue circulating in the same direction. This is what he means by the various rhythms. These atoms he supposes to get into a

complex state and they are then physical rhythms, in a more complex state they are biological rhythms, and in a still more complex state they are sociological rhythms. Here you see why he has to say what we have heard about happiness. He sees these atoms in a certain theological rhythm. He cannot find anything like virtue in a system like that, and therefore he starts by assuming that you must make virtue bend to this idea—you must lay it down that that which virtue produces is happiness, and, therefore, that virtue is happiness. He seems to think that these rhythmical motions do produce happiness, and that virtue must come under that head, as it cannot come into his system in any other form. The answer to his system is that these rhythmical motions are not everything, and after a short time we shall probably find the ideas that run throughout his philosophy exposed as fallacious and insufficient.

Rev. FLAVEL COOK.—It is hardly fair to ask Professor Wace to explain another man's theory ; but it would be interesting to know how the following case would be dealt with by Mr. Herbert Spencer. It may be known to those present that there was, so to speak, sanctioned in Japan a certain relationship which would be unhesitatingly and universally condemned in this country as a vice—nothing more nor less ; but there it was considered as a matter promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number. It was by no means reprobated, was a well-established usage, and was regarded as tending to make life easier, to put the conditions of marriage and happiness within the reach of many who would otherwise not be able to obtain such conditions. We will suppose that the Japanese having only a very limited idea of man's being, and the object of man's true happiness, would say on their theory of human nature : " This is good ; pleasure is the result ; therefore it must be good." Let us suppose, also, the entry of God's word, giving them light, so that they become aware of the higher end of existence—that there is something beyond the physical relations and the various requirements of society—that there is such a thing as the consciousness of a spiritual nature ; they would then say : " What we have hitherto thought of only as pleasure, we now know to be evil." Query,—as soon as they accept the spiritual teaching brought to them from the West—the teaching that man has a higher organization—that there is a higher aim for man's being than simply to eat and drink and enjoy himself as a mere animal—do their actions become bad ? Were they good at first ? They suppose they were. Do they continue to be good, or are they now rejected as bad ? If so, were they bad at first ? I should like to know how, according to Mr. Herbert Spencer's view, this point would be dealt with.

Professor WACE.—Perhaps it is, as Mr. Flavel Cook says, a little hard to call upon me to answer such a question. The problem is, indeed, precisely one of those which I should like to put to Mr. Herbert Spencer himself if he were in this room. One of the great difficulties of his theory is that it is hard to see how it can condemn any experiment in morality. Mr. Spencer says that we must have a general knowledge of the conditions of

human life, and even of inanimate life, in order to be in a position to judge adequately of conduct, and, if so, it would seem a very rash thing to condemn beforehand an irregular experiment of the kind referred to. That is the way in which the matter strikes me ; but I should all the more like to know what Mr. Spencer himself would say upon the subject. Mr. Herbert Spencer admits however, that he is obliged to give up his primary principle and to fall back on the simple elements of equity, and if any practice of the kind in question could be shown to involve injustice to another, he would perhaps say that it is thereby condemned at once. But my point is, that so far as he says this, he gives up his general principle.\*

PROFESSOR STANLEY LEATHES, D.D.—I have been called upon to say something, but I am not really competent to speak on the subject of the paper before us, because I have not read Mr. Herbert Spencer's work on the *Data of Ethics*. I have only gathered, very vaguely, some notion of it from other treatises ; but it seems to me that the question of Ethics has really been solved ages ago by the Mosaic law. I think when one endeavours to probe to the bottom the reason why the Ten Commandments were given, the only reason that can be found is that they are in accordance with the constitution of nature. Take them one by one, and this seems to be the only ultimate reason that can be discovered for those laws being given, or for their existing in themselves, or for their being commonly recognised, and therefore I think that the Mosaic law guides us to a very important result in these questions, because it is virtually based upon two grand principles, one being the revelation of God ; and the other, what is good for man in his social relations. So that the Mosaic law virtually propounds the connection between religion and morality. Now, in the present day, it is constantly endeavoured to sever this connection between religion and morality, and to say that we want no religion if we only have morality. I think that that is just one of the questions that can only be tried by experiment,† and I think that we can come to no conclusion but that we cannot have morality unless we also have religion. (Hear, hear.) This religion, according to the Mosaic law, is involved in the assertion,—“I am the Lord thy God.” Everything turns on that ; that is the foundation of the whole moral code as it is afterwards given. First of all, we have the revelation of the person of God, and the fact that He claims to stand in a particular relation to every human being ; while, in consequence of the relationship in which every human being stands to the God who thus reveals Himself, we have the fact of our constitution ; for, if God thus reveals Himself to us, it is solely because we are His creatures, and He has given to our nature the power of recog-

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\* Mr. Herbert Spencer was unable to attend the meeting, and has informed the Council that he will take an opportunity of replying to his critics ; the question alluded to by Mr. Flavel Cook was amongst those placed before him.—*Ed.*

† As in France in 1793.—*Ed.*



nising Him as the Creator, and there branch out of our relationship to Him the duties that devolve on us with regard to each other. We see that these duties of religion are expounded in the Mosaic Law in the first four commandments, out of which come the duties that devolve on us in relation to our fellow-creatures. If we take each one of the commandments separately—say the fifth, or sixth—we cannot understand why there is any duty devolving upon us towards our parents, except because of some primordial and original constitution in society, which is in the majority of cases sufficiently plain, certainly. Persons are trying to find out some other principles, but I do not think they will find any that will set aside or render superfluous those that are involved in the Mosaic law. With regard to the law of murder, one speaker has said it involves the preservation of one's own life, which, of course, is perfectly true. We cannot take another person's life, because he has the same right to his life that we have to ours; and the injunction is mutually operative to protect our own lives, as well as to protect the lives of others. We are safe, because that which prohibits us from injuring others, also prohibits them from injuring us. That is the constitution of our nature. You may probe as deeply as you like, and you cannot get at any other result than this constitution of nature, which is, of course, an indication in nature of the work of God. With regard to a much more difficult subject—such, for instance, as that alluded to by one of the speakers, the relations involved in the Seventh Commandment—I do not know how we are to answer any question relating to that commandment, if we do away with the sanctions given in nature and confirmed by the Mosaic law. (Hear, hear.) It seems to me that the ultimate reason for morals and ethics—the only ultimate reason we can arrive at—is to be found in something in the constitution of our nature as God has made us which is in strict accordance with the moral law, the moral law being proved to be Divine, because of its exact accordance with the ultimate constitution of nature. (Applause.)

REV. FLAVEL COOK.—I thoroughly agree with all that Professor Stanley Leathes has said as to the supremacy of the word and law of God—a perfect law which, like a crystal, true in every face and every angle, fits the whole of our personal nature in spirit, soul, mind, and body. Still, what we have to do with Mr. Herbert Spencer's argument is, not to show that the word of God is superior, but that the ground taken by Mr. Spencer is, on his own showing, not maintainable—that it breaks down—that it does not provide for the conditions of human nature—that there is a quality in man and a craving in man for something higher than physical organization will supply. This spiritual craving demands something more than Mr. Spencer offers, it breaks through all artificial restraints and theories, and asserts itself; and when it does this, what provision has this propounded theory of perfect human nature to offer? I will here relate a striking story which I heard a few days ago. There was an old man in China who had for years worshipped the sun, moon, and stars, and invoked them to help him remove the load which oppressed his spirit. It happened that a man who had come from

this side of the world, spoke in that man's hearing some of the words of Truth, and that old man, blind as he was, started to his feet and said, "That is what I have been longing for." There was something which that old man had carried in his heart for years; it had asserted itself, but nothing had been presented to him that could meet the craving he experienced until the word of Christ's Gospel was set before him. Such a system as that which Professor Wace has brought before us to-night offers nothing to meet such a want as this. (Hear, hear.)

Professor LEATHES.—I did not endeavour to upset Mr. Herbert Spencer's theory by an appeal to the Mosaic Law, but merely observed that his principles do not go sufficiently into the depths of the constitution of our nature, which, if examined, would be found deeper than he supposes, and which he does not thoroughly consider, but which are in strict accordance with the Mosaic moral Law.

The CHAIRMAN.—Before calling on Professor Wace to reply—if a reply there can be where there has been no opposition—I may be excused for making one short remark. It seems to me that this doctrine of Mr. Herbert Spencer's fails in one great respect, namely, it gives no explanation at all as to why we pass moral judgments on actions. (Hear, hear.) It seems to me that it would only lead us to form a judgment as to whether a course of conduct was expedient or not, having regard to its consequences; but we are conscious that we have in ourselves a notion as to an action being right or wrong, utterly irrespective of consequences. We cannot define what this feeling is; it is properly a moral sense. I do not say that we have an instinct within us which affords a correct guide as to whether an action is right or wrong. Conscience needs to be cultivated, or it may give very wrong judgments. No doubt, in many countries, under a wrong system of religion, the conscience is perverted, so as to lead people to think things meritorious, which we, under a better system, consider exceedingly wrong; but, at the same time, there is a moral judgment in our nature which says a thing is right or wrong, and we feel it to be something which perfectly differs from a judgment as to whether an action will produce beneficial results or not. (Hear, hear.) From this I should draw the conclusion that there is, as Professor Stanley Leathes has said, a supernatural element in our nature, which is far deeper than all the judgments that are formed as to the general results of actions—that there is a principle implanted in us by which we judge of things as right or wrongs and which was intended to lead us to conform ourselves to the rule of what is right and wrong according to the Divine will. (Applause.)

Rev. J. W. BUCKLEY.—This thought has occurred to me; how can Mr. Herbert Spencer tell what particular acts will in the long run produce more pleasure than pain? This is a question not easily answered. It seems to me to be impossible for any one to determine what particular deeds will, in the course of centuries,—nay, of an eternity, supposing the human race to

last for ever on earth, and entering into no considerations as to a future life, —produce more happiness than misery, more pleasure than pain. I cannot see how any merely human mind can settle this point. (Hear, hear.)

Professor WACE.—It would be unreasonable in me to say much more after having already occupied the time of the meeting at such length, especially as so little has been said by others on a subject which, considering its importance, I could have wished to have had thoroughly discussed. The Paper which has been read does not pretend to make an original contribution to the ethical problem under discussion ; but the point which struck me about this book, as soon as it was published, was, that here appeared to be the final result of the evolution philosophy as applied to human life, and as explained by the chief representative of that philosophy. It was natural to address oneself at once to such a work in order to learn what this philosophy had to tell us as its final outcome and total result. It is difficult to go adequately into this philosophy in its physical aspect ; but when a man speaks about ethics, many of us have the means of appreciating his arguments ; and I consequently read the book with serious interest. The main point that struck me, and which I have endeavoured to illustrate in this Paper, is, that the author has not mastered, at all events, the great contributions to ethics made in former times, and that whatever may be the ultimate conclusions come to on the matter, his reasoning is thoroughly unsound. If, as the total result of all this speculation, you are offered a mass of simply fallacious reasoning, considered merely as reasoning, that appears to be a remarkable result, and one to which attention ought to be called. I am inclined to think the time has come when one may cease to be quite so polite as people commonly have been to some of this philosophy. Personally, of course, we owe all respect to the writers, and I trust there is not a word in my Paper that can be deemed disrespectful to Mr. Spencer ; but I think we ought to cease to be respectful about argument, and that we should hit an unsound philosophical proposition just as hard as an advocate in a court of law hits the bad reasoning of another advocate. (Hear, hear.) As to the point just adduced by Mr. Buckley, with regard to Mr. Spencer not being able to calculate pleasures and pains, I have shown that this is exactly what Mr. Spencer admits. He cannot calculate such results, and if a man builds up a theory on principles that cannot be carried out, we know what becomes of the theory. In short, in considering this book, I am reminded of a story told, I think, of Voltaire, who said he had only two objections to the title of the “Holy Roman Empire,”—the one being that it was not holy, and the other that it was not Roman. (Laughter.) In the same way it may be said of this book, on the *Data of Ethics*, that there are two objections to the title ; it is difficult to find the *Data*, and equally difficult to find the *Ethics*. The data resolve themselves into assumptions, and the ethics into physics.

The meeting was then adjourned.

## REMARKS BY THE REV. PREBENDARY W. J. IRONS, D.D.

Whether the doctrine of Evolution is in accordance with what is to be ascertained of the physical universe, is a question of fact which, as Professor Wace observes, must be determined by the observations of men of Physical Science, and may for the present be left to them. But Evolution in Morals may be no more than an expression of that advancement of the germ in every conscious agent which is implied in his development and education, and is acknowledged, in some form, by all who take our present life to be imperfect in many ways, and so, possibly, a life of probation altogether for a higher sphere. Indeed Evolution, whether physical or moral, implies movement towards the more perfect; and it is strange that there are men of science often so deficient in philosophy, as to fail to see that Evolution presupposes an ideal towards which it proceeds. Just as an illogical procedure is wrong in itself (as Professor Wace points out) quite apart from the "pain" which it may ultimately occasion, mentally or bodily; so an act of injustice or unfairness is felt to be absolutely wrong, offends an *ideal*, in addition to the pain it occasions.

When Mr. Spencer says, an act is called "bad," "solely for the reason that it entails pain," he does not, of course, mean only bodily pain: but if he includes mental pain, then he admits that the conscious being has some constitution of his own, the violation of which is distressing. In other words, the conscious being is in relation with a previous ideal. It seems to me that Mr. Spencer's analysis always implies an *à priori*; and that there is frequently no difficulty in accepting, in modified terms, what he says as matter of fact, reserving altogether the determining principles. I should be glad that Mr. Spencer should consider this; and also consider that his notion of finding "a scientific basis" for first principles involves a contradiction. What may be called Mr. Spencer's diagnosis of morals is full of interest; just as Aristotle's doctrine of the "mean" is replete with practical reality. But the failure to understand the relation of the conscious being to the absolute is the conspicuous defect in both cases.

A grave error into which Mr. Spencer has fallen is not entirely his. He has been led to regard the only antithesis to his view as some system of *supernatural ethics* dependent solely on revelation. Of course there are fanatics who conceive that revelation creates the moral nature, instead of addressing itself to that nature. But to assail this is to make war with a shadow.

And, finally, with reference to all Mr. Spencer's moral analysis; even were it admitted to be complete, it is impossible to persuade anyone that human action is really determined by analytical considerations. The spring of action can never be so found. It must be a previous principle. Even if he should

maintain that his analysis ought to determine conduct, the fact remains, that it does not. And, as I said many years ago, in my book on *Final Causes*, "The facts of human nature are the data for the science of human nature."

The necessity of *ready* action, not only in each great crisis, but, frequently, in every step and stage of action (in the midst of which a pause is often impossible), shows that we act on something more than analysis, more than calculation ; even on that which, express it as we may, is practically, and always, an instinct of our own, though also a common instinct, or that which we have in communion. Since Locke, all our philosophy has suffered by overlooking this. The ignoring of the *à priori* will in our times, however, avenge itself. Truth and fact cannot ultimately be put down by theory ; as Mr. Spencer will find.