

*THE USE OF PAGAN ETHICAL TERMS IN THE  
NEW TESTAMENT.*

WE have seen that in repudiating *ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία* St. Paul, fresh from disputation with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, intended primarily, at any rate, the rejection of those theories and arguments which had been advanced against the preaching of the cross at Athens.

At the time indeed, and in after ages, this contrast between the *σοφία τοῦ κόσμου* and the *σοφία Χριστοῦ* necessarily produced wide and deep results.

But from the first it was apparent that philosophy and Christian doctrine touched at many points and attacked the same problems; and that often they were brought into an agreement, which was sometimes indeed verbal and misleading, but not infrequently essential and true.

For instance, the conception which ran through all ancient philosophy, and is essentially Platonic, that "like apprehends like," reappears in the Pauline statement, "Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 11). It appears in its modern form as an argument against materialism: "That which requires reason and thought to understand must be itself thought and reason; that which mind alone can investigate or explain must be itself mind. And if the highest conception gained is but partial, then the mind and reason studied is greater than the mind and reason of the student" (Prof. Baden Powell, cited Romanes, *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 16). The same principle is used by Romanes as an argument against an agnostic denial of God, "For no one is entitled to deny the possibility of what may be termed an organ of spiritual discernment."

Again, the existence and attributes of God are treated

by Aristotle and by the later philosophers in terms that approach very closely to the Christian expression. Thus Aristotle conceives of God as the prime mover Himself unmoved, immaterial and immutable, and existing independently of time and space, and eternal (*ζῶον ἀβδίου*).

The Aristotelian notion that the life of the wise is in virtue of the indwelling Divine element, is common to many philosophers, and is obviously akin to Christian thought. It is a life, says Aristotle, that surpasses ordinary experience (*κρείττων βίος ἢ κατ' ἀνθρώπων*), and which is lived by a man only so far as he possesses a share of the Divine (*ἢ θεῖόν τι ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει*), Arist. Eth. Nic. x. 7. Then again, the leading Aristotelian doctrine of habit (*ἔξις*) is in close correspondence with the moral teaching of the New Testament, though the word itself occurs in one passage only (Heb. v. 14).

Many other instances of the same kind of resemblance might be cited. For a fuller treatment of such points of contact between Christianity and Stoic philosophy the reader is referred to Bishop Lightfoot's admirable article on St. Paul and Seneca in his edition of the Philippians. Our present point, however, is to note that there is no trace in St. Paul's writings of an attempt to incorporate or use, except by way of passing illustration, the leading terms and conclusions of Greek philosophy. The Christian philosophy of intuition and of moral guidance stands on its own basis as a result of Divine revelation.

Accordingly, when we inquire into the Apostle's use or avoidance of words deeply steeped in philosophic theories of life or speculation, we find: (1) Some significantly omitted; (2) Others named and disparaged in the light of Christian truth, while a certain number of ethical terms unknown to philosophy are introduced into the Christian vocabulary; (3) Some pagan conceptions beautiful to begin with adopted and purified; (5) Others lowly and

despised in pagan thought exalted and sanctified by Christianity.

1. Perhaps the most significant omission of Greek philosophic terms in the New Testament is that of *εὐδαιμονία* or "happiness." For, however much ethical systems differed, they were practically agreed in regarding happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*) as the chief aim and object of human desire (*τὸ πάντων ἀκρότατον τῶν πρακτῶν ἀγαθῶν*, Arist. Eth. Nic. i. 2, comp. i. 8). It must, however, be remembered that if St. Paul contemplated *εὐδαιμονία* at all as an end, he would contemplate it as interpreted by the later philosophy of Greece with which he came in contact at Athens. That "happiness," whether conceived as the Stoic *ἀταραξία* or the Epicurean *ἡδονή*, was equally removed from the Christian ideal.

And secondly, in rejecting *εὐδαιμονία* as an ethical aim, St. Paul probably desired to place Christian ethics on an entirely new footing. In doing this he was acting in the spirit of our Lord's own words, who, in the Sermon on the Mount, expressly contrasts the aims which the Gentile world set before itself with those which He proposes for the Christian: *ταῦτα πάντα* (all those material objects of desire summed up in food and clothing) *τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητεῖ, ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ* (St. Matt. vi. 32, 33).

Doubtless the beautiful and inspiring definition by Aristotle of the perfect happiness (*ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία*, Eth. Nic. x. 7) will occur to some, with its clearly suggested adaptability to Christian purposes. It is activity (*ἐνέργεια*) in the way of excellence, or highest development, of that which is best within us; and that which is best within us is either intelligence (*νοῦς*) or a Divine element in our nature, or at least that which is nearest the Divine within us.

Such a definition might well serve its turn in the history

of Christian thought. But the time had not come yet, and the Apostle has to deal with the word as he finds it, debased and unspiritualized by mean or vicious associations. The very etymology of the word, which connected it with a pagan system of demonology, suggests an objection to its Christian use. With the Stoic the "demon" was but particular providence working in him and watching over him, which brought him into harmony with Zeus, the conductor of the universe, and involved him in a scheme of necessity which is alien to Christianity. But the main cause which necessitated the exclusion of *εὐδαιμονία* from the Christian vocabulary lay in the fact that the Christian revelation had projected the sphere of happiness beyond this life: "For if in this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all men most pitiable" (1 Cor. xv. 19), a confession which so widely separated Christian ethics from all previous systems that a fresh expression was needed for the new condition of things.

Other words in this category of omission are: *ἀταραξία*, *ἀπάθεια*, *ἐποχή*, *προαίρεσις*.

Of *ἀπάθεια*, the Stoic calmness of mind, which is the result of freedom from care or the harassing events in life, it may be said that it presents at once a parallelism and a strong contrast to the Christian conception of life. For St. Paul that life involved restless energy and unceasing conflict with pain, peril, and the powers of evil within and without. It was disturbed and agitated with rivalries and controversies and with the care of all the Churches, conditions which were inconsistent with the *ἀπάθεια* and *ἀταραξία* of the Stoic and Epicurean. On the other hand, the Christian must be *ἀμέριμνος*, "free from cares" (1 Cor. viii. 32), and he must be a possessor of "peace." Peace (*εἰρήνη*) indeed takes the place in Christian terminology of *ἀταραξία* and *ἀπάθεια*. It covers the same ground, but goes farther and deeper, signifying not only a state of

calm security and happiness (synonymous with ἀσφάλεια, 1 Thess. v. 3), but also reconciliation with God as opposed to estrangement from Him, and the consequent condition of peaceful assurance, the special gift of Divine grace realized through Christ. Ἐποχή, or "suspension of judgment," was a technical term with the sceptical philosophers. Whether the word was known to the Apostle and purposely excluded cannot be determined. The mental attitude, however, implied by the word is diametrically opposed to the Christian's assurance of faith. And a scepticism which recognised no real distinction between good and evil (οὔτε ἀγαθόν τί ἐστι φύσει οὔτε κακόν, Sext. Emp. xi. 140) could not even come in touch with Christianity.

The omission of προαίρεσις or deliberate choice may be understood in view of the submission of the Christian to the will of God and the repression of self (ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός, Gal. ii. 20). The verb προαιρεῖσθαι, however, is found, but not in a technical sense (2 Cor. ix. 7). Of the words used to express the four principal Stoic virtues: φρόνησις, practical wisdom; σωφροσύνη, self-control or sobriety; ἀνδρεία, courage; and δικαιοσύνη, justice (Ritter and Preller, s. 401), ἀνδρεία alone can, strictly speaking, be placed among the omissions of the New Testament, but the first two occur very rarely, and δικαιοσύνη is so entirely coloured and appropriated by Old Testament thought and its development in the New Testament as to have no real connexion with the Stoic δικαιοσύνη, which is simply "justice." The practical omission of these words, therefore, in the New Testament, notwithstanding their prominence in the Stoic system, is not without significance.

2. Of the second class of ethical terms referred to, those namely which occur in the New Testament but are mentioned with disparagement in the light of Christian truth,

the most interesting examples are *ἀρετή*, "virtue"; and *ἡδονή*, "pleasure," *ἀρετή* being essentially descriptive of the Stoic, as *ἡδονή* is of the Epicurean, philosophy. *Ἀρετή* is used by St. Paul once only (Phil. iv. 8), where, in claiming for Christian consideration (*λογίζεσθε*) all that is best and purest in civilized pagan life and thought, he closes the enumeration with the words, *εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος*. The juxtaposition of *ἀρετή* and *ἔπαινος* is remarkably suggestive of accepted ethical phraseology, while *εἴ τις* conveys a note of disparagement indicating a sense of failure in realization of the ideal, an indication fully justified by the moral results of the existing schools of philosophy.

The word *ἡδονή* occurs five times only in the New Testament, and once only in the Pauline Epistles, viz., Titus iii. 3 (*φιλήδονοι*, however, occurs, 2 Tim. iii. 4, opposed to *φιλόθεοι*). In each instance it is used with the baser signification of the word. In St. Luke's report of the parable of the sower, *ἡδοναί* are classed with *μέριμναι* and *πλοῦτος* as the things which "choke" the growth of the good seed (Luke viii. 14); in Titus iii. 3, *ἡδοναί* are placed in a description of the pagan life as synonymous with *ἐπιθυμίαι* (compare for the latter synonym Mark iv. 19 with Luke viii. 14). So also in St. James iv. 1, 3 and in 2 Peter ii. 13, it is used of the gratification of the appetite: *ἡδονὴν ἡγούμενοι τὴν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ τροφήν*, "that count it pleasure to revel in the daytime."

This practical exclusion of the word, and its disparagement in the Christian scheme of life, form a remarkable contrast to its frequent occurrence and its value in the current ethical theories.

It is the more remarkable because, according to the definition of Epicurus, *ἡδονή* did not represent by any means a low ideal of life. Pleasure was to be pursued, not for its own sake, but as a means to happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*).

Virtue was inseparable from true pleasure, sometimes even pain was preferable to pleasure, because endurance of pain was necessary to secure the higher pleasure.

Still the New Testament view of *ἡδονή* was justified not only by the actual corruption of the Epicurean system, which gave a sting to the Horatian phrase, "Epicuri de grege porcus," but also by the widespread demoralization of society due to the cult of pleasure more than to any other cause. It is therefore permissible to see the sanctity and purity of Christian life and expression purposely secured and guarded by the exclusion of *ἡδονή* from its literature and aims. For "pleasure," even in the highest sense in which a pagan could use the word, was essentially limited to mundane and temporal gratification. It excludes the conception of immortality, and was consequently inadequate as an expression of the Christian hope.

3. While some pagan words were, as we have seen, too closely associated with the current philosophy to be safely admitted into the Christian vocabulary, others were retained as admirably adapted for the expression of the new revelation. Instances of such words are: *αὐτάρκεια*, *ἐγκράτεια*, *συνείδησις*, *ἐπιεικεία*, *πραότης*.

*Αὐτάρκεια*, "all-sufficiency," *i.e.*, independence of external aid, lay at the very foundation of the Stoic position. It implied, on the one hand, contentedness, on the other indifference to that which happened, whether good or evil. It was characteristic of the Stoic's pride, which refused to bow to circumstances. With the Stoic, too, in accordance with his unsympathetic creed, *αὐτάρκεια* implied isolation, a thought which was carefully excluded from the original meaning of the word by Aristotle, with whom *αὐτάρκεια* is "the absolutely good" (*τὸ τέλειον ἀγαθόν*), and identical with happiness; "but," he adds, "we do not mean to limit the conception of all-sufficiency to the individual alone leading a solitary life, but we extend it also to parents and

children and wife, and in general friends and citizens, since man is by nature social" (Eth. N. i. 7, Grant's Trans.).

The contentedness or all-sufficiency of which St. Paul speaks (Phil. iv. 11), *ἔμαθον ἐν οἷς εἰμι αὐτάρκης εἶναι*, rests on a sense of the presence of the indwelling Christ, who supplies a force sufficient for all things, *πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με*, but it brings with it no scornful repudiation of external aid or sympathy: "I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me . . . ye did well that ye had fellowship with my affliction" (Phil. iv. 10, 14). There is a wide difference between the all-sufficiency of the Christian in Christ and the self-sufficiency of the Stoic in self. In the two passages of the New Testament where *αὐτάρκεια* is used (2 Cor. ix. 8; 1 Tim. vi. 6) there is a reference to the literal supply of earthly wants: "Having food and covering we shall be therewith content" (1 Tim. *loc. cit.*).

*Συνείδησις*, or conscience, has received a great accession of meaning and authority by its union with Christian thought. At the same time its moral value as the divinely implanted criterion of right and wrong was fully recognised by Pagan writers; comp. Dion. Hal. 6, 825, 15, *μηδὲν ἔκουσίως ψεύδεσθαι μηδὲ μαιίνειν τὴν αὐτοῦ συνείδησιν* (to speak no falsehood willingly, nor to defile his conscience). So Eur. Or. 390, *τί χροῖμα πάσχεις; τίς σ' ἀπόλλυσιν νόσος; | ἡ σύνεσις ὅτι σύννοδα δεῖν' εἰργασμένος*. Compare the well-known passage of Horace (Ep. i. 1, 60), "*Hic murus aheneus esto | Nil conscire sibi nulla pallescere culpa*"; and the no less familiar words of Juvenal, who speaks (Sat. xiii. 195-198) of a penalty more severe than any judge in earth or Hades could inflict, "*Nocte dieque suum gestare in pectore testem.*" This inner consciousness of Divine law among the heathen is of course recognised by St. Paul as rendering them morally accountable in the sight of God. A word, therefore, which expressed the strongest of all



moral forces in the world untaught by direct revelation naturally found a home in the Christian vocabulary. There *συνείδησις* was deepened and sanctified by the fact of the indwelling Spirit, which makes of conscience nothing less than the voice of God, the channel through which the Divine Spirit communicates with man. It is what our Lord, who does not use the word *συνείδησις* itself, means when He speaks of τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοί (St. Luke xi. 35).

There are two ethical terms falling within this category which may truly be said to have served as a "preparatio evangelii," being destined to describe the character and personality of Christ Himself—"meekness" and "gentleness" (*πραότης* and *ἐπιείκεια*). Both of these words came into the Christian vocabulary unstained by debasing association, and both expressed the best and most Christ-like aspect of pagan ethics. *Πραότης* or "meekness," however, though accepted as a virtue, is mentioned with very faint praise by Aristotle. With him it is a mean between undue or passionate resentment and slavish submission to wrong; it inclines however to that defect, and scarcely merits the name of a virtue (*εἴπερ ἡ πραότης ἐπαινεῖται*, Eth. N. iv. 5, 3).

Contrast this with the value of "meekness" in the service of Christian thought. The adjective *πραῶς* or *πραῦς* occurs four times only in the New Testament. But in two passages (Matt. v. 5, xi. 29) it is used by our Lord Himself; in another (Matt. xxi. 5), a quotation from Zech. ix. 9, it is applied to our Lord; and in 1 Peter iii. 4, "a meek and quiet spirit" is described as very precious (*πολυτελής*) in the sight of God. With so great a sanction it is perhaps remarkable that the adjective is not of more frequent occurrence. The noun, however (*πραότης* or *πραύτης*) is found in numerous passages of the New Testament, and is placed in the very forefront of Christian virtues associated with humility, self-restraint, patience, and gentleness (*ἐπιείκεια*).

*Ἐπιείκεια* enters Christian nomenclature with higher credentials than *πραότης*. With Aristotle (*Eth. N. v. 10*) it is a corrective of the strict application of justice (the *ἐπιεικῆς* being contrasted with the *ἀκριβοδίκαιος*); it is opposed to the spirit of exaction and severity. It is "the sweet reasonableness" of Matthew Arnold, and what Juvenal (*Sat. xiv. 15*) calls, "Mitem animum ac mores modicis erroribus æquos." It is therefore especially a virtue in masters of slaves (1 *Pet. ii. 18*, and Juvenal *loc. cit.*), in disputants (James *iii. 17*, and perhaps *Phil. iv. 5*), in judges (*Acts xxiv. 4*), in those who bear rule in the Church (1 *Tim. iii. 3*; *Titus iii. 2*). Joined with *πραότης*, it is essentially characteristic of Christ (*παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς διὰ τῆς πραότητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, 2 *Cor. x. 1*, where *διὰ* expresses the motive). As *πραότης* is the virtue of the submissive sufferer, and *ἐπιείκεια* the virtue of the considerate master or judge, taken together in this connexion these terms would point on the one hand to the submission of Christ, the absence of resentment under unprovoked injustice, and on the other to His forgiving love, which takes account of every excusing circumstance, both supremely exemplified in the word from the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Thus, while, as we shall see presently, the new order and revelation demanded new words for their expression, terms that defined the best outcome of pagan morality were brought into the service of Christ, and in that service charged with a higher meaning and message. It was like the reception of individuals into the Church. Some natures which refused to abandon old ideals were unable to enter; others came with hearts prepared for the higher life; others presented to the world a new type, and were the firstborn of the new creation.

ARTHUR CARR.