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By Whom, all things; for Whom, all things.

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DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF CONSCIENCE.

THE burning philosophic question of the day relates to the development of conscience. It divides itself into two: Is the conscience developed? If it be, does this interfere with its authority?

I. Is the conscience developed? If so, out of what? Out of the original elements, whatever they be, of which matter is composed? Out of atoms or molecules, or out of centres of mechanical power, or out of monads (of Leibnitz)? There is no evidence whatever that any of these can produce moral perception. It may surely be assumed that a cause cannot communicate what it has not. There is no proof that any agglomeration of matter, say clay or ice or gold, or liquid or vapor can bring forth a thought or a sentiment or a volition. I believe it will be admitted that there is no moral discernment in the original atom or molecule or force centre, and I do not see how any of these can give what it has not itself got. They assure us that it comes in, they cannot tell how, by a combination of the original bodies or forces and goes down by heredity. It may be allowed that heredity might hand it down if it once had it; but if it has not got it, it cannot transmit it. Observation makes known no instance of an action of material particles being able to give birth to the judgment and the sentiment which discern between good and evil, and which tell us that it is wrong to tell a lie and to act the hypocrite.

It may be allowed, however, that if once we have or had a moral germ, it might be propagated. Nobody imagines that material particles could spring up of themselves, but being created they work in certain ways by the powers they possess. Darwin allows, or rather demands, four or five germs created by

God before he can account for the development of animals. We continually observe the infant weak bodily and intellectually growing up into the strong man. So if we once had conscience as a germ, we might conceive it growing and expanding.

II. Supposing that there is evolution in conscience, the momentous question presses itself on us, Is its authority, and in particular its supremacy, thereby dethroned? Ethical writers in ancient and modern times have been in the way of appealing to its decisions as infallible. It is now urged that it is the product of circumstances, that its decisions are different in different circumstances, and that it varies from age to age.

As to whether development interferes with the authority of conscience, this depends on the nature of the development. If the evolution is fortuitous or fatal, we might not be entitled to argue that the product carries with it any weight. Thus circumstances often generate prepossessions and prejudices, those of individuals and classes, say of soldiers or tradesmen or lawyers or ministers of religion, which so far from being justifiable are to be condemned. So it might be with a conscience evolved out of blind matter and positions. Hereditary convictions, so far from being always good, are often immoral and degrading: as for example heathen superstitions, family, tribal, and national antipathies. There are cases in which conscience seems to sanction weak and injurious customs, such as the abstaining from food which is nutritious, and requires harsh sacrifices in the lacerating of the body and waging destructive wars against nations and creeds.

But there may be cases in which there is development and yet authority. We assume here that there is a conscience; no man admits this more fully than Herbert Spencer. We assume farther, that conscience in man claims authority. This conscience declares that we ought to love others. This sense of *ought* and *obligation* may have been handed down from father and mother to son and daughter, and from one generation to another. But surely this circumstance cannot render its claims invalid.

It is now seen by a great many people capable of thinking, and is fully acknowledged by Prof. Huxley, that development does not interfere with teleology or the argument from design in favor of the divine existence. Herbert Spencer has shown

in his "Data of Ethics" (see a review of that work in this REVIEW for November, 1879) that development in the geological ages makes for ever-increasing happiness by widening the field of enjoyment as living creatures rise in the scale, and this law and tendency certainly look as if the process was ordained by a being of benevolence. It can easily be shown, that the evolution of plants and animals from one another contains evidences of ends and purpose in the promotion of the comforts of animated beings. Sooner or later there will be a work written after the manner of Paley, showing that there are proofs of design in the very way in which by a long process the organs of the body have been formed and made to fit into each other. All this proves that evolution is a law of God quite as much as gravitation or chemical affinity or vital assimilation. Suppose that, as the result of development, we have a conscience which points to a moral law which is of the nature of a categorical imperative, requiring this and forbidding that and pointing to a designing God, guaranteeing the whole: we are justified in regarding this law as carrying with it the sanction of God, and authoritative. It is admitted that on the supposition that individual men were created by God with this law in their hearts, this law has claims on their obedience. But these claims are not cancelled by its being shown that the conscience in the living man is the result of a process all under the control of God, and evidently tending to the production not only of happiness but of moral good.

Put the farther supposition that in the development there has been a germ of some kind there at the beginning or superinduced at a certain stage, we have a hypothesis worthy of consideration and in no way derogating from the authority of God or the moral power. That germinal power according to the supposition has been there all along, and comes forth into action in certain circumstances, and is liable to be strengthened or weakened or modified by the surroundings. Regarding God as having produced the original germ and guiding and guarding the evolution of it, we may surely regard the conscience as possessing not only original but hereditary authority, as the vicegerent of God, and speaking to us in the name of him who has been our Maker and is our Governör and is to be our Judge.

The question of the validity of the conscience is quite anal-

ogous to that of the validity of the intelligence. It is certain, I think, that there has been an evolution and growth of man's intellectual powers. But this does not lead us to set aside or distrust our power of discovering truth. The intelligence is a cognitive power, and it perceives things and the relations of things without and within us. It grows with our growth, and is ever revealing more truth. The man knows more than the child, the civilized man more than the savage, the philosopher than the peasant; and this circumstance does not lead any man to distrust his understanding—does not lead him, for example, to doubt mathematical truth or the ordinary observations of experience. Just as little should the growth of the moral power lead us to doubt of its authority. The two are on precisely the same footing. If the one is to be trusted in discerning what is true and what is false, so is the other to be trusted in discerning between good and evil. If the power of knowing the good is to be denied or set aside, we must, on the same ground, give up the power of discovering truth and sink into scepticism, or at least agnosticism.

The conscience grows as all living things do. But it grows from a germ. The faculties of the mind are all, like the laws of nature and the properties of matter, of the nature of *tendencies*. Sense-perception is such a tendency. It does not act till it is called forth, and it is called forth by material objects presented to it. It is much the same with all other mental capacities. The judgment acts when objects admitting of comparison are brought under its notice. The fancy is a seed, but does not flower or bear fruit till it has experience and knowledge as its material and its nutriment. There are intellectual germs in infants and in savages, but they need to be ripened by light and heat falling on them. It is the same with the moral power; it is in all men native and necessary, but it is a norm requiring to be evolved.

It grows as the tree grows. As the oak needs soil in which to root itself and air of which to breathe, so the conscience is in our psychical nature, and is in contact with stimuli to make it germinate and expand. All along it is so far swayed by its surroundings. Its health depends so far on climate. When reared in a bare soil it will be dwarfish. When exposed to cold and

blighting it will be stunted and gnarled. In a good soil and a healthy atmosphere it will be upright and well formed. In particular, it grows and spreads out with the intelligence which enables it clearly to apprehend the realities of things, to discover causes and calculate consequences. All this is in accordance with what we observe of human nature, and may be fully admitted, while we hold that the moral capacity and perception could not have been produced without a native moral norm any more than a plant could have grown without a germ.

From this account we see how the conscience is liable to be deceived and led astray. In particular, it may be influenced by the desires and wishes of the heart or will. It is, as Butler often calls it, "a faculty of reflection," and does not perceive objects directly as the senses and the consciousness do. It is dependent on the representation given it of the state of the case. If that be perverted, the judgment of conscience, right enough in regard to the picture given it, may be wrong as to the fact. On the supposition that the white thing we see in the wood is a ghost we might very properly be alarmed, but we have no fear when we know it to be a sheet of linen. If that idol is a god, as the man's ancestors told him, he does right to worship it and submit to the sacrifices it requires; but if, as the Christian knows, it is no god, he feels under no obligation to yield it reverence or obedience. If this farm is mine, as the Irish peasant believes, he is justified in resisting all attempts to drive him from it. He will see this to be wrong when convinced that the property belongs to his landlord. Parents made their children to pass through the fire to Moloch, because they were convinced that the act would pacify their god. A friend of mine who was under the delusion that God required him to sacrifice the object that was dearest to him, and endeavored to put his wife, as the dearest object, to death, had a correct enough moral sense, but was under the sway of a deranged understanding. Saul thought he did right to crush the rising Christian sect, because he regarded them as apostates; but he changed his conduct when he saw that they were following the true faith. The Hindoo mother casts her female child into the Ganges and the African exposes his mother to death by the fountain, because they have the idea pressed upon them that it is better they

should thus die than be exposed to a life of hunger and privation. The Jesuit regards himself as justified in deceiving the enemies of the church, because of the good thereby accomplished, and does evil that good may come.

But with all its defects in our weak and corrupt nature, the conscience is indestructible quite as much as the understanding is. In children and in savages it has to occupy itself with insignificant matters; but it is seen working, and it is capable of being developed by an increase of intelligence. Criminals have resisted and so blunted it; but at times it will deal its blows upon them with tremendous force. Deceived and silent as to certain deeds of wickedness, it will show itself alive and awake as to others. We have heard of robbers committing murder with little or no remorse, but greatly distressed by the neglect of certain superstitious rites which they regard as binding on them. On the other hand, there are persons upright in their transactions with one another, but who do not seem humbled or distressed by the neglect of the duties which they owe to God.

It seems to me that conscience is of the very nature, personality, and identity of the soul. Deprive any one of his power of discerning between good and evil, between cruelty and benevolence, between candor and deceit, between holiness and pollution, and you have stripped him of his humanity quite as much as if you had shorn him of his power of distinguishing between truth and error, between fact and fable.

The question arises, What is the moral norm which, seated down in our nature, never changes, like the deep well which has the same temperature in summer and in winter? It may be difficult to express this precisely, owing to the mixing up of other things with our moral judgments and sentiments. But we can clearly see that there are certain acts which call the moral perception into exercise. Thus we approve of disinterested love, and regard the affection of a mother for her boy as a virtue. But there are cases in which the mother shows her love of her son in ways we disapprove of, as when she indulges him in what is injurious or displays an unjust preference of him over other boys. This shows that in moral good there is not only love, but law regulating love. Love ruled by law, this seems to be the quality in intelligent beings commended by the

conscience. And the opposite of this, selfishness or hatred or lawless love, seems to be sin, which is a transgression of the law.

It is the office of an inductive moral philosophy to inquire into the operations of conscience and thus construct ethics, which is the science of the laws of our moral nature, just as logic is the science of the discursive operations of the mind. As it thus inquires it discovers a law requiring love. This law is imperative and categorical, and is called by Kant the Categorical Imperative. When enunciated it takes the form, "As ye would that others should do unto you, do ye even so to them." It requires supreme love to God and equal love to our fellow-men. From these two principles, law and love, ethics has to draw the duties we owe to God and to the community.

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