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BY

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"BISHOP BUTLER'S ETHICAL THEORY."

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DEGREE CONFERRED

BISHOP BUTLER'S ETHICAL THEORY.

SCHEME.

INTRODUCTION.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

I. Reference to Ancient Philosophy.

(1) In Plato and Aristotle.

Effort to combine Reason and Passion.

(2) In Post Aristotelian philosophy; opposition of these

(a) Stoics - Reason.

(b) Epicureans - Passion.

II. Modern Ethical Philosophy - Chiefly English.

(1) Hobbe's - Man's Nature - Selfish.

(2) Answers to Hobbes'.

(a) Moral distinctions rooted in Reason.

(1) Lord Herbert.

(11) Cudworth.

(111) Clarke.

(b) Appeal to facts of Human Nature.

(1) Shaftesbury - Natural affections - Moral Sense.

(11) Butler - Unselfish Instincts - Conscience.

----- BUTLERS DOCTRINE. -----

Preliminary - Age of Butler - His main purpose - His writings -
The Analogy - The Sermons.

I. The Three Sermons on Human Nature - Analysis.

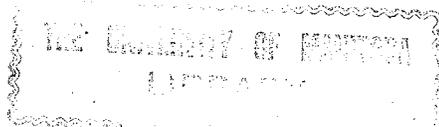
II. Sermons on the Love of God - Analysis.

----- ESTIMATE. -----

Preliminary -- Value of Butler's theory - moral tonic.

Defective: In its psychology -- Conscience an unexplained
element - No harmony reached of the various principles.

Wanted A Central Unity for the various elements of human
nature.



BUTLER'S ETHICAL THEORY.

Distinctions in Ethical Thought.

From the earliest development of philosophic thought there have been two distinct theories as to the nature and basis of morals. On the one side it has been contended that reason shall be the guide in life and on the other that passion shall be the ruling element.

In Greek philosophy Plato and Aristotle tried to get beyond this one sidedness by combining the two. Still even in their philosophy Plato went more to abstract reason while Aristotle was more of an observer and collector of facts, and this tendency was developed in the modern Inductive or ^{Ut} Militaristic School.

This distinction is more clearly seen in the philosophy of the Stoics and Epicureans. Reason was the all important element in the character of the Stoic. To live according to nature meant the subordination of self to more general interests and this subordination was virtue. The Epicurean on the other hand made pleasure the chief good. The sources and tests of ethical truth were the feelings. The cardinal virtue was prudence and whatever brought quietude was eagerly sought.

But it is only in modern times that the distinction between these two schools has been clearly brought out and defined by such writers as Cudworth, Clarke and Butler on the one side, and Hobbes, Bentham and Helvetius on the other. The view held as to the grounds of morality, whether ideas of duty are inherent in the nature of man or whether they are the result of experience and generalization form the ground of combat for the opposing schools. Those who hold the former view are termed intuitionists and those the latter utilitarians. The intuitionist claims that man has a faculty placed within which plainly shows him his duty quite regardless of interest or pleasure and which carries its own obligation to obey. The utilitarian says he has no such faculty naturally but that rules of right and wrong are arrived at by a process of induction. Right is that which has been found to be conducive to happiness and wrong that

which is not. This question was discussed chiefly by English writers, Hobbes.

The great champion of the utilitarian school was Thomas Hobbes, 1588-1679, and a study of his philosophy is necessary to the proper understanding of subsequent ethical thought, and also to the proper understanding of the place held by Butler as a writer on ethical subjects. His views on the rational and social nature of man are very startling. Man's natural tendencies are altogether self regarding. A state of nature is one in which might is right, where each has a right to everything, and, consequently, one of war. In his aim for self-gratification he finds this warlike state detrimental to his interests and reason comes ⁱⁿ to devise a plan for self-preservation. Experience teaches man that the best means to further his own interest is deference to the wishes of others. Every man ought to seek peace. The only means to this peace lies in a strong government and each by mutual consent surrenders his will to a supreme will which rules absolutely.

In this way is formed the great Leviathan to which man owes his power and security. Implicit obedience to this supreme will is the bounden duty of each under its protection. Of course submission to this external authority leaves no place for action according to internal motive so there is no such thing as conscience in his theory. Right action is that which is advantageous to self and wrong that which is not.

Answers to Hobbes.

The writings of later philosophers are largely answers to those of Hobbes.

There are two systems by which morals may be treated by the intuitionist. By the first, which was that of Herbert, Cudworth and Clarke the abstract relations of things is considered. The second inquires into the nature of man and tries to find out what course of life is correspondent to the whole nature. This was the one followed by Butler and Shaftesbury. By the first vice was contrary to the nature and reason of things; by the second it was a violation of

the nature of man.

(a). Distinctions rooted in reason.

I. Lord Herbert of Sherbury 1582-1678, precursor of the Cambridge Platonists and parent of English Deism says:- We have natural instincts, principles implanted within and sanctioned by nature. If we rebel against these it is at our own peril. Universality is the criterion by which they are known. The existence of God and the idea of virtue are eternal and universal truths. Conscience is that faculty which guides us to practice these truths, and excites the feeling of satisfaction in well-doing and dissatisfaction in ill-doing.

II. Cudworth. 1617-1688.

Cudworth, the most learned of the intuitionists states his main position in his work on "Eternal and Immutable Morality." He charges Hobbes with obscuring the distinctions of right and wrong and asserts that this distinction is so absolute and eternal that not even the will of God could change it. Good and evil are immutable truths which we apprehend by pure intellect and are far more real than the phenomena of sense. He claims with Herbert that our ideas of them are innate conceptions which the mind can draw out of itself independent of teaching and experience.

Clarke. 1675 - 1729.

Clarke's theory is much the same as Cudworth's. Things (Beings) stand to one another in certain necessary and eternal relations. We cannot conceive of anything except as in relation to something else. There are such relations between God and man; between man and man. A fitness or unfitness of action arises from these relations independent of and prior to the command of God. An obligation resting in the reason of things also arises from this fitness and the sanctions of reward or punishment are secondary to this.

(b) Appeal to facts of Human Nature.

I. Shaftesbury. 1671 - 1713.

Shaftesbury goes beyond the intuitionists just spoken of. He speaks of a sense of right and wrong as natural as natural

affection. He finds in man an unselfish element and true happiness consists in the full exercise of our benevolent affections.

A certain harmony pervades the whole course of nature resulting in a moral beauty as discernible as physical beauty. He asserts a moral sense by which we apprehend this. Conscience is looked upon as an emotion, a moral taste. He does not admit that conscience carries with it any sense of obligation because he dislikes the notion of virtue being obligatory; while to hold out the prospects of reward and punishment appeals to the lowest motives. He does not go to the Bible for proofs until he gets them by reason. He thought that what a cultivated taste would approve was beneficial to society.

Butler. 1692 - 1752.

Butler saw that more was needed than some principle which applies only to persons of cultivated taste. He saw that Shaftesbury's moral taste, regarded as analogous to the sense of beauty, was lacking in authority; and his philosophy is a strenuous effort to establish the supremacy of conscience. With him, it was a faculty having the right to rule, supreme over all the other principles and instincts in man.

Butler's Doctrine.

The age in which Butler lived was an age of rationalism and unbelief. The number of sceptics was large and increasing and they were most zealous against everything good and sacred. Swift said there were but one or two in the whole army and navy, who believed in Christianity. Morality and religion were separated; and scripture was no longer appealed to in questions of morals. Butler saw with deep sorrow this decay of religion, and earnestly set to work to refute, as far as was in his power, the arguments of Hobbes and his followers. A man of sublime and consecrated genius; of fixity of purpose and energy, he wielded a mighty influence against the scepticism of his day. To meet these men on their own ground, he endeavored to establish virtue on a reasonable basis, rather than on that of Revelation. Instead of Hobbes's state of

nature, where self is the chief object, he makes it a state where every man would seek the good of others.

In his Analogy he shows, with convincing conclusiveness, that the objections to revealed religion may be applied to the whole constitution of nature, and that the analogy between the principles of Divine government, as given in Scripture, and those shown in the course of nature, each point to the conclusion that they have a common Author. This was a much more convincing argument than the demonstration of previous writers, that God exists, and is all-powerful, and so must be good, and act in such and such ways.

The main points of his ethical doctrine, may be found in his three "Sermons on Human Nature" and in the sermons on "The Love of God,"

Sermons on Human Nature.

Sermon I.

The first sermon discusses the principles of human nature in relation to self, ^{and} to society.

Nature's claims to virtue.

The fact that we are God's creatures, born under the natural law of virtue, and the fact that our whole constitution is adapted to virtue are claims to right action, prior to the claims established by Christ's coming into the world to save it. This last fact was more dwelt upon by Christians at the time of Revelation.

Analogy between relations of members of the body and those of society.

Butler compares the relation of the members of the body to each other to that of the relation of members of society to each other. Following the apostle, Butler, "instead of the body and its members," substitutes "the whole nature of man, and all the variety of internal principles which belong to it." The comparison then is between the nature of man as respecting self and private good, and his nature as respecting society and tending to public good. These ends coincide and mutually promote each other.

"From this review and comparison of the nature of man as

respecting self and as respecting society it will plainly appear that there are as real and the same kind of indications in human nature, that we were made for society and to do good to our fellow-men; as that we were intended to take care of our own life, and health and private good."

Natural principles in man.

I. There is a natural principle of benevolence in man which is the same to society as self love is to the individual. In however low degree we find friendship, compassion, filial affection in the human heart, it still points out what we were intended for. The fact that benevolence promotes our own happiness, and that self love promotes the good of society is also a proof that we were intended for both.

II. There are several passions and affections, such as desire of esteem from others, contempt and esteem of them, love of society, indignation against vice, etc, which regulate our conduct to others in such a way as will benefit them. Though tending to good, both public and private, these are quite distinct from benevolence and self-love.

III. "There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions. We are plainly constituted such sort of creatures as to reflect upon our own nature. The mind can take a view of what passes within itself, its propensions, aversions, passions, affections, as respecting such objects, and in such degrees, and of the several actions consequent thereupon. In this survey it approves of one, disapproves of another, and towards a third is affected in neither of these ways, but is quite indifferent. This principle in man by which he approves, or disapproves his heart, temper and actions is conscience; for this is the strict sense of the word though sometimes it is used so as to take in more. And that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each other, and leads them to do good is too manifest to need being insisted upon."

Proof that this principle exists in man.

Butler compares two actions of the same person at diff-

erent times; one the relieving of an innocent person in distress; the other the doing of mischief in a fit of anger to an unoffending person, one who had been a friend and to whom he was under deep obligation. The fact that no common person could approve or disapprove these actions equally proves the existence of this faculty of reflection in man.

His view of Human Nature different to that of Hobbes.

Mankind are so constituted that there is an attraction between man and man. The slightest circumstance such as being born in the same district may serve as the occasion by which a bond may be established between different persons.

"Men are so much one body that they feel for each other shame, sudden danger, resentment, honour, prosperity, distress, one or another, or all of these, from the social nature in general, from benevolence, upon the occasion of natural relation, acquaintance, protection, dependence; each of these being distinct cements of society." To the question "Has not man dispositions and principles within which lead him to do evil to others as well as to do good?" the answer comes "Has he not dispositions and principles within which lead him to do evil to himself? The truth is man has ungoverned passions which will be gratified at any cost, but as there is no such thing as self-hatred so there is no such thing as ill-will in one man towards another.

Sermon II.

The second sermon sets forth the strong point in Butler's doctrine, the supremacy of conscience.

If the nature of any constitution is adapted to certain purposes the inference is that this end was designed; and the more complex the constitution the more reason for the inference.

RULE OF ACTION.

Religion requires that the whole character be formed upon thought and reflection. Every action should be directed towards some rule, other than the strength and prevalence of any principle or passion.

Sign that this was intended by its Author.

"It may indeed be absurd and unnatural for men to act

without any reflection; nay without regard to that particular kind of reflection which you call conscience; because this does belong to our nature. For, as there never was a man but who approved one place, prospect, building, before another so does it not appear that there ever was a man who would not have approved an action of humanity rather than of cruelty; interest and passion being quite out of the case. But interest and passion do come in, and are often too strong for, and prevail over reflection and conscience."

What is meant by acting according to Nature.

Butler's maxim was "follow nature," and here he was a follower of the Stoics. There are three senses in which we may be said to follow nature.

- (1) Any passion or affection which prevails widely among mankind such as anger, or affection of parents to children, is said to be "natural." But as man has contrary passions, he might both contradict nature and follow it by a certain action in this sense of the word.
- (2) The second sense is that in which St. Paul used the word when he spoke of the Gentiles as being "by nature" the children of wrath. In this sense he meant acting according to the passion or principle which was strongest at the time.
- (3) To follow nature according to Butler is to do the things contained in the law.

"What that is in man by which he is naturally a law to himself is explained in the following words; which shows the work of ^{the} law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." There is he says this principle in every man which distinguishes between the internal principles of the heart and external actions. It passes judgement on man's actions pronouncing some good and some evil and either approving or condemning the man. It is this faculty which makes man a moral agent and makes him a law to himself.

Actions Natural and Unnatural.

If a man act according to that principle which is strongest, and rush to foreseen ruin, he is acting in a way

disproportionate to his nature. To act according to nature, reasonable self-love must govern; so we see that without particular consideration of conscience one inward principle is superior to another.

Power and Authority.

Passion rushes towards ends without considering means. In cases where objects cannot be obtained without injury to others conscience comes in to stop the pursuit of such objects. Every instance in which passion prevails over reflection is usurpation, and violates the constitution of man. This principle which approves or disapproves our own heart, temper and actions cannot be considered as having an influence along with other principles but as claiming superiority over all others. Judgement, direction, superintendency are necessary ideas in a proper conception of it. "To preside and govern from the very constitution of man belongs to it. Had it strength as it has right; had it power as it has manifest authority it would absolutely govern the world."

This gives a view of the nature of man, and shows us what course of life we were made for, and in what degree we were to be influenced by reflection. No matter how often men violate and refuse to submit to conscience, authority is no less its natural right and office.

Sermon III.

In the third sermon, he shows that by virtue is meant the following of nature, and by vice the deviating from it.

Comparison between a Civil Constitution and the nature of man.

Just as the complete idea of a civil constitution includes that of the combined strength of the members under the direction of a supreme authority, so a complete idea of human nature includes that of all the principles and passions being subordinate to the one superior principle of conscience or reflection. And just as in the civil government the constitution is broken in upon by power prevailing over authority, so in human nature the constitutional man is broken in upon by the lower principles or faculties prevailing over that which should by nature be supreme over all. Man, exclusive of Revelation, cannot be considered as left by his maker to

act as passion dictates "but that, from his make, constitution, or nature, he is in the strictest and most proper sense, a law to himself. He hath the rule of right within; what is wanting is only that he honestly attend to it."

Butler thinks that any plain honest man asking himself if a certain course of action were right or wrong would decide in favor of the right. The only exceptions to this would be cases of superstition or partiality to ourselves. The first might be pardonable, but the latter is plain vice.

Obligations to obey this Law.

The obligation to obey this law lies in the fact that it is a law of your nature. That your conscience approves of such a course of action is alone an obligation.

"Conscience does not only offer itself to show us the way we should walk in, but it likewise carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide, the guide assigned us by the Author of our Nature."

Duty and Self-love coincident.

In the common course of life there is seldom any inconsistency between duty and interest. Self-love perfectly coincides with virtue. Whatever exceptions there may be to this, will be made right at one final distribution of things.

SERMONS XIII and XIV on the LOVE OF GOD.

Butler's sermons on the Love of God portray a grand conception of a true christian character, that in which the will of man is one with that of God. By the Love of God Butler means all those affections of mind which are due immediately to Him from such a creature as man, and which rest in Him as their end. Reverence, ambition of His love, and approbation, come into Butler's definition, while all fear is not excluded for God's displeasure is the proper object of fear.

The notion of affection implies resting in its object as an end.

In the presence of a good person one would feel reverence and love for ^{him}, and desire of his approbation, and surely all these affections may be brought to the Being who is much more than an adequate object for them.