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DISCUSSIONS.

THE OUTLOOK IN ETHICS.

As our journal passes on to its second year of life, it is natural for us all to give a moment's thought to the general situation of our whole department of study. The present writer, in suggesting what occurs to him at such a moment, can speak only from the point of view of the student of philosophy, and not from that of an expert in social problems. But a little retrospect of the course of discussion concerning ethical problems during the last twelve or fifteen years will show any one how prominent has become, within that period, the interest of the social problems for even the theoretical student of ethics.

During the seventies, we who studied philosophy were accustomed to complain of the comparative poverty of our ethical literature. There were books of note and, in a few cases, of great power published during that decade; but, on the whole, the period was not one of very active construction in this department. Since 1880 the scene has greatly changed. It is precisely the constructive aspect that is prominent in the books of Green, of Wundt, or of Paulsen, as well as in the second volume of v. Ihering's "Zweck im Recht." The critical patience of Professor Sidgwick taught us in 1874 the difficulties of our subject. Nowadays critical and even highly sceptical analysis is not neglected; but we also hear positive doctrine preached, and very industriously applied. The century bids fair to close with a period of extraordinary constructiveness in ethics. Many intelligent students of philosophy look nowadays to France as the country where the next great philosophical movement is to originate. And there are already numerous signs that the French philosophy of the near future will be as active in ethics as in the direction of psychology and of the philosophy of nature. In Germany,

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meanwhile, theoretical philosophy languishes, but not so ethics. The German, with the singular and merciless forgetfulness of his own recent past, that Wilhelm Scherer used to call a typical trait of his own nation and of its literature, profits all the while half unconsciously by the great thoughts of the idealistic age, but refuses to read with care the works of any constructive theoretical thinker of first rank since Kant, excepting Schopenhauer. Scherer used to compare such cases of forgetfulness to Siegfried's unconscious treason towards Brünnhilde; although even Scherer also saw in the works of the principal post-Kantian idealists only dreams and a more or less barbarous style. But this neglect of theoretical philosophy does not, at present, extend to ethics. It is an interesting sign of the times that those who thus find theoretical speculation fantastic, still regard the moral world, with all its hard problems and its unrealized ideals, as something very highly actual. This encouraging devotion to one side of philosophy may ere long lead men back to the other. Wundt, in the preface to his "Ethik," prophesies a revival of philosophy on lines that will be near those of the post-Kantian idealists, without repeating their extravagances.

This revival of ethical study has gone side by side with a number of interesting literary tendencies, in which more than one nation has participated. The tendency towards subjective analysis has given us, in the psychological novel, an art that attempts to furnish, as it were, a kind of classified museum of the secrets of the human heart,—a museum where either the psychologist or the student of ethics may find rich material for his scrutiny. The literature of confessions—diaries, autobiographical studies, and the like—has been of late large and increasing. The influence of Russian literature in Western Europe and in this country was, before 1880, still confined almost wholly to the one case of Türgénieff. Since then every one has come to know something of Gogol, of Dostojewsky, and of that wondrous problem, Tolstöi. The recent growth of the influence of Scandinavian literature, *e.g.*, of Ibsen, has been due in large part to the ethical paradoxes,

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and to the psychological skill shown therein. In literature, then, this is a time of ethical as well as of psychological awakening. We study the inner life in a more or less definitely scientific fashion, elaborately, lovingly, as we formerly had not learned to do. Above all, the pathological attracts our attention. The modern scientific literature of pathological psychology has been entirely revolutionized within fifteen years. The unwearied and benevolent devotion of a great alienist like v. Krafft-Ebing to the inner history of his patients' sorrows, is, in another sphere of work, characteristic of this deep and, as I am sure, thoroughly humane concern for the wounds of the inner life. The Spirit has suffered of late far less than was to be feared in the way of external physical calamities. Wars have come, but the Great War, so long awaited, has been awaited in vain. It is the inner warfare that now troubles our literature, attracts the close scrutiny of our science, and most of all concerns our ethical studies.

Let us suggest the unity of these varied tendencies of recent literature by means of a very obvious contrast that distinguishes our age from one former time of subjective analysis. The last century, too, had its subjective period, and that period extended also far into the beginning of the present century. But the subjectivism of that time stood in marked contrast to ours, in that, in those days, the principal ethical purpose of all this self-analysis was to free the human subject from the unjust bondage of convention and authority; while for us that aim is already, in theory, accomplished, and what we most need is to hunt out in a man's heart the passions that shall serve to tie him once more, and more closely, to his fellows and to the social order. The old Romantic Period was interested in loosening the chains of humanity. The intelligent man of to-day is praying hourly for proof that there are spiritual chains worthy enough and holy enough to bind his will and his reason. It is, therefore, the curious but obvious truth that our subjectivism has a social rather than a merely private and individual aim. We study the human heart to find what it is good for. When we despair, our pessimism is

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therefore much deeper than was, say, Werther's sorrow. He despaired of himself and of his personal environment. We, in such cases, despair of all spirituality. Werther was potentially Prometheus ; for Goethe was both. But from the point of view of the modern pessimistic novelist, Werther and Prometheus are equally absurd,—since one lies in whining, and the other in boasting, but both lie. When, on the contrary, we are humane instead of pessimistic, when ethical doctrine concerns us, and hope inspires us, our modern method is indeed subjective, but our aim is all the while outer and social. We don't wish to indulge the human heart, but to cure it. We study mental pathology as never before; but we aim to save. We scrutinize the inner life unweariedly; but we do so for the sake of finding what spiritual use can be made of it. And the real Spirit lives, after all, not within so much as without,—in a man's business, in the social order, in service, in duty, in union. The wounds within hinder the social business; hence we must know and heal them. We do not dread authority as they did in that previous time of subjectivism. On the contrary, we have long been far too free from spiritual authority. What we nowadays want, in that loneliness of the inner life which, during our worse moments, we often feel so bitterly, is precisely this,—to learn to love authority, and to that end to find the authority that is worth loving. Hence our ethical inquirers, indeed, ask the old question of subjectivism, "Why should *I* obey the moral law?" But they ask not as the old romantic rebels asked, for the sake of escaping from any but the inner law. They ask longingly, just because the subject has learned, in his keen modern sensitiveness, to despise the merely inner law of his caprice, and because he wants to find the way back to an ethical order that can be verified in and through the world of hard facts,—an order that shall be external and still spiritual; an object of scientific experience, and still a kingdom of the ideal.

Hence, once more, this union of relatively impersonal social ideals in ethics, with intensely keen scrutiny of the individual in psychology and in literature. The two tendencies are, for us, not opposed, but are rather aspects of one tendency.

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Our readers will have seen in our own pages, during the past year, many signs of the social drift of modern ethical discussion. This is certainly not a time of individualism, notwithstanding the keen scrutiny that we give to individuals. Our honored contributor, Professor Toy, on page 310 of the previous volume, has expressed the common aim of many modern synthetic ethical thinkers when he says, "The aim to which human moral history points is a conscience absolutely independent, and yet absolutely dependent,—independent in that it refuses to recognize any other authority than its own ideals; dependent in that it receives its ideals from the life of man, which is the highest revelation of God." What we want, then, is to hold together, to bring into synthesis the clearest and most sympathetic consideration of the individual's heart and interest, with the deepest respect for the authority of the social order,—the fullest regard for the "independent" conscience of each man, with the sternest insistence that without dependence on the life of man, as embodied in the organism of society, the individual's ideals are worthless. It is a hard task, this one of to-day. The old-fashioned analysis of the "moral sense" is not enough for us. We want the whole world of moral facts; and we can find it only in the study of all sorts and conditions of men. "There is," says Professor James, on page 330 of our first volume, "no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance." "There can be no final truth in ethics any more than in physics until the last man has had his experience and said his say." In a similar spirit, our vigorous and ingenious contributor, Mr. R. W. Black, in his paper on "Vice and Immorality" (pp. 459-474 of the previous volume), warns us against the danger of solving moral problems by an appeal to the merely isolated individual, to his inner blessedness and dignity, as if these were for him a sufficient standard of right. The individual, in and for himself, reasons Mr. Black, is an indifferent sort of creature, in whom are all sorts of potentialities for good and evil. Leave him to himself, or appeal only to his inner nature by counselling him to avoid subjective vileness, or vice as such, and you do him an

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injury. "The normal and only sufficient appeal" that can be made to a man's truly moral instincts "is from without,—that is, from their normal objects, which, be it noted, are common objects for the individual and society." "Partaking of the nature of life itself, morality involves not only a recipient subject, but an active nature and an outer object." In consequence, as Mr. Black well holds, subjective or private evil, *i.e.*, vice, "can hardly be defined at all, if it be not the spending of the forces of one's own life to the detriment of its moral capabilities." And morality has reference to the outer, the social relations. "Unless they can be referred to moral [*i.e.*, once more, to social] aims, virtue and vice cease to be distinguished by any mark save it be of internal feeling."

All this abandonment of ethical dogmatism, this open-mindedness as to the moral facts, wherever they may come from, and this assurance meanwhile that such facts are to be found in the study of the Will of Mankind, as shown in the social order,—all these features, I repeat, seem to me common to the enlightened ethical students of to-day. We may and must differ as to many matters, but herein we are at one. The moral law is not a finished code, written on the tablets of the heart. Nor, again, is it to be found in any form of mere self-will. It is determined by the fact that there are many of us living together, and that, if we are rational beings, we are deeply concerned for one another,—concerned to comprehend one another, to respect one another, to organize our wills into some sort of universality, to live in spiritual union, to give our common life the most complete wholeness that is possible. The task is as endless as it is inspiring. There will always be something new to learn in ethics. There will always be something worth seeking and worth comprehending that we never yet have found or comprehended.

To such a task this journal is trying to contribute its own little share.

JOSIAH ROYCE.

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