LECTURE XX.

ESSAY, SECOND BOOK. OF GOOD AND EVIL. THIRD BOOK. OF WORDS.

Continuation of the examination of the Second Book of the *Essay on the Human Understanding*. Of the idea of good and evil. Refutation.—Of the formation and mechanism of ideas in the understanding. Of simple and complex ideas.—Of the activity and passivity of the mind in the acquisition of ideas.—Of the most general characters of ideas.—Of the association of ideas.—Examination of the Third Book of the *Essay on the Human Understanding*, in regard to words.—Praise due to the author.—Examination of the following propositions: 1st, Do words take their first origin from other words which signify sensible ideas?—2d, Is the signification of words purely arbitrary?—3d, Are general ideas merely words? Of nominalism and realism.—4th, Are words the sole cause of error, and is all science only a well-constructed language? Conclusion of the examination of the Third Book.

It is* an incontestable fact that, when we have done right or wrong, when we have fulfilled the law of justice or have broken it, we judge that we merit a reward or a punishment; and it is also a fact that we really do receive reward or punishment, 1st, in the approval of conscience or in the bitterness of remorse; 2d, in the esteem or blame of our fellow-men, who, being also moral beings, judge as we do of good and evil, and punish us and reward us according to our acts, sometimes by the pain or the moral recompense of their blame or of their esteem, sometimes by the rewards or the physical pains which positive laws, the legitimate interpreters of natural law, hold ready for generous actions or for derelictions and crimes; 3d, finally, if we look beyond this world, if we conceive of God as we ought to conceive of him, not only as the author of the physical world, but as the

* On the idea of good and evil, of obligation, of merit and demerit, see 1st Series, *passim*, and particularly Vol. 2, Lecture 20.

father of the moral world, as the substance itself of good and of the moral law, we cannot help conceiving that God holds ready rewards or punishments for those who have fulfilled or broken the law. But suppose that there is neither good nor evil, neither justice nor injustice in itself; suppose that there is no law: there can then be neither merit nor demerit in having broken or fulfilled it; there is no place for punishment or reward; there is no place either for the pleasures of conscience or the pangs of remorse; there is no place either for the approbation or disapprobation of men, either for their esteem or their blame; there is no place either for the punishments or the rewards of society in this life, or in the life to come for the rewards and punishments of the supreme Legislator. The idea of reward and punishment rests, therefore, upon that of merit and demerit, which again rests upon that of a law. Now, what does Locke here do? he draws the idea of good and evil, the moral law and all the rules of our duties, from the fear and the hope of rewards and punishments, human or divine, that is,—to shun every other consideration, and to rest upon the solid ground of scientific method,—he founds the principle upon the consequence; he confounds, no longer as heretofore, the antecedent with the consequent, but the consequent with the antecedent. And whence comes this confusion? from that same source of confusion which we have so many times signalized, the premature search for causes before a sufficient study of effects, the search for the origin of the idea of good and evil, before having carefully stated the characters, and all the characters, of this idea. Permit me to dwell a moment on this important matter.

First, that there is in the human understanding, such as it now is, the idea of good, and the idea of evil, entirely distinct from each other, is what the most superficial observation, provided it be impartial, easily demonstrates. It is a fact, that in the presence of certain actions reason qualifies them as good or bad, as just or unjust, as honest or dishonest. And it is not only in some superior men that reason bears this judgment: there is not

a man, ignorant or instructed, civilized or savage, provided he be a reasonable and moral being, who does not bear the same judgment. As the principle of causality errs and rectifies itself without ceasing to be, so the distinction between right and wrong may be incorrectly made, may vary in its objects, and be elucidated with time, without ceasing to be at bottom the same in all men; it is a universal conception of reason, and this is why all languages, those faithful images of thought, reproduce it. Not only is this distinction a universal conception, it is also a necessary conception. In vain the reason, after having conceived it, tries to deny it and put its verity in question, it cannot; we are not able at will to call the same action just or unjust; these two ideas resist every attempt to interchange them: they may change in regard to objects, never in regard to their nature. Furthermore: reason cannot conceive the distinction between good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest, without conceiving at the same instant that the one ought to be done, and that the other ought not to be done: the conception of good and evil immediately gives that of duty and law, and as the one is universal and necessary, the other is equally so. Now, a law necessary for reason in respect to action is, for a reasonable but free agent, a simple obligation, not an absolute obligation. Duty obligates us without forcing us; if we can violate it, we cannot deny it; and even when the feebleness of liberty and the ascendency of passion, make the action, as it were, belie its law, the independent reason maintains the violated law as an inviolable law, and still imposes it with a supreme authority upon unfaithful action, as its imprescriptible rule. The sentiment of reason, and that of moral obligation which it reveals to us and imposes on us, is the moral consciousness properly so called.

Remark distinctly upon what obligation bears: it bears upon doing right; it bears only upon this point, but here it is absolute. It is, therefore, independent of every foreign consideration; it has nothing to do with the facilities or the perils which its fulfilment encounters, nothing to do with the consequences which it brings,

with pleasure or pain, that is, with happiness and misery, that is, with any motive, whatever it may be, of utility; for pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, are only objects of sensibility; good and moral obligation are conceptions of reason; utility is only an accident which may or may not be; duty is a principle.

Now, is not good always useful to him who performs it, and to others? This is another question which does not pertain to reason, but to experience. Does experience always decide in the affirmative? Even should it, and were the useful always inseparable from the good, the good and the useful would not be less distinct in themselves, and it would not be on the ground of utility that virtue would be obligatory, and that it would obtain universal veneration and admiration. We admire it, therefore we do not take it solely as useful; for admiration is not the expression of interest.*

If the good were only the useful, the admiration which virtue excites would always be in the ratio of its utility: but this is not so. There are no virtues which, for utility, can be compared with certain natural phenomena which everywhere diffuse and sustain life. And who has ever felt for the sun, whose influence is so beneficent, the sentiment of admiration and respect with which the most sterile virtuous act inspires us? It is because the sun is simply useful; while the virtuous act, useful or not, is the fulfilment of a law, to which the agent, whom we qualify as virtuous, and whom we admire, is voluntarily conformed. We can profit by an action without admiring it, as we can admire it without profiting by it. The foundation of admiration is not, therefore, the utility which the admired object procures for others; it is still less the utility which the action procures for him who does it. Virtuous action would then be only a calculation of happiness; we might congratulate its author, but we should not be tempted to admire him. Humanity demands in its heroes

* On the moral phenomenon of admiration, see 1st Series, Vol. 2, Lecture 17, p. 214, etc

some other merit than that of a sagacious merchant; and, far from the utility of the agent and his personal interest being the title and measure of admiration, it is a fact that, all other things being equal, the phenomenon of admiration decreases and increases just in proportion to the sacrifices which the virtuous action costs.* But do you wish a manifest proof that virtue does not rest upon the personal interest of him who practises it? take the example which I have already given,† that of an honest man whose virtue ruins him instead of being useful to him; and, in order to prevent all idea of calculation, suppose a man who gives his life for the truth, who dies upon the scaffold in the flower of his age, for the cause of justice. Here no future chance of happiness, at least in this world, therefore no calculation, no personal interest, is possible. This man, if virtue is only the useful, is a fool, and humanity which admires it, is in delirium. This delirium is nevertheless a fact, and an incontestable fact; it unanswerably demonstrates that, in the human understanding, such as it has pleased its Author to make it, the idea of good and evil, of vice and virtue, is one thing, and the idea of utility, of pleasure and pain, of happiness and misery, is another.

I have just shown you the essential and metaphysical difference between these ideas; it is now necessary to exhibit their relation. It is certain that the idea of virtue is distinct from that of happiness; but I ask whether, when you meet a virtuous man, a moral agent who, free to obey or not to obey a strict law, obeys it at the expense of his dearest affections; I ask whether this man, this moral agent, does not inspire you, independently of the admiration which is attached to the act, with a sentiment of benevolence which is attached to the person? Is it not true that you would be disposed, if happiness were in your hands, to bestow it upon this virtuous man? Is it not true that he would

* On sacrifice, as the foundation and measure of moral approbation, see 1st Series, Vol. 4, Lecture 15, p. 170, etc.

† Preceding Vol., Lecture 8, and 1st Series, Vol. 1, Course of 1817, Lecture 18, p. 313, and Vol. 2, Lecture 23, p. 355.

appear to you to merit happiness, and that in regard to him happiness would appear to you no longer as merely an arbitrary fact, but as a right? At the same time, when the culpable man finds himself in misery through the effect of his vices, do we not judge that he has deserved it? Do we not judge, in general, that it would be unjust for vice to be happy and virtue miserable? Such is evidently the opinion of all men; and this opinion is not only universal, it is a necessary conception. In vain reason tries to conceive of vice as worthy of happiness, t cannot succeed in it; it cannot succeed in denying an intimate harmony between happiness and virtue. And in this we are not beings of sensation who aspire after happiness, nor beings of sympathy who desire it for our fellow-men; we are rational and moral beings who judge thus for others, as well as for ourselves; and when facts do not accord with our judgments, it is not our judgments that we condemn, we maintain them before all the contrary facts. In a word, the idea of merit and demerit is for the reason inseparable from that of the moral law, fulfilled or violated.

Where virtue and vice have their recompense and punishment, there is order for us; whenever vice and virtue are without punishment and reward, or where they are equally treated, there for us is disorder. Rewards and punishments are diverse, according to cases which it is not necessary here to determine and classify with perfect precision. When vicious acts do not pass beyond the sphere of the person who commits them, we do not impose upon them any punishment but contempt: we punish them by opinion. When they pass beyond this sphere and attain that of others, then they fall under positive laws; hence penal laws. In all times, in all places, these two kinds of punishment, moral and material, have been inflicted upon vicious agents. Without any doubt, it is useful for society to inflict contempt upon him who violates the moral order; without any doubt, it is useful for society to effectively punish him who corrupts the foundations of social order; this consideration of utility is real, it is powerful; but I say that it is not the only one, that it is not the first, that

it is only accessory, and that the principle of all penalty is the idea of the essential merit and demerit of actions, the general idea of order, which imperiously demands that the merit and demerit of acts, which is a law of reason and order, shall be realized in a society that pretends to be rational and well ordered. On this ground, and on this ground alone, of realizing this law of reason and order, the two powers of society, opinion and the State, appear to us faithful to their primary law. Then comes utility, the immediate utility of repressing evil, and the indirect utility of preventing it by example, that is, by fear. But this consideration of the utility of punishment, would not be sufficient for the foundation. Suppose, in fact, that there is in itself neither good nor evil, and consequently neither essential merit nor demerit: what right have you, I ask, to dishonor a man, to make him mount the scaffold, or to put him during his whole life in irons, solely for the benefit of others, when the action of this man is neither good nor bad, and merits in itself neither blame nor punishment? Suppose that it is not just in itself to blame this man and punish him, and there is an end made of the justice of infamy and glory, of the justice of every species of reward and punishment. I say farther: if penalty has no other foundation than utility, then there is made an end of its very utility; for, in order that a penalty may be useful, it is necessary, 1st, that he upon whom it is inflicted, provided he be endowed with the principle of merit and demerit, should regard himself as justly punished, and accept his punishment with a befitting disposition; 2d, that the spectators, equally endowed with the principle of merit and demerit, should find the criminal justly punished according to the extent of his criminality, should apply to themselves by anticipation the same justice, and should be kept in harmony with the general order by view of these legitimate forfeitures. Take away from punishment this foundation of justice, and you destroy its utility; you substitute indignation and abhorrence for a salutary lesson and for repentance both in the condemned and in the public; you put courage, sympathy, all that is noble and great in human nature,

on the side of the victim; you rouse all energetic souls against society and its artificial laws. Thus even the utility of punishment rests upon its justice. The punishment is the sanction of the law, not its foundation. The idea of right and wrong is founded only upon itself and upon the reason which discovers it to us; it is the condition of the idea of merit and demerit, which is the condition of the idea of punishment and reward: this is therefore, to the two first, especially to the idea of good and evil, in the relation of the consequence to the principle.*

This relation, which contains all moral order, inviolably subsists, even when we pass from the sphere of this life and from human society to that of religion and of the world where God reigns alone, where destiny gives place to the pure action of Providence, where fact and right are one and the same thing. The idea of merit and demerit, transported in some sort beyond this world, is the true reason of the idea of the punishments and the rewards of another life. It is not in the caprice of a being superior to us in power that resides the legitimacy of future punishments and rewards. Take away the justice of God; his power, absolute as it is, does not sufficiently authorize punishments and rewards. Take away his justice: what remains? an order, and not a law; and, instead of the sublime realization of the idea of merit and demerit, religion is no longer any thing but the menace of a tyrannical force against a feeble being, condemned to the part of patient and victim.† In heaven, as upon earth, and in heaven much more than upon earth, the sanction of law is not its foundation; punishment and reward are derived from good and evil, but good and evil are not constituted by punishment and reward.

Let us apply to all this the distinctions which we have previously established. We have distinguished the logical order of

* First Series, *passim*, particularly Vol. 2, part 3, Lecture 17, p. 218; Lecture 21 and 22, p. 341; see also the *Translation of Plato*, Vol. 3, argument of the *Gorgias*.

† First Series, Vol. 1, p. 383; Vol. 2, Lecture 19, p. 278–284

ideas from the order of their acquisition. In the first order, one idea is the logical condition of another idea when it explains it; in the second order, one idea is the chronological condition of another idea when it is produced in the human mind before it. Now, in regard to the question which occupies us, the idea of justice, the idea of moral law, violated or fulfilled, is: 1st, the logical condition of the idea of merit or of demerit, which without it is incomprehensible and inadmissible; 2d, the antecedent, the chronological condition of the acquisition of the idea of merit or of demerit, which certainly never would have been produced in the mind, if the idea of justice and injustice had not been previously given it. Locke, after having often confounded, as we have seen, the logical condition of an idea with its chronological condition, here confounds at once the logical and chronological condition of an idea with this idea itself, and even with a consequence of this idea; for the idea of punishment and reward is only a consequence of the idea of merit and demerit, which, in its turn, is only a consequence of the idea of good and evil, of just and unjust, which is the supreme principle beyond which it is impossible to ascend. Locke reverses this order: instead of first laying down the idea of good and evil, then that of merit and demerit, then that of punishment and reward, it is the reward or the punishment, that is, the pleasure or the pain that results from it, which, according to Locke, is the foundation of good and evil, and of the moral rectitude of actions.

Book II. Chap. XXVIII. § 5. "*Moral good and evil.*—Good and evil, as hath been shown, Book II. Chap. XX. § 2, and Chap. XXI. § 42, are nothing but pleasure or pain, or that which occasions or procures pleasure or pain to us. Moral good and evil, then, is only the conformity or disagreement of our voluntary actions to some law, whereby good or evil is drawn on us by the will and power of the law-maker; which good and evil, pleasure or pain, attending our observance or breach of the law, by the decree of the law-maker, is what we call reward and punishment."

Hence, Locke distinguishes three laws or rules, to wit: the divine law, the civil law, the law of opinion or reputation.

Ibid. § 7. "By the relation they bear to the first of these, men judge whether their actions are sins or duties; by the second, whether they be criminal or innocent; and by the third, whether they be virtues or vices."

Ibid. § 8. "*Divine law, the measure of sin and duty.*—First, The divine law, whereby I mean that law which God has set to the actions of men, whether promulgated to them by the light of nature, or the voice of revelation. That God has given a rule whereby men should govern themselves, I think there is nobody so brutish as to deny. He has a right to do it; we are his creatures: he has goodness and wisdom to direct our actions to that which is best; and he has power to enforce it by rewards and punishments, of infinite weight and duration, in another life; for nobody can take us out of his hands. This is the only true touchstone of moral rectitude, and by comparing them to this law it is that men judge of the most considerable moral good or evil of their actions; that is, whether as duties or sins, they are like to procure them happiness or misery from the hand of the Almighty."

You see then that the punishments and rewards of another life are declared the sole touchstone, the sole measure of the rectitude of our actions. But suppose that the law which God has given us were not just in itself, independently of the punishments and rewards which are attached to it, the act which obeys it or breaks it would be neither good nor bad in itself; and then the divine will would have in vain attached to this law, indifferent in itself, both in regard to its fulfilment and its violation, punishments the most dreadful and rewards most alluring, these promises and these threats, addressed only to the sensibility and not to the reason, would excite in us fear or hope, not respect and the sentiment of duty. And we must not say, like Locke, that God has the right to do it, that is, to establish this law, indifferent in itself, since we are his creatures; for this means nothing, unless that he is the strongest and that we are weakest: it is simply invoking the right of might. In general, the tendency of this theory is to make of God an arbitrary* king, to substitute in God will and power for reason and wisdom. It is a theodice of the senses, not of the reason, made for slaves and brutes, not for intelligent and free beings.

§ 9. "*Civil law, the measure of crimes and innocence.*—Secondly, the civil law, the rule set by the commonwealth to the actions of those who belong to it, is another rule, to which men refer their actions to judge whether they be criminal or no. This law nobody overlooks; the rewards and punishments that enforce it being ready at hand, and suitable to the power that makes it; which is the force of the commonwealth, engaged to protect the lives, liberties, and possessions of those who live according to its laws, and has power to take away life, liberty, or goods, from him who disobeys: which is the punishment of offences committed against this law."

Society assuredly has this right; this right is even a duty for it; but upon the condition that the laws which it shall enact be just: for suppose the law which society establishes to be unjust, the violation of this law ceases to be unjust, and then the punishment of an act not unjust which has transgressed an unjust law is itself an injustice. Take away, I repeat, the legitimacy and the justice of the law, and you destroy the justice and the legitimacy of the punishment. Punishment loses all character of morality and only keeps that of purely physical force, which could not be, as Hobbes† clearly saw, too great, too absolute, since it subsists only through the fear which it inspires.

§ 10. "*Philosophical law, the measure of virtue and vice.*—Thirdly, the law of opinion or reputation. Virtue and vice are names pretended and supposed everywhere to stand for actions in their own nature right and wrong; and as far as they really

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* *Translation of Plato*, Vol. 1, argument of the *Euthyphrón*.

† First Series, Vol. 3, Lect. 9, etc.

are so applied, they so far are coincident with the divine law above mentioned. But yet, whatever is pretended, this is visible, that these names, virtue and vice, in the particular instances of their application, through the several nations and societies of men in the world, are constantly attributed only to such actions as in each country and society are in reputation or discredit. Nor is it to be thought strange, that men everywhere should give the name of virtue to those actions which among them are judged praiseworthy, and call that vice which they account blamable; since otherwise they would condemn themselves if they should think any thing right to which they allowed not commendation, any thing wrong which they let pass without blame. Thus the measure of what is everywhere called and esteemed virtue and vice, is the approbation or dislike, praise or blame, which by a secret and tacit consent establishes itself in the several societies, tribes, and clubs of men in the world; whereby several actions come to find credit or disgrace among them according to the judgment, maxims, or fashion of that place. For though men, uniting into politic societies, have resigned up to the public the disposing of all their force, so that they cannot employ it against any fellow-citizens any farther than the law of the country directs; yet they retain still the power of thinking well or ill, approving or disapproving of the actions of those whom they live among and converse with; and by this approbation and dislike, they establish among themselves what they will call virtue and vice."

§ 11. "That this is the common measure of virtue and vice, will appear to any one who considers that though that passes for vice in one country which is counted a virtue, or at least not vice in another, yet, everywhere, virtue and praise, vice and blame, go together."

Upon this point Locke cites all pagan antiquity, which excited to virtue by appeal to glory. He even cites a passage of St. Paul, which he forces and turns aside from its natural sense in order to arrive at the conclusion that there is no other measure

of virtue than good or bad renown. Read also § 12: *The "enforcements" of this law are "condemnation and discredit."*

But you perceive that it is the same with opinion, the pretended philosophic law, as it is with public chastisements or the civil law, as it is with the chastisements of another life or the divine law. Suppose that virtue is not virtue in itself, and that it is praise and approbation which constitute it, then it is clear that there is no longer any morality; there is no longer any law; there is no longer any thing but arbitrary customs, local and changing; there is no longer any thing but fashion and opinion. Now, opinion is nothing but a lying noise, or it is the echo of the public conscience, and in this case it is an effect and not a cause; its legitimacy and its force lie in the energy of the sentiment of good and evil. But to elevate the effect to the rank of the cause, to establish good and evil upon opinion alone,* is to destroy good and evil, is to pervert and corrupt virtue by giving fear as its only source; it is to make courtiers, not virtuous men. Popularity is one of the sweetest things in the world, but only when it is the echo of our own conscience and not the price of complaisance; when it is acquired by a course of truly virtuous actions, by constancy to character, fidelity to principles and to friends, in the common service of country. Glory is the crown, not the foundation of virtue. Duty is not measured by reward. Without doubt it is easier to perform it upon a public theatre, with the applauses of the crowd; but it does not decrease in obscurity, it does not perish in ignominy: there, as elsewhere, it remains the same, inviolable and obligatory.

The conclusion, to which I continually recur, is, that here Locke evidently takes the consequence for the principle, the effect for the cause. And remark that this confusion is a necessity of the system of Locke. This system admits no idea which does not come from reflection or from sensation. Reflection not

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* This is the fundamental error of Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, First Series, Vol. 4, Lect. 16, p. 234–240, etc.