

**LECTURES ON THE
PHILOSOPHY OF THE
HUMAN MIND.**

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LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.

LECTURE I.—(Introduction.)

Gentlemen,

The subject on which we are about to enter, and which is to engage, I trust, a considerable portion of your attention for many months, is *the Philosophy of the Human Mind*,—not that *speculative* and *passive* philosophy only, which inquires into the

nature of our intellectual part, and the mysterious connexion of this with the body which it animates, but that *practical* science, which relates to the duties, and the hopes, and the great destiny of man, and which, even in analyzing the powers of his understanding, and tracing all the various modifications of which it is individually susceptible, views it chiefly as a general instrument of good—an instrument by which he may have the dignity of co-operating with his beneficent Creator, by spreading to others the knowledge, and virtue, and happiness, which he is qualified at once to enjoy, and to diffuse.

“Philosophy,” says Seneca, “is not formed for artificial show or delight. It has a higher office than to free idleness of its languor, and wear away and amuse the long hours of a day. It is that which forms and fashions the soul, which gives to life its disposition and order, which points out what it is our duty to do, what it is our duty to omit. It sits at the helm, and in a sea of peril, directs the course of those who are wandering through the waves.”

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“Non est philosophia popolare artificium, nec ostentationi paratum; non in verbis sed in rebus est. Nec in hoc adhibetur ut aliqua oblectatione consumatur dies, ut dematur otio nausea. Animum format et fabricat, vitam disponit, actiones regit, agenda et omittenda demonstrat, sedit ad gubernaculum, et per ancipitia fluctuantium dirigit cursum.” Ep. 16.

Such, unquestionably, is the great practical object of all philosophy. If it increase the happiness and virtue of human kind, it must be allowed to have fulfilled, to human beings, the noblest of earthly ends. The greatness of this primary object, however, perhaps fixed too exclusively the attention of the moral inquirers of antiquity, who, in considering man as capable of virtue and happiness, and in forming nice and subtle distinctions as to his supreme good, and the means by which he might attain it, seem

almost to have neglected the consideration of his intellectual nature, as an object of mere physical science. Hence it happens, that, while the systems of ancient philosophy exhibit, in many instances, a dignity of moral sentiment as high, or almost as high, as the unassisted reason of man could be supposed to reach, and the defects of which we perhaps discover only by the aid of that purer light, which was not indulged to them, they can scarcely be said to have left us a single analysis of complex phenomena of thought and feeling. By some of them, indeed, especially by the Peripatetics and Stoics, much dialectic subtilty was employed in distinctions, that may seem at first to involve such an analysis; but even these distinctions were verbal, or little more than verbal. The *analytical investigation* of the mind, in all its complexity of perceptions, and thoughts, and emotions, was reserved to form almost a new science in the comprehensive philosophy of far later years.

If, however, during the flourishing periods of Greek and Roman letters, this intellectual analysis was little cultivated, the department of the philosophy of the mind, which relates to practical ethics, was enriched, as I have said, by moral speculations the most splendid and sublime. In those ages, indeed, and in countries in which no revealed will of heaven had pointed out and sanctioned one unerring rule of right, it is not to be wondered at, that, to those who were occupied in endeavouring to trace and ascertain such a rule in the moral nature of man, all other mental inquiries should have seemed comparatively insignificant. It is even pleasing thus to find the most important of all inquiries regarded as

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truly the most important, and minds of the highest genius, in reflecting on their own constitution, so richly diversified and adorned with an almost infinite variety of forms of thought, discovering nothing, in all this splendid variety, so worthy of

investigation, as the conduct which it is fitting for man to pursue.

But another period was soon to follow, a period in which ages of long and dreary ignorance were to be followed by ages of futile labour, as long and dreary. No beautiful moral speculations were then to compensate the poverty of intellectual science. But morality, and even religion itself, were to be degraded, as little more than technical terms of a cold and unmeaning logic. The knowledge of our mental frame was then, indeed, professedly cultivated with most assiduous zeal; and if much technical phraseology, and much contention, were sufficient to constitute an elaborate science, that assiduous zeal might well deserve to have been rewarded with so honourable a name. But what reasonable hope of a progress truly scientific could be formed, when to treat of the philosophy of mind was to treat of every thing but of the mind and its affections; when some of the most important questions, with respect to it, were, Whether its essence were distinct from its existence? whether its essence therefore might subsist, when it had no actual existence? and what were all the qualities inherent in it as a nonentity? In morals, whether ethics were an art or a science? whether, if the mind had freedom of choice, this independent *will* be an entity or a quiddity? and whether we should say, with a dozen schoolmen, that virtue is good, because it has intrinsic goodness, or, with a dozen more, that it has this intrinsic goodness, because it is good?

In natural theology, questions of equal moment were contested with equal keenness and subtilty; but they related less to the Deity, of whose nature, transcendent as it is, the whole universe may be considered as in some degree a faint revelation, than to those spiritual ministers of his power, of whose very existence nature affords no evidence, and of whom revelation itself may be said to teach us little but the mere existence. Whether angels pass from one point of space to another, without passing through the intermediate points? whether they can visually discern objects in

the dark? whether more than one can exist at the same moment in the same physical point? whether they can exist in a

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perfect vacuum, with any relation to the absolute incorporeal void? and whether if an angel were in vacuo, the void could still truly be termed *perfect*?—such, or similar to these were the great inquiries in that department of Natural Theology, to which, as to a separate science, was given the name of *Angelography*: and of the same kind were the principal inquiries with respect to the Deity himself, not so much an examination of the evidence which nature affords of his self-existence, and power, and wisdom, and goodness, those sublime qualities which even our weakness cannot contemplate without deriving some additional dignity from the very greatness which it adores, as a solution of more subtile points, whether he exist in imaginary space as much as in the space that is real? whether he can cause a mode to exist without a substance? whether, in knowing all things, he know universals, or only things singular? and whether he love a possible unexisting angel better than an actually existing insect?

“Indignandum de isto, non disputandum est.”—“Sed non debuit hoc nobis esse propositum arguta disserere,^[1] et philosophiam in has augustias ex sua majestate detrahere. Quanto satius est, ire aperta via et recta, quam sibi ipsi flexus disponere, quos cum magna molestia debeas relegere?”^[2]—“Why waste ourselves,” says the same eloquent moralist; “why torture and waste ourselves in questions, which there is more real subtilty in despising than in solving?”—

“Quid te troques et maceras, in ea quæstione quam subtilius est contempsisse quam solvere?”^[3]

From the necessity of such inquiries we are now fortunately freed. The frivolous solemnities of argument, which, in the disputations of Scotists and Thomists, and the long controversy of the believers

and rejectors of the universal *a parti rei*, rendered human ignorance so very proud of its temporary triumphs over human ignorance, at length are hushed forever; and, so precarious is all that glory, of which men are the dispensers, that the most subtle works, which for ages conferred on their authors a reverence more than praise, and almost worship, would now scarcely find a philosophic adventurer, so bold, as to avow them for his own.

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The progress of intellectual philosophy may indeed, as yet, have been less considerable than was to be hoped under its present better auspices. But it is not a little, to have escaped from a labyrinth, so very intricate, and so very dark, even though we should have done nothing more than advance into sunshine and an open path, with a long journey of discovery still before us. We have at last arrived at the important truth, which now seems so very obvious a one, that the mind is to be known best by observation of the series of changes which it presents, and of all the circumstances which precede and follow these; that, in attempting to explain its phenomena, therefore, we should know what those phenomena are; and that we might as well attempt to discover, by logic, unaided by observation or experiment, the various coloured rays that enter into the composition of a sunbeam, as to discover, by dialectic subtilties, *a priori*, the various feelings that enter into the composition of a single thought or passion.

The mind, it is evident, may, like the body to which it is united, or the material objects which surround it, be considered simply as a substance possessing certain qualities, susceptible of various affections or modifications, which, existing successively as momentary states of the mind, constitute all the phenomena of thought and feeling. The general circumstances in which these changes of state succeed each other, or, in other words, the laws of their succession, may be pointed out, and the phenomena arranged in various classes, according as they may resemble each other, in the circumstances that precede or follow them, or in other

circumstances of obvious analogy. There is, in short, a science that may be termed *mental physiology*, as there is another science relating to the structure and offices of our corporeal frame, to which the term *physiology* is more commonly applied; and as, by observation and experiment, we endeavour to trace those series of changes which are constantly taking place in our material part, from the first moment of animation to the moment of death; so, by observation, and in some measure also by experiment, we endeavour to trace the series of changes that take place in the mind, fugitive as these successions are, and rendered doubly perplexing by the reciprocal combinations into which they flow. The innumerable changes, corporeal and mental, we reduce, by generalizing, to a few classes; and we speak, in reference to the mind, of

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its faculties or functions of perception, memory, reason, as we speak, in reference to the body, of its functions of respiration, circulation, nutrition. This mental physiology, in which the mind is considered simply as a substance endowed with certain susceptibilities, and variously affected or modified in consequence, will demand of course our first inquiry; and I trust that the intellectual analyses, into which we shall be led by it, will afford results that will repay the labour of persevering attention, which they may often require from you.

In one very important respect, however, the inquiries, relating to the physiology of mind, differ from those which relate to the physiology of our animal frame. If we could render ourselves acquainted with the intimate structure of our bodily organs, and all the changes which take place, in the exercise of their various functions, our labour, with respect to them, might be said to terminate. But though our intellectual analysis were perfect, so that we could distinguish, in our most complex thought or emotion, its constituent elements, and trace with exactness the series of simpler

thoughts which have progressively given rise to them, other inquiries, equally, or still more important, would remain. We do not know all which is to be known of the mind, when we know all its phenomena, as we know all which can be known of matter, when we know the appearances which it presents, in every situation in which it is possible to place it, and the manner in which it then acts or is acted upon by other bodies. When we know that man has certain affections and passions, there still remains the great inquiry, as to the propriety or impropriety of those passions, and of the conduct to which they lead. We have to consider, not merely how he is capable of acting, but also, whether, acting in the manner supposed, he would be fulfilling a duty or perpetrating a crime. Every enjoyment which man can confer on man, and every evil, which he can reciprocally inflict or suffer, thus become objects of two sciences—first of that intellectual analysis which traces the happiness and misery, in their various forms and sequence, as mere phenomena or states of the substance *mind*;—and secondly, of that ethereal judgment, which measures our approbation and disapprobation, estimating, with more than judicial scrutiny, not merely what is done, but what is scarcely thought in secrecy and silence, and discriminating some element of moral good

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or evil, in all the physical good and evil, which it is in our feeble power to execute, or in our still frailer heart, to conceive and desire.

To this second department of inquiry belong the doctrines of general *ethics*.

But, though man were truly impressed with the great doctrine of moral obligation, and truly desirous, in conformity with it, of increasing, as far as his individual influence may extend, the sum of general happiness, he may still err in the selection of the means

which he employs for this benevolent purpose. So essential is knowledge, if not to virtue, at least to all the ends of virtue, that, without it, benevolence itself, when accompanied with power, may be as destructive and desolating as intentional tyranny; and notwithstanding the great principles of progression in human affairs, the whole native vigour of a state may be kept down for ages, and the comfort, and prosperity, and active industry of unexisting millions be blasted by regulations, which, in the intention of their generous projectors, were to stimulate those very energies which they repressed, and to relieve that very misery which they rendered irremediable. It therefore becomes an inquiry of paramount importance, what are the means best calculated for producing the greatest amount of social good? By what ordinances would public prosperity, and all the virtues which not merely adorn that prosperity, but produce it, be most powerfully excited and maintained? This political department of our science, which is in truth only a subdivision, though a very important one, of general practical ethics, comprehends, of course, the inquiries as to the relative advantages of different forms of government, and the expediency of the various contrivances which legislative wisdom may have established, or may be supposed to establish, for the happiness and defence of nations.

The inquiries, to which I have as yet alluded, relate to the mind, considered simply as an object of physiological investigation; or to man, considered in his moral relations to a community, capable of deriving benefit from his virtues and knowledge, or of suffering by his errors and his crimes. But there is another more important relation in which the mind is still to be viewed,—that relation which connects it with the Almighty Being to whom it owes its exist

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ence. Is man, whose frail generations begin and pass away, but one of the links of an infinite chain of beings like himself, uncaused,

and co-eternal with that self-existing world of which he is the feeble tenant? or, Is he the offspring of an all creating Power, that adapted him to nature, and nature to him, formed together with the magnificent scene of things around him, to enjoy its blessings, and to adore, with the gratitude of happiness, the wisdom and goodness from which they flow? What attributes, of a Being so transcendent, may human reason presume to explore? and, What homage will be most suitable to his immensity, and our nothingness? Is it only for an existence of a few moments, in this passing scene, that he has formed us? or, Is there something within us, over which death has no power,—something, that prolongs and identifies the consciousness of all which we have done on earth, and that, after the mortality of the body, may yet be a subject of the moral government of God? When compared with these questions, even the sublimest physical inquiries are comparatively insignificant. They seem to differ, as it has been said, in their relative importance and dignity, almost as philosophy itself differs from the mechanical arts that are subservient to it. “Quantum inter philosophiam interest,—et cæteras artes; tantum interesse existimo in ipsa philosophia, inter illam partem quæ ad homines et hanc quæ ad Deos spectat. Altior est hæc et animosior: multum permisit sibi; non fuit oculis contenta. Majus esse quiddam suspicata est, ac pulchrius, quod extra conspectum natura posuisset.”^[4] It is when ascending to these sublimer objects, that the mind seems to expand, as if already shaking off its earthly fetters, and returning to its source; and it is scarcely too much to say, that the delight which it thus takes in things divine is an internal evidence of its own divinity. “Cum illa tetigit, alitur, crescit: ac velut vinculis liberatus, in originem redit. Et hoc habet argumentum divinitatis suæ, quod illum divina delectant.”

I have thus briefly sketched the various important inquiries, which the philosophy of mind, in its most extensive sense, may be said to comprehend. The nature of our spiritual being, as displayed in all the phenomena of feeling and thought—the ties which bind us to

our fellow-men, and to our Creator—and the prospect of that unfading existence, of which life is but the first dawn

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ing gleam; such are the great objects to which in the department of your studies committed to my charge, it will be my office to guide your attention and curiosity. The short period of the few months to which my course is necessarily limited, will not, indeed, allow me to prosecute, with such full investigation as I should wish, every subject that may present itself in so various a range of inquiry. But even these few months, I flatter myself, will be sufficient to introduce you to all which is most important for you to know in the science, and to give such lights as may enable you, in other hours, to explore, with success, the prospects that here, perhaps, may only have opened on your view. It is not, I trust, with the labours of a single season that such inquiries, on your part, are to terminate. Amid the varied occupations and varied pleasures of your future years,—in the privacy of domestic enjoyment, as much as in the busier scenes of active exertion,—the studies on which you are about to enter must often rise to you again with something more than mere remembrance; because there is nothing that can give you interest, in any period or situation of your life, to which they are not related. The science of mind, is the science of yourselves; of all who surround you; of every thing which you enjoy or suffer, or hope or fear: so truly the science of your very being, that it will be impossible for you to look back on the feelings of a single hour, without constantly retracing phenomena that have been here, to a certain extent, the subjects of your analysis and arrangement. The thoughts and faculties of your own intellectual frame, and all which you admire as wonderful in the genius of others,—the moral obligation, which, as obeyed or violated, is ever felt by you with delight or with remorse,—the virtues, of which you think as often as you think of those whom you love; and the vices, which you view with abhorrence, or with pity,—the traces of divine goodness, which never can be absent from your view, because there is no

object in nature which does not exhibit them,—the feeling of your dependence on the gracious Power that formed you,—and the anticipation of a state of existence more lasting than that which is measured by the few beatings of a feeble pulse,—these in their perpetual recurrence, must often recal to you the inquiries that, in this place, engaged your early attention. It will be almost as little possible for you to abandon wholly such speculations, as to look on the fa

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miliar faces of your home with a forgetfulness of every hour which they have made delightful, or to lose all remembrance of the very language of your infancy, that is every moment sounding in your ears.

Though I shall endeavour, therefore, to give as full a view as my limits will permit of all the objects of inquiry which are to come before us, it will be my chief wish to awake in you, or to cherish, a love of these sublime inquiries themselves. There is a philosophic spirit which is far more valuable than any limited acquirements of philosophy; and the cultivation of which, therefore, is the most precious advantage that can be derived from the lessons and studies of many academic years:—a spirit, which is quick to pursue whatever is within the reach of human intellect; but which is not less quick to discern the bounds that limit every human inquiry, and which, therefore, in seeking much, seeks only what man may learn:—which knows how to distinguish what is just in itself from what is merely accredited by illustrious names; adopting a truth which no one has sanctioned, and rejecting an error of which all approve, with the same calmness as if no judgment were opposed to its own:—but which, at the same time, alive, with congenial feeling, to every intellectual excellence, and candid to the weakness from which no excellence is wholly privileged, can dissent and confute without triumph, as it admires without envy; applauding gladly whatever is worthy of applause in

a rival system, and venerating the very genius which it demonstrates to have erred.

Such is that philosophic temper to which, in the various discussions that are to occupy us, it will be my principal ambition to form your minds; with a view not so much to what you are at present, as to what you are afterwards to become. You are now, indeed, only entering on a science, of which, by many of you, perhaps, the very elements have never once been regarded as subjects of speculative inquiry. You have much, therefore, to learn, even in learning only what others have thought. But I should be unwilling to regard you as the passive receivers of a system of opinions, content merely to remember whatever mixture of truths and errors may have obtained your easy assent. I cannot but look to you in your maturer character, as yourselves the philosophers of other years; as those who are,

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perhaps, to add to science many of its richest truths, which as yet are latent to every mind, and to free it from many errors, in which no one has yet suspected even the possibility of illusion. The spirit which is itself to become productive in you, is therefore, the spirit which I wish to cultivate; and happy, as I shall always be, if I succeed in conveying to you that instruction which it is my duty to communicate, I shall have still more happiness if I can flatter myself, that, in this very instruction, I have trained you to habits of thought, which may enable you to enrich, with your own splendid discoveries, the age in which you live, and to be yourselves the instructors of all the generations that are to follow you.

Footnotes

[1]

Argutias serere. Lect. var.

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