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Professor Calderwood on Intuitionism in Morals

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*Professor Calderwood on Intuitionism in Morals.*—In MIND II. Prof. Calderwood published a criticism on the first chapter of Book III: of my *Methods of Ethics*. This criticism involved important misapprehensions of my meaning and drift, which, as they are naturally though not necessarily connected with the fundamental differences between my point of view and my critic's, it may be useful briefly to point out.

(1.) Prof. Calderwood has somewhat misunderstood the general aim of the part of my treatise which deals with Intuitionism. He supposes me to be criticising from the outside a particular school or sect of moral philosophers. My endeavour was rather to unfold a method of reaching practical decisions which I find (more or less implicit) in the ordinary thought of the society of which I am a part, and to some extent in the natural processes of my own mind; and after tracing its different phases, to estimate carefully their scientific value. The doctrine which is called by the name Intuitionism is only one of those phases. Its scientific claims appear to me incomparably the most important, and it therefore chiefly occupies my attention during the remainder of the Book: but in the first four sections of the chapter criticised I have not yet come to speak of it specially. Thus the vagueness in my language (in these sections) of which Prof. Calderwood complains is a necessary incident of my plan of discussion. I begin by taking the notions which I have to use as I find them in common thought as expressed in common language; and I let them become gradually more definite, as my discussion brings into view distinctions in the general objects which they represent. What does the "plain man" (to whose consciousness Butler and other moralists have so pointedly referred) mean by Moral Intuition? Merely, I think, the immediate cognition of the rightness or wrongness of actions. His usage of the term does not exclude either universal abstract intuitions or particular concrete intuitions: but of the two, I think, he more often means the latter. As I have said (*M. of E.* p. 85) "we most commonly think of the dictates of conscience as relating to particular actions: and when a man is bidden, in any particular case, to 'trust to his conscience' it commonly seems to be meant that he should exercise a faculty of judging morally this particular case without reference to general rules, and even in opposition to conclusions obtained by systematic deductions from such rules." The case is stated much more strongly in the following passage from a work which has recently appeared, Mr. Bradley's *Ethical Studies* (p. 176):—"On the head that moral judgments are not discursive, no one, I think, will wish me to stay long . . . in practical morality no doubt we may reflect on our principles, but I think it is not too much to say that we *never* do so, except where we have come upon a difficulty of particular application. If any one thinks that a man's *ordinary* judgment 'this is right or wrong' comes from the having a rule *before* the mind and bringing the particular case under it, he may be right; and I cannot try to show that he is wrong. I can only leave it to the reader to judge for himself. We say we 'see' and we

'feel' in these cases, not we 'conclude.' We prize the advice of persons who can give no reasons for what they say, etc., etc."

This statement seems to me far too sweeping: but it may help to convince Prof. Calderwood and those who think with him, that I was right in giving at the outset of my Book III. an account of Intuitionism which did not exclude the manner of thought here described as typical. In respect of the comparative value of this kind of intuition I altogether disagree with Mr. Bradley. I have no doubt that reflective persons, in proportion to their reflectiveness, come to rely rather on abstract universal intuitions relating to classes of cases conceived under general notions; and I prefer the moral thought of the reflective few to that of the unreflective many. Accordingly, these are the intuitions which I am chiefly occupied with examining in the subsequent chapters of the book. Prof. Calderwood may perhaps think that I ought to have confined myself to the consideration of Intuitionism in its most philosophical form. But this would have led me at once to Utilitarianism: because I hold that the only moral intuitions which sound philosophy can accept as ultimately valid are those which at the same time provide the only possible philosophical basis of the Utilitarian creed. I thus necessarily regard Prof. Calderwood's Intuitionism as a phase in the development of the Intuitional method, which comes naturally between the crude thought of Butler's "plain man" and the Rational Utilitarianism to which I ultimately endeavour to lead my reader.

(2.) This view made it difficult for me to give a definition of Intuitionism which should be at once clear, fair and useful. I could not give as its fundamental doctrine "that moral principles are intuitively known:" because, in my opinion, this would not distinguish it from Utilitarianism, or indeed from any other method of reasoning to moral conclusions. In all such reasonings there must be some ultimate premisses: which, as they are not known as inferences from other truths, must be known directly—that is, by Intuition. In order to raise a substantial issue, it seemed necessary in defining Intuitionism to exclude expressly the Utilitarian view, that the rightness of actions is to be ascertained by inference from an estimate of their consequences. But it was evident, again, that to exclude this without qualification would have been an absurd exaggeration of the antithesis which I had to define. No Intuitionist ever maintained that *all* our conduct can be ordered rightly without any calculation of its effects on human happiness. On the contrary, this calculation, for ourselves and for others, is expressly inculcated by the maxims of Prudence and Benevolence, as commonly understood. It is only from certain special portions of the whole region of conduct that Utilitarian foresight is shut out: and all thoughtful Intuitionists admit the importance of defining carefully these domains of special jurisdiction. For example, they are careful to tell us that the maxim of Veracity does not relieve us from the obligation of considering whether what we say is likely to give happiness or to cause pain to others: it only excludes all such

considerations in so far as they may appear to justify falsehoods. Hence in stating as the fundamental assumption of Intuitionism "that we have the power of seeing clearly what actions are right and reasonable in themselves, apart from their consequences," I thought it needful to add "to some extent." These words Prof. Calderwood has unfortunately misunderstood as qualifying the *clearness* of the moral vision assumed; whereas they were only intended to limit its range.

(3.) If then the practical issue between the Intuitional and Utilitarian methods be thus precisely raised: if the question be put, whether in respect of certain kinds of conduct our moral faculty furnishes us with self-evident imperatives, which ought to be obeyed without regard to consequences, we have next to consider how this question is to be decided. Here, if I could trust my own moral faculty alone, as it acts at present, I should say that no further test is needed than the Cartesian, if rigorously applied. If I ask myself whether I see clearly and distinctly the self-evidence of any particular maxims of duty, as I see that of the formal principles "that what is right for me must be right for all persons in precisely similar circumstances" and "that I ought to prefer the greater good of another to my own lesser good:" I have no doubt whatever that I do not. I am conscious of a strong impression, an opinion on which I habitually act without hesitation, that I ought to speak truth, to perform promises, to requite benefits, &c., and also of powerful moral sentiments prompting me to the observance of these rules; but on reflection I can now clearly distinguish such opinions and sentiments from the apparently immediate and certain cognition that I have of the formal principles above mentioned. But I could not always have made this distinction; and I believe that the majority of moral persons do not make it: most "plain men" would probably say, at any rate on the first consideration of the matter, that they saw the obligations of Veracity and Good Faith as clearly and immediately as they saw those of Equity and Rational Benevolence. How then am I to argue with such persons? It will not settle the matter to tell them that they have observed their own mental processes wrongly, and that more careful introspection will show them the non-intuitive character of what they took for intuitions; especially as in many cases I do not believe that the error is one of mis-observation. Still less am I inclined to dispute the "primitiveness" or "spontaneousness" or "originality" of these apparent intuitions. On the contrary, I hold that here, as in other departments of thought, the primitive spontaneous processes of the mind are mixed with error, which is only to be removed gradually by comprehensive reflection upon the results of these processes. Through such a course of reflection I have endeavoured to lead my readers in chaps. 2-10 of Book III. of my treatise: in the hope that after they have gone through it they may find their original apprehension of the self-evidence of moral maxims importantly modified. This whole view of mine seems so new to Prof. Calderwood, that he can only reply that "correction of intuitions or of spontaneous

utterances of conscience is impossible, and the proposal of it absurd"—a forcible statement, but hardly an effective argument.

H. SIDGWICK.

*The Uniformity of Nature.*—Mr. Pollock (MIND III. p. 425) maintains that Mr. Lewes's principle of causation, stated fully in his *Problems of Life and Mind*, and re-stated more briefly in MIND II., is the formation of a perfectly real assertion out of two hopelessly barren identical propositions; in other words, that it is illogical. Is it really so? Does Mr. Lewes anywhere say "That which is will be," or "That which has been will be?" What he does say is something very different: That which is, *is* and *will be so long as the conditions are unaltered*—an identical proposition, certainly; but illogically constructed out of two others like those set down by Mr. Pollock, certainly not. And the bearing of Mr. Lewes's principle upon the question of the Uniformity of Nature seems to me clearly discernible. There are really two points at issue between him and Prof. Bain. One is: what *is* the uniformity expected of Nature? The other is: on what is this expectation based? According to Prof. Bain, the expectation is that the future will exactly resemble the present, that present conditions will all be faithfully repeated, that present events will steadily recur. Certainly *such* an expectation (if, and wherever, it exists) is a mere guess; such a resemblance, such a repetition, such a recurrence, must assuredly be risked, and only risked, for there are no facts of experience to warrant indiscriminate forecasting of this sort. But is it not unreasonable to bring forward this purely popular and altogether loose expectation as a philosophical belief? From the philosophical stand-point, the only uniformity that can be legitimately predicated of Nature is, as Mr. Lewes keeps declaring, the uniformity of relation between the same cause and the same effect; and the expectation that *this* uniformity will continue is merely the ideal extension of an assured law of present experience. This expectation, therefore, is grounded on a dead certainty; it is the ideal form of a real fact, the mental reproduction of experiences *given* in all our conscious acts. Such a belief is no mere guess, there is no risk in the matter, when looked at so: the belief is only the inner continuation of experiences gathered from all our outward relations. This ideal extension into the future of real present experiences is quite as legitimate, and is, in fact, quite the same thing, as the mathematician's claim to be allowed to produce a straight line *ad infinitum*. We permit him to produce as far as he likes, *provided he keep his line straight as at first*; and so with the mental producing of real facts—we hold such producing permissible, *provided no change be made in the facts produced*. Now, Mr. Lewes formulates this fact, and proclaims the legitimacy of this process, with perfect precision when he lays down his principle that whatever is, is and will be so long as the conditions are unaltered.

Mr. Pollock considers all identical propositions, and this, of course, among the rest, as "hopelessly barren of real inference." But, I