

**SUPPLEMENT TO EPITOME
OF THE SYNTHETIC
PHILOSOPHY; PP 545-639**

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F. HOWARD COLLINS

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SUPPLEMENT TO

EPITOME

OF

The Synthetic Philosophy

(CONCLUDING "THE PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS.")

BY

F. HOWARD COLLINS.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE INDUCTIONS OF ETHICS.

"Those empirically-established rules of human action which are registered as essential laws by all civilized nations: that is to say—the generalizations of expediency."

I. THE CONFUSION OF ETHICAL THOUGHT.

111. Let us contemplate some of the chief factors of the ethical consciousness, and observe the sets of conflicting beliefs and opinions severally resulting from them.

112. Originally, ethics has no existence apart from religion, which holds it in solution. In the first stage of religion the ghosts of fathers and other relatives are propitiated by the members of each family; with the establishment of chiefs there arises a special fear of their ghosts, with the resulting offerings, eulogies, prayers, and promises. On passing from these cases, in which the required subordination is shown exclusively in observances expressive of reverence, to those in which there are commands of the kind called ethical, we find that the propriety of not offending God is the primary reason for fulfilling them.

113. The conceptions and feelings conspicuous in ancient epics and histories have continued conspicuous during the course of social evolution, and are conspicuous still. If, instead of asking for men's *nominal* code of right and wrong, we seek their *real* code, we find that in most minds the virtues of the warrior take the first place.

114. But though for the defence against, and conquest of, societies, one by another, injurious actions of all kinds have been needful, actions of an opposite kind have been

needful within each society. Communities have habitually established for themselves, now tacitly and now avowedly, here in rudimentary forms and there in elaborated forms, sets of commands and restraints conducive to internal friendship. Without conformity to these codes there must result social dissolution.

115. As the ethics of enmity and the ethics of amity have thus to be simultaneously entertained, there is formed an assemblage of utterly inconsistent sentiments and ideas. Its components can by no possibility be harmonized, and yet they have to be all accepted and acted upon. Every day exemplifies the resulting contradictions, and men's contentment under them.

116. Side by side with these ethical conceptions has been slowly evolving a conception derived wholly from recognition of naturally-produced consequences. The gradual rise of an utilitarian ethics was indeed inevitable.

117. Yet a further origin of moral dictates has arisen simultaneously. The discipline of social life has produced in men conceptions and emotions which issue in a liking for conduct favouring social welfare and an aversion to conduct at variance with it. A moulding of human nature manifestly furthered by survival of the fittest.

118. Such being the conflict of codes and conflict of sanctions, what must be our next step? We must look at the actual ideas and feelings concerning conduct which men entertain, apart from established nomenclatures and current professions. We shall then find that the confusion of ethical thought is even greater than we imagine.

II. WHAT IDEAS AND SENTIMENTS ARE ETHICAL.

119. The need for greatly widening the current conception of ethics is, that there are large classes of actions which excite ideas and feelings undistinguishable in their essential natures from those to which the term ethical is conventionally limited.

120. Among uncivilized and semi-civilized peoples, the obligations imposed by custom are peremptory. The universal belief that such things *ought* to be done, is not usually made manifest by the visiting of punishment or reprobation on those who do not conform, because nonconformity is scarcely heard of. How intolerable to the general mind is breach of usages, is shown occasionally when a ruler is deposed and even killed for disregard of them: a sufficient proof that his act is held wrong. Many instances might here be given of acts which do violence to our moral sentiments, yet are associated in the minds of other races with feelings and ideas not only warranting, but enforcing them. They are fulfilled with a sense of obligation; and non-fulfilment of them, regarded as a breach of duty, brings condemnation and resulting self-reproach.

121. As ideas of duty and feelings of obligation cluster round customs, so they cluster round the derived laws. Not only does there arise a consciousness that obedience to each particular law is right, and disobedience to it wrong, but eventually there arises a consciousness that obedience to law in general is right and disobedience wrong.

122. Hence, to treat the subject scientifically, we must disregard the limits of conventional ethics, and consider what are the intrinsic natures of ethical ideas and sentiments.

123. Where the consciousness of authority, of coercion, and of public opinion, combined in different proportions, result in an idea and a feeling of obligation they must be classed as ethical, or rather as forming a body of thought and feeling which may be called pro-ethical; and which, with the mass of mankind, stands in place of the ethical properly so-called.

124. For the ethical sentiment and idea, properly so-called, are independent of the ideas and sentiments of obligation. This feeling retires to the background as right actions become spontaneous. We will now go on to consider only the phenomena presented by the pro-ethical sentiment under its various forms.