

THE ORIGIN OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

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The Origin of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong by Franz Brentano

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RIGHT AND WRONG**

THE ORIGIN
OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF
RIGHT AND WRONG

BY FRANZ BRENTANO

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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PRAGUE UNIVERSITY

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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The present translation owes its origin to a desire on the part of the translator of bringing to the wider notice of his fellow-countrymen a work which has proved beneficial and stimulating to himself. Written during short intervals of leisure while studying with Professor Anton Marty of Prague University, it has had the advantage of his careful and constant supervision. Without his aid it would scarcely have seen the light. The translator has especially to thank Professor S. A. Alexander, of Owens College, Manchester, for his valuable help in the general revision and the translation of several difficult passages. It is now, alas, too late to do more than record the translator's debt to the late Professor Adamson, of Glasgow University, whose revision and correction of this essay was one of the last services rendered to the cause of truth by a life-long disciple.

West Dulwich, 1902.



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS lecture, which I now bring before the notice of a larger public, was delivered by me before the Vienna Law Society on January 23, 1889. It then bore the title: "Of the Natural Sanction for Law and Morality." This title I have changed in order to bring its general purport more clearly into prominence; otherwise I have made scarcely any further alteration. Numerous notes have been added, and an already published essay: "Miklosich on Subjectless Propositions" appended. In what way it bears upon inquiries apparently so remote will be evident in the sequel.

The occasion of the lecture was an invitation extended to me by Baron von Hye, President of the Society. It was his wish that what had been said here a few years ago by Ihering, as jurist, in his address, *Über die Entstehung des Rechtsgefühls*, might in the same Society be illustrated by me from the philosophic point of view. It would be a mistake to assume from the incidental nature of the circumstances to which it owed its first appearance that the Essay was only a fugitive, occasional study. It embraces the fruits of many years' reflection. The discussions it contains form the ripest product of all that I have hitherto published.

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These thoughts form a fragment of a Descriptive Psychology, which, as I now venture to hope, I may be enabled in the near future to publish in its complete form. In its wide divergence from all that has hitherto been put forward, and especially by reason of its being an essential stage in the further development of some of the views advocated in my *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint* it will be sufficiently evident that during the period of my long literary retirement I have not been idle.

Specialists in philosophy will find also in this lecture what will be at once recognized as new. As regards the general reader, the rapidity with which I pass from one question to another might at first completely conceal many a sunken reef which required to be circumnavigated, many a precipice which had to be avoided. Surely I, if any one, have reason, owing to the conciseness of statement employed, to remember the saying of Leibnitz and pay little attention to refutation and much to demonstration. A glance at the notes—which, were they to do full justice to the subject, would need to be multiplied an hundredfold—will give him a further idea of those bye-paths which have misled so many, and prevented their finding an issue to the labyrinth. Meantime I would be well content—nay, I would regard it as the crown to all my efforts—should all that has been said appear so self-evident to him that he does not deem himself bound to thank me once in return.

No one has determined the principles of ethics as, on the basis of new analyses, I have found it necessary to

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determine them, no one, especially among those who hold that in the foundation of those principles the feelings must find a place, have so radically and completely broken with the subjective view of ethics. I except only Herbart. But he lost himself in the sphere of aesthetic feeling, until at last we find him so far from the track that he, who in the theoretical philosophy is the irreconcilable enemy of contradiction, nevertheless in practical philosophy (i.e. ethics) tolerates it when his principles—the highest universally valid ideas—rush into conflict with one another. Still his teaching remains in a certain aspect truly related with mine, while, on other sides, other celebrated attempts to discover a basis for ethics find in it points of contact.

In the notes, individual points are more sharply defined, a very detailed examination of which would have been too prolix in the lecture. Many an objection already urged has been met, many an expected rejoinder anticipated. I also hope that some will be interested in the several historical contributions, especially in the inquiries concerning Descartes, where I trace back the doctrine of evidence to its causes and point out two further thoughts, one of which has been misunderstood, the other scarcely noticed, neither treated with the consideration they deserve. I refer to his fundamental classification of mental states and to his doctrine of the relation of love to joy, and of hate to sadness.

With several highly honoured investigators of the present—assuredly not least honoured by myself—I have entered into a polemical debate, and indeed most