

**OF THE UTILITARIAN
THEORY OF
MORALS**

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Of the Utilitarian Theory of Morals by John Penrose

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30

Stephen Ed King Price
for W. E.

OF

THE UTILITARIAN THEORY

OF

MORALS.

BY THE

REV. JOHN PENROSE, M.A.,

FORMERLY OF C. C. C., OXFORD.

“In omni vita sua quemque a recta conscientia transversum unguem non oportet discedere.”—*Cicero to Atticus*, xiii. 20.

“Atque ipsa utilitas, justi prope mater et æqui.”—*Horace*.

LONDON:

J., G., AND F. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,
AND WATERLOO PLACE, PALL MALL.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Tract was commenced with an intention of inserting it in one of the Reviews. The Author hopes, therefore, that the reader will excuse the assumption of the plural *we*, which it can scarcely be requisite to lay aside.



OF THE
UTILITARIAN THEORY OF MORALS.

THE easiest way by which to arrive at the true theory of morals is to begin, as in all other things, at the beginning ; to take up, in the first instance, a very simple case, and thence to proceed to more complicated cases, and to trace out the common and essential quality which runs through them all.

The earliest and simplest germination of moral feeling which we observe to subsist in the human race, is to be found in the obedience paid by the infant to the mother and nurse ; not, indeed, in the child's persuasion that he *must*, (for in mere compulsion there can be no morality at all,) but that he *ought* to obey them. What process in the infant's mind may give birth to this persuasion ; by what association with his pains or his pleasures it may become a motive power of his conduct ; is a question of no direct importance in any moral inquiry. The fact is, that he very soon, certainly in the first months of his existence, becomes sensible to it, becomes sensible to the feeling of duty, of

the *το δεον*, or of conscience, all these being only different names of the same principle,—a principle quite distinct from all external compulsion. In other words, he is not only impressed with the notion that his nurse can *force* him to do as she likes, (and this, moreover, is a matter of *knowledge* which, we believe, comes later than the other *sentiment*,) but also that he is a good boy if he obeys, and a bad boy if he disobeys, her word, or her frown.

These infantile morals are, we suppose, very nearly the same all over the world. The nurse, during the first periods of infancy, exacts very nearly the same duties, and by the same methods, in Tripoli, and in New York, in the plains of Tartary, and in the streets of London. But then, as the boy advances to manhood, his moral feeling varies with that of the century, or the latitude, in which it is his good or his evil fortune to have been born, and to live. A semi-barbarous African may deem revenge to be one of the most sacred of duties: the well-instructed Christian never doubts that *his* duty is to forgive. If, in those relations of life on which these opposite sentiments bear, each acts on his own sentiment, the acts of the one confirm and exasperate him in fierceness of temper, and embue him in blood; whilst the acts of the other confirm his brotherly tenderness for all the failings of mankind, and lead him to the imitation

of that confessedly most perfect of all examples of virtue which have been ever given to mankind. Is it then possible that this one tie of connection, this suffrage of conscience, this feeling of each party, that he is doing what his position requires him to do, can unite conduct and characters so dissimilar in a common bond?—The answer is, that if both parties are conscientious, the acts of both are *generically* moral, those of the one party as much so as those of the other; and that the difference between them is, that the one has been brought up in a bad school, and the other in a good school of morals; and, consequently, that the difference of their moral characters, which is very great, is to be sought, not in the nature of the moral principle with which they set out,—for that is the same in both,—but in the skill, or the justice, the benevolence, or the piety, or some other known or unknown principle, by which it is guided. Of all good morals conscience is the root, without which no fruit at all can be had; but the specific nature of the fruit which we obtain depends on the grafting: and thus, in tracing the principles of morals beyond that first principle of obeying our consciences, which is common throughout, we come at once into an immense field of specific differences. These differences, although in this sense only specific, are yet no less than the differences between good and evil; between the means of attaining a