

IS THERE ANY SUCH THING AS CONSCIENCE?

If we admit that God has a plan, and that all free agents are parts of it; how is each one to know what God expects of him, that he may do it? In other words, how shall a man know what is right and what wrong, for know he must before he can do his duty? I can suppose only three answers.

1. The attempt may be made to ascertain the accordance of any action with the plan or will of God, by assuming the object or aim of that plan, and then reasoning as to the propriety of the action considered as a means of attaining it. For instance, if a man wishes to decide whether it is his duty to kill his aged parents, he may first inquire what is the general design of God in creating men and all other things. Suppose he assumes, or satisfies himself, that God intends the greatest amount of happiness;—and to this assumption, after all that I have said, I would not object, provided, the happiness of God, which I suppose to be involved in the fulfillment of his plan, is included;—he then proceeds to inquire what tendencies patacide may have upon the general happiness. How it may affect God he cannot discover till he has discovered the plan of God, which is the very object of search. How it may affect the creatures of God he may see, to some extent. First, putting to death causes pain, which tends to show that the action is wrong. But, secondly, it might relieve from a burdensome and miserable life, and introduce to a happy eternity. Say there is a probability of its doing so. This goes to show the action to be right. But again, the action, as an example, might induce others to perpetrate the same deed in other circumstances, where misery would result, and this effect might more than counterbalance the other benefit. Now if a man were furnished with a pair of moral steelyards to weigh these consequences as they expand and roll onward in to the darkness of a coming eternity, he might proceed towards a correct conclusion, but by the time he had arrived at it, it would be *forever* too late to act in the case. Neither would an inquirer, upon this assumption, be at all assisted by a revelation from God, for he would have still to settle the tendency of the action before he could admit the revelation.

2. If the assumption of God's purpose be given up, his will may be learned from a written revelation. The assurance that he who governs nature has said so, may decide the point of duty. But a written revelation, valuable as it might be, would be quite inadequate to the end proposed. It could not be every where—at all times and places. Indeed, by itself so far as regards securing universal rectitude, it could be little better than a code of laws addressed to the countless wheels, a little and great, of a cotton manufactory.

3. There may be a feeling naturally arising in the breast, approving the right and condemning the wrong, without regard to consequences. Indeed, if God has any plan it must be so. There must be such a thing as CONSCIENCE. It was this feeling which prompted the reader, when he took up my first paper, to exclaim instantly, 'What does the man mean by asking in a string at least twelve questions, which are nothing more or less than twelve insults to any man's common sense?' Conscience whispers no, in the ear of the child when he is first tempted to tell a lie, or take even a pin that is not his; and it chokes his utterance and agitates his nerves as he commits the deed. Conscience thunders its curse in the ear of that man who 'chains his fellow man and exacts his sweat.' Conscience too, grievously as she has been mangled and tortured through successive generations, still applies her whip of scorpions to the naked backs of those men in our country, who hold *two millions of their fellow men in bondage*. you may see it in their nervous sensitiveness whenever the word *slavery* is uttered; in their quaking fear lest the tripple claims of ignorance, degradation and vice, which they are continually new riveting, should prove too weak to hold their victims; in their avowed conviction that the negroes, if immediately set at liberty and kindly treated, would, in violation of the laws of the human mind, become the executioners of wrath upon them to the uttermost. The active efforts towards the general abolition of slavery in this country, to our shame be it said, have never amounted to any thing more than a mild expression of the opinion by a handful of men, that it ought to take place immediately, and that singularly oblique action of the American Colonization Society. And yet the great body of slaveholders are indignant at the latter, even after repeated assurances, that it meddles not with slaves, and they have set a price upon the heads of the former,—in one case by legislative enactment. What sort of sensation would it produce in the legislature of New-York, if an obscure individual in Georgia should express his opinion through the public press, that all the horses employed on the Erie Canal ought in justice to be forthwith unharnessed and turned out to graze at large?

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