NATURALISM.

IN ONE of the most remarkable books of modern times—a work of rare literary excellence and, as it seems to me, transparent honesty of purpose—Mr. Balfour has weighed naturalism in the balance and found it wanting. Naturalism, however, is not at present blessed (or the reverse) with a stereotyped creed; it is rather a point of view or mental attitude; and those who adopt this attitude have been led to conclusions which are in many respects markedly divergent. There may be some whose naturalism tallies in all essential respects with that which Mr. Balfour has placed in one of the scales of his balance; but there are others who fail to recognise this naturalism as theirs; who believe that Mr. Balfour has failed in certain important matters to give to the conclusions of naturalism their due value; and who contend that, had he in these matters weighed what they regard as the substance, and not merely the shadow, the result of the process would have been different.

"The leading doctrines of naturalism are," we read,[1] "that we may know 'phenomena' and the laws by which they are connected, but nothing more. 'More' there may or may not be; but if it exists we can never apprehend it: and whatever the world may be 'in its reality' (supposing such an expression to be otherwise than meaningless), the world for us, the world with which alone we are concerned, or of which alone we can have any cognisance, is that world which is revealed to us through perception, and which is the subject-matter of the natural sciences. Here, and here only, are we on firm ground. Here, and here only, can we discover anything which

[1] *Foundations of Belief*, p. 7.

deserves to be described as knowledge. Here, and here only, may we profitably exercise our reason or gather the fruits of wisdom."

Now in this definition of naturalism (especially having regard to the foot-note-description of phenomena as "roughly speaking, things and events, the general subject-matter of natural science"), it would seem at first sight that mental products and processes were to be regarded as wholly outside its sphere. But this is clearly not Mr. Balfour's intention. For one of the main theses which he seeks to uphold is that naturalism fails to give an adequate account of the developed consciousness in man. Special chapters are devoted to ethics, æsthetic, and reason in their relations to naturalism, the inadequacy of which to give a satisfactory account of our ideals of right, of beauty, and of truth, is set forth in eloquent language the fervor of which indicates the strength of the author's conviction. "It is hard to see," we are told,[1] "on the naturalistic hypothesis, whence any one of these various natural agents is to derive a dignity or a consideration not shared by all the others, why morality should be put above appetite or reason above pleasure." "My point is," says Mr. Balfour,[2] "that in the case of those holding the naturalistic creed the [moral] sentiments and the [naturalistic] creed are antagonistic; and that the more clearly the creed is grasped, the more thoroughly the intellect is saturated with its essential teaching, the more certain are the sentiments thus violently and unnaturally associated with it to languish or to die." Taking naturalism as our guiding principle "we can," he insists,[3] "hardly doubt that the august sentiments which cling to the ideas of duty and sacrifice are nothing better than a device of nature to trick us into the performance of altruistic actions." "Kant,[4] as we all know, compared the moral law to the starry heavens, and found them both sublime. It would, on the naturalistic hypothesis, be more appropriate to compare it to the protective blotches on the beetle's back, and to find them both ingenious."

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[1] P. 15.
[2] P. 15.
[3] P. 16.
[4] P. 10.

Mr. Balfour then proceeds to consider the "sentiments known as æsthetic; and just as I assumed," he says,[1] "that the former class [of moral sentiments] were, like other evolutionary utilities, in the main produced by the normal operation of selection, so I now assume that the latter, being (at least in any developed stage) quite useless for the perfection of the individual or species, must be regarded, upon the naturalistic hypothesis, as mere by-products of the great machinery by which organic life is varied and sustained." No person," Mr. Balfour further assumes,[2] "who is at all in sympathy with the naturalistic view of things would maintain that there anywhere exists an intrinsic and essential quality of beauty, independent of the feelings and the taste of the observer." "And yet[3] the persistent and almost pathetic endeavors of æsthetic theory to show that the beautiful is a necessary and unchanging element in the general scheme of things, if they prove nothing else, may at least convince us that mankind will not easily reconcile themselves to the view which the naturalistic theory of the world would seemingly compel them to accept." "We must believe that somewhere and for some being there shines an unchanging splendor of beauty, of which in nature and art we see, each of us from our own standpoint, only passing gleams and stray reflexions, whose different aspects we cannot now co-ordinate, whose import we cannot fully comprehend, but which at least is something other than the chance play of subjective sensibility or the far-off echo of ancestral lusts."

Turning now to the rational faculties there is, for naturalism, Mr. Balfour imagines,[4] "no distinction to be drawn between the development of reason and that of any other faculty, physiological or psychical, by which the interests of the individual or the race are promoted. From the humblest form of nervous irritation at the one end of the scale, to the reasoning capacity of the most advanced

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[1] P. 33.
[2] P. 42.
[3] P. 64.
[4] P. 68.

races at the other, everything without exception—sensation, instinct, desire, volition—has been produced directly or indirectly, by natural causes acting for the most part on strictly utilitarian principles. Convenience, not knowledge, therefore, has been the main end to which this process has tended." "Reason,[1] on the naturalistic theory, occupies no elevated or permanent position in the hierarchy of phenomena. It is not the final result of a great process, the roof and crown of things, on the contrary, it is, as I have said, no more than one of many experiments for increasing our chance of survival, and, among these, by no means the most important or the most enduring." Regarding mind as, from the point of view of organic evolution, an inherited faculty for self-adjustment,[2] Mr. Balfour reminds us that even here "one of the principal functions of mind is to create habits by which, when they are fully formed, it is itself supplanted. If the conscious adaptation of means to ends was always necessary in order to perform even those few functions for the first performance of which conscious adaptation was originally required, life would be frittered away in doing badly, but with deliberation, some small fraction of that which we now do well without any deliberation at all." And so we are led to the general conclusion that[3] if naturalism be true, or, rather, if it be the whole truth, then is morality but a bare catalogue of utilitarian precepts; beauty but the chance occasion of a passing pleasure; reason but the dim passage from one set of unthinking habits to another. "All that gives dignity to life," exclaims Mr. Balfour, "all that gives value to effort, shrinks and fades under the pitiless glare of a creed like this; and even curiosity, the hardiest among the nobler passions of the soul, must languish under the conviction that neither for this generation nor for any that come after it, neither in this life nor in another, will the tie be wholly loosened by which reason, not less than appetite, is held in hereditary bondage to the service of our material needs." "If, then,[4] naturalism is to hold the field, the

[1] P. 72.
[2] P. 73.
[3] P. 77.
[4] P. 81.

feelings and opinions inconsistent with naturalism must be foredoomed to suffer change; and how, when that change shall come about, it can do otherwise than eat all nobility out of our conception of conduct and all worth out of our conception of life," Mr. Balfour is "wholly unable to understand"; while with regard to "those persons who claim to show by their example that naturalism is practically consistent with the maintenance of ethical ideals with which naturalism has no natural affinity," he contends[1] that "their spiritual life is parasitic; it is sheltered by convictions which belong, not to them, but to the society of which they form a part; it is nourished by processes in which they take no share. And when those convictions decay, and those processes come to an end, the alien life which they have maintained can scarce be expected to outlast them."

Such in brief outline,—for we need not follow Mr. Balfour into his catechism of the future,—is the argument for the inadequacy of naturalism in the ethical, æsthetic, and rational fields.

We may, perhaps, sum up the argument under four heads.

1. Natural selection, the dominant factor in organic evolution, cannot adequately account for the development of human ideals of right or beauty, nor for man's intellectual powers and achievements.

2. No other naturalistic interpretation of ethical, æsthetic, or intellectual phenomena, as presented in human development, is possible or worth consideration.

3. Any naturalistic interpretation of these phenomena would rob them of their worth and dignity.

4. Those who contend that their worth and dignity is intrinsic, whatever may be their extrinsic origin, cheat themselves in a vain delusion; and while they merely echo the sentiments of others, fancifully claim the sentiments as their own.

Now, with regard to the opinion expressed in the first of these four heads, I am in the main at one with Mr. Balfour. I agree with him that natural selection (if I rightly interpret him, as, in this part

[1] P. 83.

of his work, identifying naturalism with natural selection) cannot adequately account for more than the foundation of, certainly not for the final development of man's ideals of right or beauty, nor for the growth of human knowledge. But in the assumption that no other naturalistic interpretation of ethical, æsthetic, or intellectual phenomena is possible, I am in distinct and direct antagonism. It is true that Mr. Balfour does not formulate this assumption nor give it explicit statement, but we seem forced to conclude from his silence on the matter either that, in his opinion, there is no such interpretation in the field, or that no such interpretation is worthy of consideration.

I trust that I am not misinterpreting Mr. Balfour in saying that he here identifies naturalism with natural selection. The moral sentiments are, he says, to be compared on naturalistic principles to the protective blotches on the beetle's back,—a phrase which has been hailed with delighted acquiescence by those who sympathise with his dialectic. Æsthetic sentiments are mere by-products of the great machinery by which organic life is varied and sustained. Reason is no more than one of the many experiments for increasing our chance of survival. Throughout the discussion Mr. Balfour appears to assume that naturalism, in dealing with the products of social evolution, has come in sight of no principles other than those which are factors in organic evolution. Mind, he says, from the point of view of organic evolution, may be considered as an inherited faculty for self-adjustment; and to this we may add that from the point of view of social evolution, mind may still be considered as continually self-adjusting. But there is this important distinction, that whereas in organic evolution the mental faculties are subservient to the preservation of the organism in self-adjustment to an environment essentially physical and organic, when we come to the mental evolution of man as a social being the organism is made subservient to the development of mind in self-adjustment to an environment of ideas and ideals.

For this cannot be too emphatically insisted on: that natural selection deals with organisms, and that its method is that of elimination, if not from the world of living things, at least from the world

of breeding things. Natural selection only affects the development of mind and consciousness incidentally—that is to say, in so far as mind conduces to organic evolution. In social evolution among human beings, natural selection ceases to be the dominant method of evolutionary progress; and mental evolution, *involving other principles, not less natural than those which the study of organic development has disclosed*, becomes the central feature of the process.

We must extend our conception of naturalism so as to include a naturalistic interpretation of nature in all its wealth of moods, neither excluding inorganic nature on the one hand nor human nature on the other hand. If the leading doctrines of naturalism are that we may know phenomena and the laws by which they are connected; if for naturalism the world with which alone we are concerned and of which alone we have any cognisance, is that world which is revealed to us through perception, and which is the subject-matter of the natural science; we must include under the head of phenomena the loftiest ideals which the human mind has reached, and rank among the natural sciences ethics and æsthetics. These are the claims of naturalism. Whether they can be fully substantiated or not is a matter for the future rather than for the present to decide. But in any case the proof, no matter how cogent and how eloquent, that natural selection is incapable of adequately accounting for Raphael or Shakespeare or Darwin, is about as apposite as the proof that the known laws of crystallisation are incapable of affording an adequate explanation of the buttercup or the daisy.

Nor is it necessary that naturalism, in order to justify its claims, should be able to give a complete and adequate explanation of the universe. To the naturalist with all his arrogance there still remain, it is to be hoped, some few shreds of intellectual modesty. And he may fairly claim as much indulgence as Mr. Balfour himself claims for his suggestions towards a provisional philosophy, "It is evident, of course," he may say,[1] "that this general view [of naturalism], if we are fortunate enough to reach it, will not be of the nature of a complete or adequate philosophy. The unification of all belief into

[1] Pp. 233–234.

an ordered whole, compacted into one coherent structure under the stress of reason, is an ideal which we can never abandon; but it is also one which, in the present condition of our knowledge, perhaps even of our faculties, we seem incapable of attaining. For the moment we must content ourselves with something less than this. The best system we can hope to construct will suffer from gaps and rents, from loose ends and ragged edges. It does not, however, follow from this that it will be without a high degree of value; and whether valuable or worthless, it may at least represent the best within our reach."

That a naturalistic interpretation of man's ethical and æsthetic ideals tends in any degree to rob them of their worth and dignity appears to be false in fact. I, for one, should be sorry to believe that the noble deed, the unselfish action, the lofty ideal have no intrinsic worth and dignity but shine only with a borrowed lustre, no matter what the source of that lustre. Any creed which tends on the one hand to rob man of his inherent dignity, or on the other hand, to attribute his vices to diabolic agency, degrades him from the position of a responsible being and makes him a mere puppet over whom the gods meanly quarrel. And if it be asserted that the naturalist's conceptions of the worth of human endeavor are the spurious heritage of a creed that is not his, the counter-assertion may be made with at least equal plausibility, that the dignity of their supposed extrinsic source is but the reflected and hypostatised glory of their own inherent nobility.

I would not, however, for one moment be supposed to contend that naturalism, as I conceive it, is necessarily either antagonistic to or exclusive of supernaturalism, regarded as a product of human idealism. The "reconciliation" between naturalism and supernaturalism, to use a current but by no means satisfactory phrase, is not to be found in any more or less arbitrary separation of the natural and the supernatural but in the identification of the one with the other, and in the recognition on either part of the fact that there is no minutest detail of the natural that has not, or may not have, for man as poet, seer, and idealist, a supernatural aspect. The natural, we are often told, leads up to the supernatural at the utmost

and ultimate verge of scientific analysis; beyond the ever-widening oasis of scientific knowledge, say others, lies the circumambient desert of agnosticism. The truer view is that the sphere of naturalism is throughout its whole extent and in every detail, no matter how seemingly insignificant, interpenetrated with supernaturalism. And this supernaturalism is not something separate from the phenomena which it is the business of science to investigate, but their inner and deeper aspect which it is the function of philosophy and religion to harmonise. On this view naturalism and supernaturalism are not antagonistic, but reciprocal; do not dwell apart but are coextensive; do not deal with separate spheres, the one knowable and the other unknowable, but constitute the diverse aspects of that body of belief which is the outcome of human experience at its best.

We now reach a point of view from which our differences from Mr. Balfour may be more closely seen and indicated. We are prepared to sweep the curve of naturalism through the whole range of the knowable, not imagining that the naturalistic interpretation of the universe is at present in any degree adequate or final, but accepting it as a provisional system of great promise. In doing this we are far from denying the existence or the all-pervading influence of the supernatural; nay, rather we are laying firmly the foundations of a belief based not on rationalism, but on idealism. We contend for the natural and intrinsic nobility of man at his best and highest, and see therein the foundations of his religious ideals.

There is, however, another point of view from which we must consider the claims of naturalism; and here again we will take the criticisms of Mr. Balfour as our starting-point.

In his chapter on the "Philosophic Basis of Naturalism" he skilfully plucks naturalism of its feathers and then, standing aside, genially encourages us to laugh at the poor, naked thing's efforts at flight as he tosses it up into the thin air of scepticism. Or, to vary the analogy, we may say without injustice that by a little ingenious mixture of the results of physical analysis with some of the conclusions of psychological analysis he produces a dish so nauseous and indigestible that even the general reader, who can swallow most

things, wonders how naturalism can contrive to eke out a lean and meagre existence on such hopelessly innutritious provender.

In the preceding part of Mr. Balfour's work we are prepared for what is to follow by the assertion[1] that "naturalism (as commonly held) is deeply committed to the distinction between the *primary* and the *secondary* qualities of matter; the former (extension, solidity, and so forth) being supposed to exist as they are perceived, while the latter (such as sound and color) are due to the action of the primary qualities upon the sentient organism, and apart from the sentient organism have no independent being." "We are dealing, recollect," says Mr. Balfour,[2] in his further development of the subject, "with a theory of science according to which the ultimate stress of scientific proof is thrown wholly upon our immediate experience of objects. But nine-tenths of our immediate experiences of objects are visual; and all visual experiences, without exception, are, according to science, erroneous. As everybody knows, color is not a property of the thing seen: it is a sensation produced in us by that thing. The thing itself consists of uncolored particles, which become visible solely in consequence of their power of either producing or reflecting etherial undulations. The degrees of brightness and the qualities of color perceived in the thing, and in virtue of which alone any visual perception of the thing is possible, are, therefore, according to optics, no part of its reality, but are merely feelings produced in the mind of the percipient by the complex movements of material molecules, possessing mass and extension, but to which it is not only incorrect but unmeaning to attribute either brightness or color." And again,[3] "When I am in the act of experiencing a tree in the next field, what on this theory I am really doing is inferring from the fact of my having certain feelings the existence of a cause having qualities adequate to produce them. It is true that the process of inference is so rapid and habitual that we are unconscious of performing it. It is also true that the inference

[1] P. 42.

[2] Pp. 111, 112.

[3] Pp. 114, 115.

is quite differently performed by the natural man in his natural moments and the scientific man in his scientific moments. For, whereas the natural man infers the existence of a material object which in all respects resembles his idea of it, the scientific man knows very well that the material object only resembles his ideas of it in certain particulars,—extension, solidity, and so forth,—and that in respect of such attributes as color and illumination there is no resemblance at all. Nevertheless, in all cases, whether there be resemblance between them or not, the material fact is a conclusion from the mental fact, with which last alone we can be said to be, so to speak, in any immediate empirical relation." No wonder that Mr. Balfour is "struck by the incongruity of a scheme of belief whose premises are wholly derived from witnesses admittedly untrustworthy, yet which is unable to supply any criterion, other than the evidence of these witnesses themselves, by which the character of their evidence can in any given case be determined." "In other words," he says a little later, "we need only to consider carefully our perceptions regarded as psychological results, in order to see that, regarded as sources of information, they are not merely occasionally inaccurate, but habitually mendacious," though on his own presentation of the naturalistic position, this habitual mendacity would seem to affect only the secondary and not the primary qualities.

What answer will be made to Mr. Balfour by those naturalists, if such there be, who accept the halting analysis into primary and secondary qualities, I am not in a position to judge. "Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung." It will be more to the purpose to state, as clearly as may be and without unnecessary technicalities, the truly naturalistic attitude, as I conceive it. Above all things it behooves us to stick close to the realities that are given in practical experience; and to remember that every step in analysis takes us so much further from the reality from which we start. The tree in the next field is for us who see it just as real a bit of practical experience as we can possibly have. And if a physicist on our right hand says that he has spent a lifetime in submitting trees to physical analysis, and that he can inform us that the tree is nothing but matter and energy; while a psychologist on our left hand

assures us that had his friend the physicist been more profitably employed, he would long ago have discovered that the tree is nothing but sensations and the relations between them combined in subtle synthesis; we may reply to them both that, profoundly interested as we are in the analytical results to which they have been led in the prosecution of their special studies, they have, in neither case, affected in the smallest degree the reality of the tree that stands before us in the field. Were some chemist to take from our dessert-plate a ripe and luscious peach, and hand us instead a few grains of carbon and some cubic feet of sampled gases, telling us that these were the ultimate realities of which the fruit consisted, should we not ask him to retire to his laboratory and try to learn this lesson—that in no case can the results of analysis have a reality superior to or more valid than that the destruction of which had yielded these elements? helping ourselves meanwhile to another ripe peach and realising to the full its velvet skin, its rich color, its scent and sweetness. There is perhaps no philosophic cobweb that has caught more unwary human flies than this doctrine that the products of analysis have somehow a reality superior to that from which they are extracted; that the trembling of molecules or vibrations of the ether are more real than the Kreutzer Sonata; that the extension and solidity of the rose-bud are more real than its scent and color; that sensations of smell or taste are more real than the aroma of a cigar or the bouquet of a Burgundy.

Naturalism, then, should stick close to the fundamental reality of practical experience. Holding fast by this, it may proceed to analyse. In every bit of experience, from the simplest to the most complex, an objective and a subjective aspect may be distinguished. In the daily experience to which our senses minister the objective aspect offers a field to the student of physics; and for the special purposes of his inquiry he submits this to further analysis. To the student of psychology, on the other hand, the subjective aspect offers a field of co-ordinate importance, in which he employs his special methods of analysis. Unfortunately, the almost inevitable tendency of the specialist to magnify his office and to allow his own results to hide the rest of the universe leads the physicist and the

psychologist alike to forget or ignore the fact that each is dealing with but one side of the shield of experience, and that the reality abides not merely in the detailed chasings of the one side or the other, but in the shield itself in its entirety and its integrity. And then steps by some dainty philosopher bent on picking the brains of both and co-ordinating their results; he finds that when the physicist has pared away nearly all his side of the shield there remains a residual film of energy, and when the psychologist has pared away nearly all his side of the shield there remains a residual film of consciousness. Unable to separate these residual films, which form all that is left of the shield, he identifies the two, and smilingly assures us that he has solved the ultimate riddle of the shield. Ill would it become me to ridicule the results which this philosopher has reached. I believe that just as the outcome of the analysis of physicist and psychologist is essentially helpful, so may the co-ordination of these results in a theory of ultimate monism be of real service. But if the philosopher holds up to our view the residual film and exclaims: This then is the true and veritable shield; the naturalist must step in and say: Pardon me; you have managed between you to whittle away the shield itself; and what remains is little more than a formula, valid enough no doubt, but thin and filmy to a degree. In the name of naturalism I say, give me back the shield.

All this, it may however be said, though it is dull enough to be possibly true, is no answer to the searching inquiries of scepticism. It comes to no more than this, that naturalism accepts experience as it finds it and says to the sceptical critic: Don't bother me with problems which have no interest for me and which I can't solve.

Well! it seems to me that the first question that naturalism, or any other theory of the world, has to face is this: What is to be the criterion of reality? And that naturalism should reply to this question, that direct experience is the only valid criterion we have. The analyst's reply is quite different. That which remains after the most searching and rigorous analysis is, he tells us, the ultimate reality. And his method lands us either in untenable materialism

on the one hand, or, on the other hand, in an idealism, so called, which "admits of no answer and produces no conviction."

Nothing I venture to affirm can be more real than a bit of practical experience in the moment of that experience; and if in analysis we *distinguish* therein an objective aspect on the one hand and a subjective aspect on the other hand, let us remember that these two are of strictly co-ordinate reality. The objective aspect of our experience—the world as we experience it, in every detail of form and color of sound and scent—is, I repeat, of strictly co-ordinate reality with the subjective aspect. In experience neither is before nor after the other for they are one and indivisible, though they are distinguishable in analysis.

Accepting this criterion, however, new questions at once suggest themselves. Since the experience is individual—let me say for the sake of emphasis *my* experience—what may be real for me, may be real for no one else. Suppose that I am color-blind, my geraniums will bear flowers indistinguishable in color from the leaves of the plant. The flowers for me are really green. But for you they are really red. How are we to get over this discrepancy? The flowers themselves cannot be really at the same time both red and green. Naturalism boldly asserts that they can—green to me and red to you. Not, be it noted, both red and green either to me or to you, but red to one and green to the other. But since to the normal human being they are, under the usual conditions of sunlight illumination, red, we may say that they are really red to the normal man. It must not be forgotten that experience is impossible in the absence of someone who experiences: and if the someones differ, the experience itself must so far be different. When we come to consider æsthetics and ethics we find that these facts are of such importance that they cannot be overlooked.

But what about the objective world when no one is there to experience it? First of all it is not then actually objective in the sense in which I have been using the word. For object is the correlative of subject, and in the absence of experience neither term of the correlative couple has any present existence as such. But surely, it will be said, the world, or at any rate something, persists whether we are

there to experience it or not. I am not prepared to deny it. Nay, more I am, for my own part, bound to confess that I assume that it is so; that I cannot in my thinking get on without the assumption; and that all experience seems to me to justify the assumption.

I have now at sufficient length explained what are the leading tenets of a naturalism which differs in certain marked respects from that which Mr. Balfour had in view, They are as follows:

1. Naturalism sweeps through the whole range of the knowable.

2. It is nowise antagonistic to or exclusive of supernaturalism.

3. It takes as its criterion of reality direct experience prior to the analysis of science.

4. Of the two aspects of experience which primary analysis first discloses, the objective and the subjective, it regards both as of strictly co-ordinate reality.

5. It asserts the inherent and intrinsic worth and dignity of the human ideals.

6. It refuses to admit that natural selection, potent as this may be as a factor in organic evolution, is to be regarded as chief naturalistic factor in human evolution.

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