But this irony, and the analogical instances over which it was thrown, were but approaches to that end which Socra­tes appears always to have had in view in his conversations, —the ascent to accurate general notions of each object of thought. He was always working his way towards an ex­act definition of the idea on which the discussion turned. Each instance which he adduced was a step in this progress, diminishing by its light some portion of that obscurity and confusion of thought with which he found the subject in­vested. He did not, indeed, reach the point which he had in view. Dialectical science was in too rude a state at pre­sent for the attainment of its perfect end. Socrates rather set an admirable example of the perseverance and energy with which the end should be pursued, than a perfect model of the method of pursuing it. His very method, indeed, confesses its own imperfection, in stopping just at the point where the way seems to be opened, and leaving the sub­ject negatively, rather than positively defined.

This constant pursuit of exact definition is an indication of the antisceptical bent of the mind of Socrates. The foundations of morals and of all science were shaken by the speculations of his sophistical predecessors. Opinion was exalted to the prerogative of knowledge. Socrates accord­ingly put opinion to the test. He explored it experimen­tally, as it existed in different minds ; and he proved it de­ficient from the standard to which it had been vainly ex­alted. He found that it vanished before the light of inves­tigation ; and, in fact, that in proportion as the fancies and errors of opinion were cleared away, advances were made towards more stable and certain knowledge. This know­ledge, accordingly, he continually sought after. He had probably but an indistinct conception of the realities to­wards which he directed his pursuit. Still he appears con­stantly to have assumed and fully believed their existence, by steadily proceeding, as we find him to have done, through the various opinions which he encounters in discussion, un­til he arrives at some more definite form of thought. What Socrates only indistinctly apprehended, Plato afterwards realized in his philosophical system, and endued with ex­istence in his celebrated theory of Ideas. But in the view of his master that theory was but dimly seen in shadow. Socrates shaped his course towards it, as he more and more limited the extravagancies of popular opinion on the various subjects which he discussed, and excluded whatever was ir­relevant and foreign to the real nature of the thing. He threw doubts on what was doubtful, that there might be the less doubt and uncertainty about what remained when the doubtful was removed from a subject.

What appears to have led Socrates into this sound method of proceeding, was, as Aristotle very justly intimates, the firm moral convictions which were the great elements of his mind and character.@@1 He felt that there was a reality in the principles of piety, justice, benevolence, and other mo­ral sentiments, which no sophistry could impugn. He not only felt their reality within himself, but he had observed, that however invisible to the outward eye, they produced real effect3 in the world ; that they were not only evidenced in the constitution of nature, but also recognized in those unwritten laws which were found everywhere the same, independently of positive institution, as well as in the enactments of particular states.@@3 He looked for the origi­nal of these sentiments to the perfect nature of the Di­vinity ; and he held them accordingly to be invariable and true, as the Divinity is invariable and true. Hence he

would allow no proper and adequate power of causation but moral design. Material or mechanical causes were in his view but of instrumental efficacy.@@’ It was moral sentiment only, the love and pursuit of good, that possessed real power. This alone, he observed, subsisted unchanged and fixed, whilst every thing else was moved by it, and derived its existence from it. It was the neglect of this primary principle in the detail of the physical theory of Anaxago­ras, which had offended him in the system of that philoso­pher. And agreeably to this, Plato tells us of his account­ing for his remaining in his prison, from the simple cause of the moral feeling by which he was actuated.

Fixing his eye accordingly on these stable eternal prin­ciples, Socrates pressed forward in every discussion towards their attainment. He would never rest in vague general classifications, which involving also much that belonged not to the subject in question, left its nature as undefined as ever. But he proceeded to a further limitation of the ge­neralities on each subject, obliging his hearer to distinguish the subordinate genera included in the more general idea first thrown out, and thus gradually to circumscribe the sub­ject within its proper boundaries. This was the intimate connexion of his logic and ethics. He was engaged through­out in an endeavour to remove the vain presumptions of mere opinion, and to substitute for these a real knowledge, as far as it was attainable, of the subjects themselves. He conceived that if men went astray in their conduct, acting on what they mistakenly thought right, and good, and true, it was only necessary to make them *know* the truth, and they would then act on their *knowledge,* as before they act­ed on mere *opinion,* and by thus acting attain their happi­ness. This was but a short-sighted view of the origin of human misconduct and unhappiness, as it did not go beyond the fact of the erroneous judgment of men, to the moral perversion which was the primary cause of their failure in action. As the practical error of men arises from this perversion, it is evidently vain to think to improve their conduct, by merely substituting more correct notions of truth and duty; since this remedy does not reach the source of the malady. Such, however, was the view of Socrates. And hence he laboured, whatever might be the subject of his conversations, to lead men to contemplate the nature of the thing discussed, and to seek to define it to them­selves ; thus blending the perception of the right and the good in the intellectual apprehension of the truth. Xeno­phon accordingly remarks the importance attributed by So­crates to the ability of distributing things into genera, on the ground, that by means of this talent “ men would be­come most virtuous, most formed for command, and most able in discourse.”@@4

Though Socrates thus endeavoured to render his hearers accomplished in the art of discussion, by directing their at­tention to Definition, he, us might be expected, in that early state of logical science, did little more than point out the great importance of Definition, and mark the direction in which it should proceed. Were we to take our estimate of what Socrates accomplished in this way from the “ Dia­logues” of Plato, we must suppose Socrates to have been much more methodical in his discussions, than we should infer from the specimens given by Xenophon. Something perhaps should be allowed for the practical turn of Xeno­phon’s mind, and his comparative inattention to the more abstract part of the discussions of his master, whilst his fel­low-pupil, on the other hand, who had an eagle-eye for

@@@1 Aristot. Metapb. i. 6. ∑ωκ∕>dτovr δt tτrpi *ρiv* τα ydικα *πρaγρartvnρtvου,* κ∙r>λ.

@@@' Xenoph. Mem. iv. 4,

@@@’ Aristotle gives an instance of the manner in which Anaxagoras lost sight of his theory of mind in working out his system. Anaxa­

goras, he tells us, said “ that roan was the most intelligent of animals, because be had hands ; whereas he should have stated, that man bad hands because he was the most intelligent of animals ; for that hands were an instrument for taking hold." Aristot. de Part. Aniιn. iv. 10, p. 1034. *fAvaξayοpas piv* ovv *φηtri, 6ιa* to *χtιpaς tχ(ιι∕, φpοι>ιpωτaτοv ιιvaι* τωc fωωv *τijv άνθρωπον\* rv∖οyοv* δe, διά *TO φρονιρώτατον rïvat τiιv ζώων, χttpat lχ∏V* του λαμβdv(tv *yap χtιpts 6pyav0v tiσιv.* Ed. Duval.

@@@\* Xenopb. Mem. iv. 5. 12. ’Es τούτον yùp *ytyvrσθaι avâpas àpicrrovs rt και τ∣ytμovικωτaτoυs και* διαλf(tτutωτατovt.