

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR,
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

GENERAL SECRETARY:
E. J. SEWELL.

LECTURE SECRETARY:
E. WALTER MAUNDER, F.R.A.S.

VOL. XLIX.



LONDON:

(Published by the Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, S.W. 1.)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

587TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, ON MONDAY, MARCH 5TH, 1917,
4.30 P.M.

PROFESSOR H. LANGHORNE ORCHARD, M.A., took the Chair.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

The SECRETARY (Mr. E. J. Sewell) announced the Election of Rev. F. N. Carus-Wilson, M.A., and Mr. A. E. Youssef, B.Sc., as Associates of the Institute.

The CHAIRMAN, in few words, called upon Clement C. J. Webb, Esq., M.A., to read a Paper upon the difficult but important subject of "The Conscience."

THE CONSCIENCE. By CLEMENT C. J. WEBB, Esq., M.A.,
Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

IN doing me the honour of asking me to address you to-night, you did not, I am convinced, expect that I should attempt in the short time at our disposal to treat in any exhaustive fashion the important and difficult subject of the Conscience, or look for more from me than some reflections upon it which might suggest a point of view from which it may be approached, and might prove provocative of further discussion.

It is at once obvious that the use of the word *Conscience* in an absolute sense, ancient though no doubt it is, is yet a secondary use. Like the variant *Consciousness*, which represents along with it in English the Latin *conscientia* and the French *conscience*, but from which it is distinguished by its special association with morality, it primarily calls for a genitive to follow it. Consciousness is consciousness of some object; Conscience in the narrower sense is consciousness of rightness and wrongness, of moral quality, in actions. This should always be borne in mind, for it is apt to be overlooked when Conscience is, as it were, personified and spoken of as though it were an inward witness (the old English word for Conscience was *Inwit*)—an inward witness and judge of our actions, distinguishable from ourselves as the performers of the actions which it observes.

This absolute use of "Conscience" is, of course, nothing new. We find it in St. Paul, by whom the Stoic term *συνείδησις* of which *conscientia* and *conscience* are translations, is frequently used; though it is rarely found in the New Testament outside of his writings, never perhaps outside of those of authors who stood under his influence. We can trace it and the personification of Conscience back to the tag from Menander, *ἅπαντι ἡμῶν ἡ συνείδησις θεός*. It may even be said to be implicit in the *σύν*, the *con*, which signalizes the knowledge spoken of in the word as something existing alongside of, and therefore in some sense distinct from, another more direct or immediate knowledge, which is presupposed by it and which is mine as the doer of the acts which are observed and judged. Although, perhaps, the force of the cognate word Conscience has been weakened by its use as a rendering of the German *Bewusstsein*, it also ought strictly to be used only of a reflective knowledge—of what is sometimes distinguished by modern writers on philosophy as *self-consciousness*, or at least of a kind of knowledge which only a *self-conscious* being can possess. And in Conscience this reference to reflection has not been lost; the word is always understood to mean a sort of awareness in which one's *own* actions are the object, from which as *conscientious* one distinguishes *oneself* as a subject. It is just for this very reason that the personification of Conscience, as though it were another person from the persons who act and whose acts are observed and judged, is so easy and, one may even say, inevitable.

The mediæval schoolmen distinguished, as is well known, *Conscientia* (*συνείδησις*) from *Synderesis*, and it is in some respects regrettable that this distinction should have fallen into disuse. The history of the word *Synderesis* is obscure, and, so far as it is known, curious. It no doubt represents a Greek *συντήρησις*, which was probably, like *συνείδησις* itself, a technical term of the Stoics; what the precise significance of that term was has been disputed, but it came, in the degenerate form of *Synderesis*, into the vocabulary of mediæval philosophy from a passage of St. Jerome's commentary on Ezekiel, in which, among other interpretations of the prophet's vision, he mentions one according to which the man, the lion, and the calf represent the three so-called parts of the soul enumerated by Plato in the *Republic*, the rational, the passionate, and the appetitive, while the eagle stood for that which the Greeks called *συντήρησις*, which is above these and beyond them, namely, the *spark of conscience*, *scintilla conscientiae*, which was not extinguished in the heart of man by the Fall, and, by means

whereof we, when overcome by pleasure or by passion, or sometimes even when deceived by a show of reason, perceive that we are sinning. Here, then, has been recognized, under the name of *Synderesis*, a fundamental capacity for perceiving moral values, unaffected by the Fall, and so common to all members of our race, a capacity yielding what may be called a natural conviction of sin.

Of the precise relation of *synderesis* to *conscientia* different accounts were given by different schoolmen; we may content ourselves with mentioning that of St. Thomas, by whom *synderesis* is considered as the *habitus*, the disposition or capacity whereof *conscientia* is the *actus* or exercise in particular cases. It is, as I said, in my judgment a loss that the use of a word should have been laid aside, the employment of which secured the recognition of an important distinction, which, too often, for want of a corresponding distinction of name, has escaped notice; I mean the distinction between the capacity for discriminating right from wrong, a capacity which we must claim for ourselves, if morality is to have any meaning for us at all, and the exercise of that capacity in particular cases, an exercise sometimes supposed to be invested with a sort of infallibility and finality which are only the reflection of the *ultimateness*, if I may use the word, properly belonging to the capacity, as it belongs to all the fundamental capacities of our spirit, which do not suffer explanation beyond themselves.

This is not to imply that the capacity and its exercise are separable, as they are certainly distinguishable. They are not. I will try to illustrate what I take to be their mutual relations by an analogy from the sphere of mathematical intuition.

It is only as existing in *lines* that we can be aware of *straightness* or of *curvature*. We are not first acquainted with abstract straightness and then recognize it in a line. Yet if we had not already recognized straightness or curvature in lines actually seen, we could not come to learn what they are from repeated experiences of straight or curved lines. That is to say that straightness, the universal quality of straightness, is only known or knowable in particular straight lines, yet our acquaintance with it is not obtained by induction from numerous instances of straightness, still less (as Mill suggested) by induction from lines which are not themselves really straight at all but only approximate to straightness. The *a priori* character, nevertheless—to use Kant's expression—which must thus be recognized as belonging to our fundamental geometrical intuitions, does not secure us from mistakes due to defective

sight, inattention or the like, as to the straightness or the reverse of a particular line. It is not otherwise in the sphere of morality. What the distinction between right and wrong is or means, can only be known in instances. If anyone professes not to understand it, we can only take some instance of each, some act, for example, of loyalty and some act of treachery; and ask him whether he does not recognize a distinction between them, even where materially the acts are indistinguishable, *e.g.*, in two cases of the intentional dropping of a bomb by an aviator on a munition factory, in the one case, however, by an enemy aviator, in the other by one in the service of the country whose munitions he attacks. Yet, while only in an instance can the distinction of right and wrong in actions be perceived, and while there is no way of coming at the knowledge of the distinction except by perceiving it directly in some instance—for it could never be explained to some one who did not perceive it in *some* instance—nevertheless this does not make it impossible to dispute whether this or that act is right or wrong.

We might, perhaps, use the mediæval distinction of *synderesis* and *conscientia* to help ourselves in expressing this, and might say that the infallibility or, rather (if I may so put it), the incorrigibility of *synderesis* does not carry with it such infallibility of *conscientia* as would make it impossible to dispute whether a particular act is right or wrong: though in the last resort there is no going beyond the direct perception of rightness and wrongness in an instance, and no external criterion of rightness can be found, any more than there can be found an external criterion of truth. In the last resort we must see for ourselves that a proposition is true or an action right. We must see it, I say, for ourselves; but we can only see it for ourselves because it is so independently of our seeing it. The view of rightness or moral goodness which lays all the stress on the subjective side, on the apprehension of it in abstraction from the substance or nature of what is apprehended, is akin to the "subjective idealism" which makes the existence of what we perceive by means of the senses depend upon, or consist in, our perception of it. Such positions tend towards pure scepticism and are only saved from reaching it through a want of thoroughness in their advocates. Thus, in the sphere with which we are now concerned, that of morality, we find people professing a boundless "liberty of conscience," but secretly relying for what they will admit as genuine "conscience," upon an unconfessed or incompletely confessed authority. We shall see examples of

this presently when we turn, as I propose we should now turn, from these general considerations as to the nature of Conscience to the question of that Liberty of Conscience which has so often served as a trumpet whence no doubt "soul-animating strains" have sometimes been blown, but which (it must be confessed) has also sometimes given but an uncertain sound.

What do we mean by Liberty of Conscience? It cannot of course mean liberty to have Conscience, that is consciousness, of the moral quality of actions. For this cannot be directly exposed to external interference. Does it then mean liberty to act according to what one knows to be right? It does mean this; but it has also generally been taken to include beside this liberty to act according to what one *thinks* to be right, and it is in respect of this part of its meaning that the chief difficulties connected with the subject arise.

One can only *know*, in the proper sense of the word, that to be right which is really right; but one may *think* that to be right which is not so, as well as that which is. Yet opinion may be mistaken for knowledge both by the person who opines or thinks, and by others to whom he communicates his opinion; while, although we may doubt whether knowledge can be mistaken for opinion by him who knows, it is certain that we may mistake others' knowledge for opinion. This is so, not only in respect of morality, but of other things also. Freedom to express all sorts of opinion is admittedly a security for the progress of knowledge; not that all opinions are equally valuable or likely to lead to knowledge, but that restraint of the freedom to express any opinion is a sure means to hamper minds in their advance towards knowledge, especially since there can be (this I will ask to be allowed to assume) no tribunal of authority set up whose infallibility in distinguishing truth from error can possibly be guaranteed. And so far as we are dealing merely with speculation on morality, the same arguments as can be brought forward in favour of allowing a general freedom to express all sorts of opinion will apply in respect of morality also. But it is and, one may say, is universally held to be, a different matter when we come to social conduct. It is doubtful whether there is anyone, even among those who are most unwilling to grant the existence of any limits to the right to enjoy freedom of action in accordance with Conscience, who does not draw the line somewhere.

One may disguise this from oneself by saying that Conscience *cannot* enjoin certain actions; but in so saying one has assumed at a certain point that ability in themselves always to distinguish

knowledge from opinion in others which, as we saw, cannot be conceded to any person or body of persons without investing them with the prerogative of infallibility. Unable—and, if what I said above is true—unable from the very nature of the case, to give an external criterion of rightness any more than of truth, the champions of Liberty of Conscience are apt to fall back upon the subjective criterion of what is called Conscientiousness. Now it is no doubt true that *insincerity* has no claim to be respected in this matter. Insincerity is the negation of Conscience, for the insincere assertor of a view not only does not *know* it to be true, in the sense in which that may be affirmed of anyone who only *thinks* it to be so, but he *knows* that he neither knows nor, properly speaking, even thinks so. But the doctrine that all *sincerely*-held opinion is entitled to be free to take effect, cannot be maintained, as is well known, without great difficulty. And, to say the truth, the ordinary man means by a *conscientious* opinion—or objection—something more than a sincerely-held one. This is, I think, shown by the fact that everybody feels that there is something absurd in the attitude inevitably taken up by the law, where the rights of the conscientious objector are recognized, for which proof that the objection is *not insincere* is a sufficient proof of its *conscientiousness*. When one hears of a “conscientious objection” to vaccination, one naturally thinks at once of some such scruple at the use of human means of defence against disease as is, or was, I believe, entertained by the Peculiar People; and however unreasonable we may consider such a scruple to be, one feels that the violation of a religious scruple which one does not share may be the first step on an inclined plane ending in the *auto-da-fé*, and is not to be taken without serious hesitation. But quite inevitably, as I said, the protection afforded to a religious scruple has to be extended to a sincere conviction based on argument, such as one school of medical practitioners would use against another, to show that the process involves a risk to health sufficient to outweigh the chances of protection which it offers from a worse disease. Such a conviction may no doubt be more reasonable in the eyes of most of us, whether we share it or not, than the scruples of the Peculiar People. But it is obviously not what one would naturally mean by a “conscientious objection.” It lacks the association with religion which that phrase undoubtedly carries with it. That such an association with religion is commonly connoted by the expression, is attested by the difficulty experienced by members of the Tribunals set up under the recent Military Service Act in dealing with “conscientious

objectors" to military service who base their objection on what are described as *moral*, not *religious* grounds. To some members of Tribunals, little accustomed to meditate on the relations of morality and religion, an objection did not seem to be religious at all or entitled to respect in that character, which neither appealed to a text of Scripture nor depended on the formal tenets of a recognized religious body. Sometimes, too, to the objector himself the associations of the word "religion" were exclusively with texts and creeds and organizations for common worship, so that, not acknowledging the authority of texts or creeds, nor belonging to any religious denomination, he preferred to call his objection "moral" rather than "religious," and thereby puzzled his judges by a distinction to which they were not accustomed. Of course the objection thus called "moral" was really in most cases essentially "religious." The distinction had practical importance only because the existence of the view put forward lacked the external attestation afforded by it being on record as a tenet of a religious body, or as the literal meaning of a text acknowledged as authoritative. But the whole difficulty went to confirm the original association in the minds of most men, of "conscientious objection," properly so called, with religion.

Historically, it is manifest that it has been mainly over questions of Religion that men have fought and died for Liberty of Conscience. What was it then precisely that they were fighting for?

I think it will be found that, where we most readily allow the champions of Liberty of Conscience to have been in the right, they were contending for the right not to be disqualified for the privileges of citizenship by religious opinions irrelevant to the duties of citizenship, or even (as some early Christian apologists pleaded in their own behalf) predisposing them to the performance of those duties. With the Quaker's scruple at the form of an oath, we may or may not sympathize: but we shall most of us admit that, since he attached no less sanctity to his affirmation than other men attached to the oath, it would have been unreasonable to go on insisting upon a formality, however superstitious the objection to it, which a man might be an exemplary citizen and yet dislike, and even dislike on grounds that might be held should be conceded by the State, so far as the State professed Christianity. There was, in a word, nothing in the Quaker's objection to the oath inconsistent with the common understanding upon which the existence of the State depends.

You will remember Charles Lamb's severe essay on *Unitarian Protests*; protests, that is, which were left by some Unitarians of his day in the vestry after being married by a clergyman of the Church of England, directed against the Trinitarian formula used in the Marriage Service of that Church. Had these protesters taken the stronger line which Lamb would have persuaded them to take, and been married by a rite of their own, risking the penalties of illegality, we could have sympathized with their action, I think, on a ground similar to that on which we saw we could sympathize with the Quaker's refusal to swear in a court of justice. Dissent, we should feel, from the doctrine of the Trinity, raises after all no presumption whatever that the dissenter means less or other by marriage than the mass of his fellow-citizens. Once the question is raised, it is plainly seen to be unfair to hamper a fundamental right of citizenship with the obligation to profess agreement with the majority of one's fellow-citizens on an issue quite irrelevant to the business in hand.

But the conscientious objection of which we have lately heard most, that to military service, is surely quite wrongly classed with the Quaker's to the oath and the Unitarian's to the Anglican Marriage Service. Assuming the State to be really in danger of destruction by a foreign foe, a citizen who refuses to take his share in its defence is declining a fundamental duty of citizenship implied in the common understanding on which the existence of the State depends. This is so quite independently of the totally different question which has sometimes been confused with it, the question, namely, whether the permanent establishment of conscription or some other form of compulsory military service is the best method for guaranteeing the security of the State in time of need. The out-and-out objector to combatant service, whether Quaker or no—as distinct from the mere political opponent of conscription—is not, like the Quaker who insists upon affirming instead of swearing, doing in substance exactly what the State asks of him, and merely scrupling at a particular form which has become traditionally attached to the doing of it. He is, in fact—or should be, if he understood his true position—resigning all claim to the protection of the State, and making himself—for Conscience' sake, no doubt—an outlaw. He has no further claim upon the State. He cannot protest in the name of Liberty of Conscience when treated as a criminal. He may be a martyr for righteousness, but a victim of tyranny he is not. Hegel says quite rightly that only because a State is strong, so that it can dispense with their service and feels itself in no danger from their propaganda, can

it tolerate Quakers with their refusal to take part in the self-defence of the community. That the Quaker is "conscientious" in this refusal is really irrelevant. What would he himself say in the case of a conscientious Thug who, at the opposite extreme of opinion to his, took it to be his religious duty, not to decline to slay his country's enemies in time of war, but, on the other hand, to slay his fellow-countrymen in time of peace?

But are we not, it may be asked, to agree with the Apostles in the *Acts*, that we should "obey God rather than men"? Must we not, when, to the best of our judgment, God forbids what man commands, refuse obedience to the latter? No one surely would answer this question except in the affirmative; but it is quite another question how far it is right to claim that *man* should not penalize the refusal.

In the original context of the phrase, the Apostles no doubt confidently appeal to their judges to approve their choice of obedience. But who were their judges? They were the Sanhedrin, the religious court of their nation, sitting to judge them in the name of the same national God whom they claimed to be obeying. A like situation has often recurred in the history of the Christian Church and its spiritual tribunals. But the State, nowadays, at any rate, does not pretend to speak in this way as the mouthpiece of God. The analogy in the case of the State is the assertion of a legal or constitutional right against an usurping executive—such as the protest of Hampden against the ship-money in the history of our own country. I do not, of course, mean to deny that the authority of the State is in a very real sense divine. "There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." But there is a distinction, recognized in Christ's precept to render unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's and unto God the things which be God's, between the secular and the spiritual authority, which is entirely relevant to the present issue.

I am not concerned to defend the action of those who, some years ago, chose to be "passive resisters" against the demand for payment of an education rate which they conceived to be designed to subsidize instruction in the tenets of a religious body from which they dissented. It was, indeed, often observed at the time that it was hard to draw the line between their policy and one which would be inconsistent with the maintenance of the State at all, since this, even in the most democratic community, must at least involve the occasional and temporary submission of the minority to measures regularly carried against

them by a majority in a free assembly. But although the defenders of "passive resistance" were often sadly to seek in their logic, it is plain that their position was quite otherwise defensible than that of our conscientious objectors to military service. Though they had no definite constitutional guarantee or fundamental law to which they could appeal, they were undoubtedly in fact appealing to a recognized principle of the British commonwealth, that of the equality of religions before the law, which they conceived, rightly or wrongly, to have been violated. They were appealing to a common understanding among the citizens of this country, not to an authority altogether beyond the State, in obedience to which they would be prepared to sacrifice city and citizens alike. Once more, I am not for a moment denying that such an authority there may be, or that such a sacrifice may not be sometimes demanded. What I am denying is that the State can justly be called upon to recognize a claim to transcend its jurisdiction altogether on the ground that the claim is "conscientiously" or sincerely made.

I pass from this particular subject of the relations of the State to the individual conscience, so-called (let us remember) by a natural courtesy, since in its strictest sense one cannot be said to have conscience or consciousness except of what is really right, whereas no one doubts that many statements of "conscientious" conviction express mere opinions and often erroneous opinions. Recent controversies have brought this subject much before our minds; but there is a question of the relation of the individual conscience to the social conscience or consciousness of right and wrong, which goes deeper than that of its relation to the demands of the particular form of society which we call the State. For my own part I have no hesitation in denying the claim of the State to be the supreme and all-embracing society in the sense that, as a German publicist is quoted by the late Henry Sidgwick as saying, "the maintenance of the State justifies every sacrifice, and is superior to every moral rule." I consider that in nothing did the Christian religion make a more notable ethical advance upon the ethical teaching of classical antiquity than in its clear recognition of a duty transcending that of the citizen. The distinction between Church and State—a distinction in which the late Lord Acton saw the historical guarantee of political liberty, as Auguste Comte had seen in it the historical guarantee of intellectual liberty, is characteristic of Christendom, because it is a consequence of this feature of Christian morality. No doubt the Church in putting forward a claim for itself to be the supreme authority in morals

may repeat the similar error, previously, and again since, committed by the State. But still it remains true that the recognition of a double allegiance by a citizen who is also a Christian Churchman is a permanent testimony to the impossibility that membership in any finite and visible organized community can be the completely adequate expression of the infinity of the human spirit.

Yet this is not to say that the individual as such can escape into a realm of merely individual duty, which is not in any sense social. The expression "private conscience" may well prove misleading. Probably it was first used to mean the conscience of what it was right to do as a private person as distinguished from the conscience of what it was right to do as a person acting in a public capacity. But the phrase is sometimes used very carelessly; and it comes to be taken almost as though it belonged to the essence of Conscience to be private.

Now, as was said in an earlier part of this paper, Conscience, to be Conscience at all, must indeed be one's own. But "private," in a strict sense, it could not be without abandoning all claim to rationality; for Reason can never be private. It is essentially what we share with all rational beings; it is essentially that in us which apprehends what is objectively real, independently of the peculiarities belonging to our apprehension of it. To think of the Conscience as "private" is to represent it, not so much in the light of a kind of *reason* as in the light of a kind of *sense*; and many would see no harm in this. But even my senses I distrust if they disagree with other people's; that is, I distrust their report of the real world. Our perceptions must indeed be our own; and, as we saw before, so must our rational apprehensions also. But they need not be, and, on the whole, we prefer them not to be, *peculiar*. It is the madman who of all men lives most in a world of his own; the genius, on the other hand, is he who gives the touch of a common nature which "makes the whole world kin." So, insistence on the privacy of Conscience in morals may lead to mere individual taste or passion masquerading under the name of "private conscience." There is indeed always a moral danger in the cultivation of moral dissent for dissent's sake. The great reformers have usually appealed to the tradition of the society in which they appear. "If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed Me." They claim to be faithful to the principles which all acknowledge—more faithful than their neighbours. They have indeed often appealed to the tradition of the society in a way that is unhistorical, representing what they recommend as having actually occurred in a

legendary past. But the substance of the appeal to antiquity is independent of its legendary setting. It is, in fact, an appeal to the tradition of the society as a living thing, with a tendency to grow in a definite direction. It is implied in the appeal that to the unsophisticated conscience the congruity of the new teaching or reformed practice with what it already recognizes as good, will be apparent; to reject it would involve self-sophistication. Hence the reformer's conscience, though it may be solitary in the sense that something has dawned upon it which has as yet dawned on no one else's, is yet not properly called "private." A really private revelation to an individual conscience, there could be no sin in others rejecting. A great saint or reformer may be the first to perceive a moral truth, just as a great man of science may be the first to make a discovery in nature. Either may have a knowledge which no one else shares; but the knowledge is not on that account "private." Others would share it did they use their own reason as faithfully; and he who has it makes haste to communicate it, and makes no doubt of its communicable, that is, its public character.

The worship of the "private conscience," as such, is thus quite irrational. But it may, notwithstanding, be an important principle that everyone's conscience should be equally respected, not because everyone's is equally likely to be right, but because of the danger of making a general rule as to whose conscience is to be preferred to his neighbour's. It may be right for the community to interfere as little as possible, on the same principle as that on which some actions which we think had better not be done we yet also think had better not be forbidden or punished by law. But nobody thinks thus of all actions, and in the case of Conscience it is plainly not reasonable to extend the rule of acquiescence to consciences which object to the performance of duties on the discharge of which by its members the very existence of the community depends. We may recognize that the danger of what is called in a general way "Socialism" lies in the direction of impressing the judgment of the community on the individual, and so losing the progressive impulse supplied by individual criticism—not private criticism (except in the sense of criticism by one who is not an official), but criticism brought into the public stock. The opposite danger is that of what is sometimes called *laissez faire*. Here the common ideal is not recognized; the community's judgment is lost, and along with it the proper starting point of the individual conscience. It is not impossible for both dangers to be combined. One finds such a combination

sometimes in quarters which pass for being specially enlightened. People in their contempt for what they call *conventionality* pay no respect to the feelings which echo in the individual conscience the traditional judgments of the community, treating them as mere private prejudices, while they attempt so to remodel the life of the community as to deprive these feelings of the support afforded them by public opinion.

Whether, then, we consider the antithesis of the individual conscience and the public conscience, or judgment of the community, or that of the individual conscience and the objective good, we must be on our guard against ascribing to the individual conscience by itself the value that belongs to the whole moral fact. What is of supreme worth is the conscientiously willed good : not what, if conscientiously willed, *would be* good, but is actually unwilled or unconscientiously willed—that is, willed but not willed because it is known to be good : nor yet the bare form of conscientious volition ; but the concrete conscience informed with knowledge—and therefore not private—willing the real and objective good.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN : I am sure we all thank the author of the paper for the skill and dialectical subtlety with which he has handled a subject of undoubted difficulty, and the importance of which cannot, I should say, be over-estimated. We find that Socrates followed his good demon, as he called it, meaning by "demon" a being partly divine and partly human whom he supposed to be resident within him, whose function was to guide him from error and lead him into truth.

The importance of Conscience we know was recognized in the Word of God, the Bible—all through the Divine Book. The great Apostle, too, says how we should respect even what was supposed to be a weak conscience, the possessor of which did not see the whole truth about matters ; yet so long as he believed his ideas to be true, he was bound to follow them. We might, of course, try to persuade him, and reason him into abandoning his weak conscience and getting a strong one in its place ; but we were never to force the weak conscience on any account. What did St. Paul aim at ? He aimed at this : "Herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man."

That is the essence of the Christian religion. Conscience, indeed, supplies the very basis of all respect for authority and government. It lies at the very basis of all religion. If I were asked to define Conscience, I should be asked to do what has never yet been successfully accomplished, I think. I cannot agree with the definition (on p. 143) that Conscience is simply consciousness of good and evil. I cannot agree that that, though true so far as it goes, is adequate. There is much more in Conscience than simple consciousness of good or evil. We find what the great German philosopher, Kant, calls the categorical imperative. It tells us what we ought to do. It does not merely show ; it commands and guides.

The importance of Conscience we recognize continually in the affairs of daily life. If we meet anyone who appears to be conscienceless, we generally give him more or less a wide berth. Quite rightly, for such a person is unreliable. What are we seeing now in Europe but a terrible illustration of the result of disregarding Conscience. "We know we did wrong," said the German Chancellor; "in violating the neutrality of Belgium, but it was military necessity." That Nemesis has pursued Germany, and will pursue her until the War is over. When one looks at those battlefields where some of the best manhood of Europe has shed its blood, the voice of that blood cries from the ground, and it finds an echo in desolate homes and in broken hearts, in the cries of the widows and the children, against making jettison of great moral principles.

What is Conscience, indeed? I am disposed to define it—and I hope I shall not burn my fingers where so many have burnt theirs—as *the faculty of duty*. We may say duty to God and duty to man. From duty to God, however, follows duty to man because God has commanded it. The faculty of duty. What is it that Conscience does? This spiritual faculty, as I call it, compares moral qualities with the supreme law, the Moral Law. Just as you may compare a line with a ruler to see whether it is straight or not, so Conscience compares the moral qualities in moral action—the moral qualities such as justice, truth, mercy, and love and their opposites; compares those with the moral standard—the Law of God, the Moral Law. If a quality is straight, and agrees with the straight or righteous law, it is called good; but otherwise it is called bad, and the more it deviates the worse it is.

That I take to be the faculty of Conscience, or the moral sense, as

some have called it. It allies itself with all our physiological faculties. A man feels and knows ; and the moral faculty, the faculty of duty, allies itself with the senses. There is a feeling of pleasure when we follow the guidance of Conscience, and a feeling of pain when we do not follow that guidance. Conscience also allies itself with knowledge ; it associates faculties with the actions in which they become apparent, and perceives intuitively and at once whether the moral faculty agrees or not with the moral standard. To the will, Conscience makes special appeal.

It appears to me that, throughout his paper, the author has made the mistake of regarding Conscience as referring specially to action. In our own case, no doubt, we can see if our actions are right or wrong—and why ? Because in our own case we know the motives, and therefore the moral qualities. In the case of other people, however, not knowing their motives, we may get into all sorts of difficulties because unable to see the moral quality of their actions. We guess at it ; we argue about it. There we bring in intellectual judgment, and the combination of true conscience and intellectual judgment has greatly confused the subject of Conscience. That lax use of the term Conscience, in which intellectual judgment enters as well as the moral faculty, has done a great deal of mischief to clearness of thought on the subject.

Miss HODGKIN : There is one point in Mr. Webb's lecture to which I venture to draw attention :

“A citizen who refuses to take his share in the defence of his country is declining a fundamental duty of citizenship . . . he is resigning all claim to the protection of the State, and making himself—for conscience' sake, no doubt—an outlaw. He has no further claim upon the State.”

In reply, I would say that there are duties of citizenship other than the one which the lecturer considers “fundamental.” How does the Quaker compare with citizens generally in respect of the fulfilment of duties other than military ? A large amount of the religious liberty enjoyed in our country to-day is the result of the stand made by our Quaker forefathers 260 years ago, when 2000 of them were in prison at one time for conscience' sake. I recall the stand for freedom made by John Bright, the work of Joseph Sturge for the liberation of the slave, the influence of

Elizabeth Fry in the matter of prison reform, and of Samuel Bowley and others as pioneers in the cause of Temperance. Again, think of the service rendered to humanity by Lister, whose discovery of the use of antiseptics is said to have saved more lives than have been lost in battle during the nineteenth century. I would remind you of all that Friends have done in the cause of education and philanthropy and social reform; of their labours in connection with the Bible Society, both at headquarters and throughout the country; not to speak of the high moral tone of the lives lived by quiet, inconspicuous members of our community during these 260 years. They have endeavoured to live those lives in humble dependence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, speaking directly to their consciences in harmony with the Holy Scriptures. Thus it has become a common saying that "a Quaker's word is as good as his bond."

Is there not something due from the State in consideration of this high ideal of Christian citizenship? Are these the people that should be treated as outlaws because they sincerely believe that their allegiance to the Prince of Peace, and His command to love our enemies, forbids them to take human life? These principles Friends have held as long as they have been in existence. They have held them consistently during other wars, with the full knowledge of the Government, and have not been banished from the country on account of it.

By the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, France sent 2000 Huguenots to perish as galley slaves, and drove thousands more from her shores by persecution, but at the same time she robbed herself of one of her most valuable moral assets. What was her loss was England's gain. Surely no member of the Victoria Institute would wish to banish the Quakers by making life in our Empire impossible for them, as it would be if Conscriptio were to become permanent! In refusing to take human life we are only following in the steps of the early Christians. For about the first three centuries of our era Christians as a rule refused to fight. "I am a Christian, I cannot fight," was their testimony. If the Church of Christ had kept true to this early testimony, who can say that she would not have carried public opinion with her in this matter?

That the Arm of the Lord is sufficient for those who put their

trust in Him instead of in the arm of flesh, has been abundantly proved by Friends, both as regards the individual, the community, and the State. Under William Penn the State of Pennsylvania was founded without bloodshed, and was maintained in peace for seventy years without an army in the midst of a population of savage Indians who were constantly in conflict with neighbouring States not governed by peace principles.

Personally I feel that the right attitude for Friends is to give themselves to the help of their country in every way short of taking life or making munitions. To many of us, who seem to be standing aloof, loyalty to our country is a burning passion, second only to the allegiance we owe to our Lord and Master. It is that allegiance which forces us to be in the despised minority amidst the enthusiasm of the War. There are few of us, even Quakers, who are not sharing in some way in our nation's agony. I myself have eight nephews in the War, either fighting or healing.

The SECRETARY read a communication from Dr. Schofield, as follows :—

“ Being unable to attend the meeting, and having read Mr. Webb's paper, may I ask the author if he does not recognize three internal arbitrators or powers of arbitration—the *Intellectual*, that judges the right and wrong in matters of mind, logic, etc. ; the *Æsthetic*, that judges in matters of art authoritatively ; and the *Moral*, or what we generally term Conscience ? Does not what is meant by the word cover all three powers ? ”

The Rev. A. GRAHAM-BARTON suggested another definition of Conscience. He said : I regard Conscience as innate to start with, and being innate, it is a recognition of dual authority—God and myself. I hold that Conscience carries with it this conviction—whether a man believes in God or not—that someone knows, some power knows beside himself. When I do an act which, in my judgment, is wrong, I am conscience-stricken, and that stricken conscience is the result of an inner belief, evident against my own will, that someone knows as well as myself.

I think we do not perhaps just compare moral qualities in Conscience. We are so often called upon to act immediately without seeking to compare ; and I hold, with Rousseau and Kant, that Conscience never errs. I do not care whether it is an educated and

enlightened or an illiterate conscience. Conscience always voices the right or wrong when the act is to be done, and we become conscious in ourselves. With regard to the *Synderesis*, that is a fundamental capacity which the lecturer ventures to assert may have existed before the Fall. To my mind, it is most questionable. I cannot understand that, in a condition without wrong, a quality could be determined upon something that does not exist; and therefore I consider that Conscience came in with the Fall, with the consciousness of wrong and right, and not with the consciousness of right only. It was the presence of right and wrong that determined the matter.

With regard to the question of liberty of conscience our lecturer ventures to assert that those who were passive resisters in days gone by were often "sadly in need of logic," a most daring assertion to make, because it is against the truth. The question of freedom of conscience for passive resisters lay entirely along religious lines. Whilst the State has a perfect right to control the bodies of men, and even regulate their morals, the State has no right whatever to interfere with a man's religion, for which he has to answer to God himself.

Mr. SIDNEY COLLETT: I am sure we must all be very grateful for this learned discourse. At the same time, I feel that it would have been much more helpful if the lecturer had dealt in particular with the Scriptural aspect of the subject. For instance, we read of evil conscience, vile conscience, and serene conscience. Of the child of God we read: "good conscience," "pure conscience," and "conscience void of offence." If I listen when the voice of Conscience speaks within, then that voice will speak again. If I refuse to listen to that voice, the probability is that I shall silence it, and it will not speak again. But—and here I must somewhat disagree with the previous speaker—an important thing to remember is that man is a fallen creature, and therefore Conscience alone is not a reliable guide. I wish to refer to two remarks, one at the foot of page 142:

"The spark of conscience, which was not extinguished in man by the Fall,"

and the other at the top of page 143:

"A fundamental capacity for perceiving moral values, unaffected by the Fall."

As to the first statement, I entirely agree ; it was not altogether extinguished by the Fall. With the latter I disagree ; it was, I believe, affected by the Fall. Witness, for example, the case of Saul of Tarsus. Saul tells us : " I verily thought within myself I ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth." He was acting according to his conscience when fighting against God, and probably it was the same thing in the case of the murderers of Christ, and hence the last prayer : " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Peter referred to the same thing when, preaching to the same murderers, he said : " Brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it." So, when all is said, I believe Conscience is only an infallible guide when it is guided by the Word of God, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God. It may be that that is referred to in the last line but one of the paper, " Conscience informed with knowledge."

Mr. E. WALTER MAUNDER, F.R.A.S. : I have read the paper with exceeding interest. It deals with a difficult subject in a very courageous but careful manner, and I felt some fear that in the short time in which we had to study it, some of us might miss the precision with which Mr. Webb has developed the various stages of his argument. Mr. Webb has been careful throughout his paper to define each point in succession as he raised it. May I take, as an example, Miss Hodgkin's protest on the part of the Quakers ? I believe that we all had a personal sympathy with her in her apologia for the Quaker position. But I do not think Mr. Webb intended to attack it. If I turn back to the foot of page 148 I find that Mr. Webb says in effect that the Quaker cannot claim from the State that form of protection which his own conscience leads him to denounce as sinful.

" He may be a martyr for righteousness, but a victim of tyranny he is not."

There is a great distinction between the two. Perhaps an illustration will serve as a definition better than a good deal of argument. If we turn to the Acts of the Apostles we find that very soon after the day of Pentecost the Apostles were taken before the Sanhedrim and forbidden to preach, and then scourged. They did not complain about the scourging ; they accepted that with joy because they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for Christ. They suffered for His

sake gladly. Some years afterwards St. Paul was at Philippi, and the military authorities seized him and Silas, and had them cruelly scourged, and thrust into prison, without any form of trial, but simply to please the mob. Against this act of tyranny St. Paul protested strongly, and not without success. So far as I know, the Quakers have themselves always observed the same kind of distinction. The Quakers, as Miss Hodgkin has reminded us, helped many slaves to escape when slavery existed in the United States. They protested against slavery, but when they were sent to prison or were fined for helping slaves to escape, they submitted to the authority of the State peaceably and went to gaol and paid the fines without a protest. That is a consistent attitude.

I think some points raised by other speakers were due to want of time for the careful reading which this most careful paper demanded, a paper for which I feel that we are much indebted to the lecturer. Two statements which I have marked as being of first importance are on page 144 :

“ In the last resort we must see for ourselves that a proposition is true or an action right. We must see it, I say, for ourselves ; but we can only see it for ourselves because it is so independently of our seeing it.”

I think those sentences are well worth our keeping in constant memory.

Mr. JOSEPH GRAHAM : I should like to add a tribute to the excellence of the paper. Mr. Collett got near the line of thought which I wish to emphasize. That is, concerning the conscience that is misleading. We know men do very extraordinary things in the name of Conscience ; and so far as the definitions I have heard have gone, I see no reason to suppose that men are not quite conscientious in doing those things. There seems to me, therefore, to be some other quality coming in. Conscience, no doubt, is an inward voice speaking to everyone, and if that voice is listened to in a regenerate heart it will lead right, but not necessarily with the majority. How, then, to reconcile the majority to the individual ? That is a point I should have liked Mr. Webb to deal with.

Mr. M. L. ROUSE, B.A., B.L. : Professor Orchard, I think, criticised Mr. Webb a little needlessly in saying that, when he spoke of liberty of conscience, he associated Conscience always with action.

The fact is that the writer of the paper started by saying that Conscience was a quality, but that it was exemplified by action ; and what we meant by liberty of conscience did not mean liberty to have conscience, but liberty to act according to individual conscience. The point was whether one should allow liberty to act upon what man thought to be right in every case. Conscience was not defined as action. It was defined as something previously existing, and exemplified by action.

On the other hand, I would like to offer a few criticisms. We are told that personification of Conscience is found in Paul, but I can only discover two instances in which Paul can be said to have personified Conscience. The first is that in which he says : " My conscience also bearing me witness " (Romans ix, 1). The other case is where he is speaking to the heathen, and says, " Their conscience bearing witness " (Romans ii, 15). Otherwise, I cannot find that the apostle Paul personified Conscience. It might equally be said that John did so when he wrote : " They went out one by one, convicted by their own conscience." That might be held to be personification, but in neither case can you be positive. It might simply be the realizing through the faculty of conscience.

I thought the brief letter from Dr. Schofield, summing up the three faculties, the intellectual, the æsthetical, and the moral, was excellent ; and to me it commends itself, and is surely right. I believe with Mr. Collett that we all have a conscience, and Butler proved that by taking an extreme case. He said : " Is there any heathen tribe, however base, which would not condemn the action of a man who did a vile turn to someone who had saved his life ? " There is no tribe who would not condemn that. If Conscience did not exist, they might equally say it was right or wrong. There would be nothing to decide it in their minds.

The CHAIRMAN : It is now my pleasing duty to ask you to pass by acclamation a vote of thanks to the very able and talented (though not apparently altogether convincing) author of the paper to which we have had the great pleasure of listening. As my earlier observations have been a little discussed by one or two gentlemen, for whom I feel respect, perhaps I may be allowed to say that when the Apostle speaks of a good conscience and of an evil conscience, he means a conscience that approves, and a conscience that

disapproves. The statement of St. Paul that: "I verily thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth" wants looking into a little bit. "Verily I thought within myself." "I reasoned within myself."

Taking Conscience to be what most people mean by it, it is not merely a moral faculty, but an intellectual judgment as well, as to whether an action is good or right. This is exactly what I dissent from. I say Conscience is nothing but a moral faculty which intuitively compares moral qualities and their opposites with the moral standard, the divine law, approving or disapproving; I limit Conscience to that. If you bring in also inferences drawn by the intellectual judgment, and call the compound thing Conscience, you will get into serious difficulties, and your Conscience will certainly be a fallible thing. The categorical imperative, as Kant calls it, that we should do right and avoid wrong—is the function of Conscience. It is the production of a good will, that is, will which will continually go with the right, never with the wrong. That is what I understand by Conscience. "I verily thought within myself." It was not his conscience told him to do that. It was his mistaken judgment, his mistaken reasoning. What did his conscience tell him to do? His conscience told him he should have sought in prayer to God to know the right. That is what Conscience told him to do, and what it tells every human being to do. I should define Conscience as the faculty of Duty.

LECTURER'S REPLY.

I thank you for the kind vote of thanks you have given me. In the short time that remains I shall not be able to deal with all the interesting points that have been raised. Mr. Maunder's apologia for me on the subject of what I said respecting the Society of Friends is one which I completely accept. It was far from my wish to minimize the immense services which the nation, the Church, and the whole of the human race owe to the Society of Friends in many directions. I did not wish for a moment to deny that, while at the same time contending, as I still do, that there is the distinction that Mr. Maunder discovered in my paper, and pointed out.

I should like to say something with regard to the three faculties that Dr. Schofield mentioned, but must forbear. I do not think that

anything I said about Conscience should be construed to exclude or to be inconsistent with the doctrine of the categorical imperative. I always think there is something misleading about the dual quality of God and ourselves.

With regard to the personification of Conscience, I should, perhaps, accept the correction that I did not perhaps mean to say that all the passages in St. Paul were properly described as personification. I meant rather what I call the use of Conscience in the absolute sense. The word is found only in St. Paul. The only other thing I would wish to say is with regard to the passage at the bottom of page 142 and the top of page 143. I do not venture here to express a view one way or the other upon the difficult problem about the Fall. I am not stating my own opinion, but simply describing or giving the contents of the passage by Jerome, whom I was quoting.

Thanking you once more for your kindness in listening to the paper and your criticisms of it.

The Meeting adjourned at 6.20 p.m.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.

Rev. JOHN TUCKWELL, M.R.A.S., wrote :—

The Institute is greatly indebted to Mr. Webb for his learned and thoughtful paper. It is necessary to emphasize, as he has done, the fact that the conscience is as much a faculty for "perceiving moral values" as the eye is for perceiving colours. It is not the mere expression of "the average opinion of society." There is what may be called an average conscience, but there is also a superior conscience, and all great struggles for reform are struggles between the two. There was a time when the average conscience cried out against the Supreme Conscience "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

The average Judaic conscience scattered the Apostles from Jerusalem. The average pagan conscience flung the Christians to the lions. The average Romish conscience tortured "heretics" with thumbscrew, rack and fire; and in each case this went on until the superior conscience won in the struggle.

Mr. Webb is mistaken in his exposition of Passive Resistance.

The appeal of the resisters was not to "a recognized principle of the British Commonwealth—that of the equality of religions before the law" (p. 150). There is no such "principle," there is no such "equality." The resisters appealed to an authority beyond the State; and, like Daniel of old, refused to take a willing part in what they regarded as hostile to the interests of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, they acknowledged the authority of the State over their goods, and took the consequences. It was thus a conflict of the superior conscience against the average conscience.