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978-1-108-00413-8 - The Constitution of Man: Considered in Relation to External Objects

George Combe

Excerpt

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**ESSAY**

ON THE

**CONSTITUTION OF MAN,**

AND ITS RELATIONS TO EXTERNAL OBJECTS.

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CHAPTER I.

ON NATURAL LAWS.

**A** STATEMENT of the evidence of a great intelligent First Cause is given in the “Phrenological Journal,” and in the “System of Phrenology.” I hold this existence as capable of demonstration. By **NATURE**, I mean the workmanship of this great Being, such as it is revealed to our minds by our senses and faculties.

In natural science, three subjects of inquiry may be distinguished. *1st*, What exists? *2dly*, What is the purpose or design of what exists; and, *3dly*, Why was what exists designed for such uses as it evidently subserves? For example,—It is matter of fact that arctic regions and torrid zones exist,—that a certain kind of moss is most abundant in Lapland in mid-winter,—that the rein-deer feeds on it, and enjoys high health and vigour in situa-

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tions where most other animals would die ; further, it is matter of fact that camels exist in Africa,— that they have broad hooves, and stomachs fitted to retain water for a length of time, and that they flourish amid arid tracts of sand, where the reindeer would not live for a day. All this falls under the inquiry, What exists ? But, in contemplating the foregoing facts, it is impossible not to infer that one object of the Lapland moss is to feed the reindeer, and one purpose of the deer is to assist man : and that, in like manner, broad feet have been given to the camel to enable it to walk on sand, and a retentive stomach to fit it for arid places in which water is not found except at wide intervals. These are inquiries into the use or purpose of what exists. In like manner, we may inquire, What purpose do sandy deserts and desolate heaths subserve in the economy of nature ? In short, an inquiry into the use or purpose of any object that exists, *is merely an examination of its relations to other objects and beings, and of the modes in which it affects them ;* and this is quite a legitimate exercise of the human intellect. But, *3dly*, we may ask, Why were the physical elements of nature created such as they are ? Why were summer, autumn, spring, and winter introduced ? Why were animals formed of organized matter ? These are inquiries why what exists was made such as it is, or into the will of the Deity in creation. Now, man's perceptive faculties

are adequate to the first inquiry, and his reflective faculties to the second ; but it may well be doubted whether he has powers suited to the third. My investigations are confined to the first and second, and I do not discuss the third.

A *law*, in the common acceptation, denotes a rule of action ; its existence indicates an established and constant mode, or process, according to which phenomena take place ; and this is the sense in which I shall use it, when treating of physical substances and beings. For example, water and heat are substances ; and water presents different appearances, and manifests certain qualities, according to the altitude of its situation, and the degree of heat with which it is combined. When at the level of the sea, and combined with that portion of heat indicated by 32° of Fahrenheit's thermometer, it freezes or becomes solid ; when combined with the portion denoted by 212° of that instrument, it rises into vapour or steam. Here water and heat are the substances,—the freezing and rising in vapour are the appearances or phenomena presented by them ; and when we say that these take place according to a Law of Nature, we mean only that these modes of action appear, to our intellects, to be established in the very constitution of the water and heat, and in their natural relationship to each other ; and that the processes of freezing and rising in vapour are

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their constant appearances, when combined in these proportions, other conditions being the same.

The ideas chiefly to be kept in view are, *1st*, That all substances and beings have received a definite natural constitution; *2dly*, That every mode of action, which is said to take place according to a natural law, is inherent in the constitution of the substance, or being, that acts; and, *3dly*, That the mode of action described is universal and invariable, wherever and whenever the substances, or beings, are found in the same condition. For example, water, at the level of the sea, freezes and boils, at the same temperature, in China and, in France, in Peru and in England; and there is no exception to the regularity with which it exhibits these appearances, when all its conditions are the same: For *cæteris paribus* is a condition which pervades all departments of science, phrenology included. If water be carried to the top of a mountain 20,000 feet high, it boils at a lower temperature than  $212^{\circ}$ , but this again depends on its relationship to the air, and takes place also according to fixed and invariable principles. The air exerts a great pressure on the water. At the level of the sea the pressure is nearly the same in all quarters of the globe, and in that situation the freezing points and boiling points correspond all over the world; but on the top of a high mountain the pressure is much less, and the vapour not being held down by so

great a power of resistance, rises at a lower degree of heat than  $212^{\circ}$ . But this change of appearances does not indicate a change in the constitution of the water and the heat, but only a variation of the circumstances in which they are placed; and hence it is not correct to say, that water boiling on the tops of high mountains, at a lower temperature than  $212^{\circ}$ , is an exception to the general law of nature: there never are exceptions to the laws of nature; for the Creator is too wise and too powerful to make imperfect or inconsistent arrangements. The error is in the human mind inferring the law to be, that water boils at  $212^{\circ}$  in all altitudes; when the real law is only that it boils at that temperature, *at the level of the sea*, in all countries; and that it boils at a lower temperature, the higher it is carried, because there the pressure of the atmosphere is diminished.

Intelligent beings exist, and are capable of modifying their actions. By means of their faculties, the laws impressed by the Creator on physical substances become known to them; and, when perceived, constitute laws to them, by which to regulate their conduct. For example, it is a physical law, that boiling water destroys the muscular and nervous systems of man. This is the result purely of the constitution of the body, and the relation between it and heat; and man cannot alter or suspend that law. But whenever the human intellect per-

ceives the relation, and the consequences of violating it, the mind is prompted to avoid infringement, in order to shun the torture attached by the Creator to the decomposition of the human body by heat.

Similar views have long been taught by philosophers and divines. Bishop BUTLER, in particular, says:—“ An Author of Nature being supposed, it “ is not so much a deduction of reason as a matter “ of experience, that we are thus under his govern- “ ment, in the same sense as we are under the go- “ vernment of civil magistrates. Because the an- “ nexing pleasure to some actions, and pain to “ others, in our power to do or forbear, and giving “ notice of this appointment beforehand to those “ whom it concerns, *is the proper formal notion “ of government.* Whether the pleasure or pain “ which thus follows upon our behaviour, be owing “ to the Author of Nature’s acting upon us every “ moment which we feel it, or to his having at once “ contrived and executed his own part in the plan “ of the world, makes no alteration as to the matter “ before us. For, if civil magistrates could make “ the sanctions of their laws take place, without “ interposing at all, after they had passed them, “ without a trial, and the formalities of an execu- “ tion ; if they were able to make their laws execute “ themselves, or every offender to execute them “ upon himself, we should be just in the same sense

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“ under their government then as we are now ; but  
 “ in a much higher degree and more perfect man-  
 “ ner. *Vain is the ridicule with which one sees*  
 “ *some persons will divert themselves, upon find-*  
 “ *ing* LESSER PAINS CONSIDERED AS INSTANCES OF  
 “ DIVINE PUNISHMENT. THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY  
 “ OF ANSWERING OR EVADING *the general thing here*  
 “ *intended*, WITHOUT DENYING ALL FINAL CAUSES.  
 “ For, final causes being admitted, the pleasures  
 “ and pains now mentioned must be admitted too,  
 “ as instances of them. And if they are, if GOD  
 “ annexes delight to some actions, with an apparent  
 “ design to induce us to act so and so, then he not  
 “ only dispenses happiness and misery, but also re-  
 “ wards and punishes actions. If, for example, the  
 “ *pain which we feel upon doing what tends to the*  
 “ *destruction of our bodies*, suppose upon too near  
 “ approaches to fire, or upon wounding ourselves,  
 “ *be appointed by the Author of Nature to prevent*  
 “ *our doing what thus tends to our destruction ;*  
 “ this is ALTOGETHER AS MUCH AN INSTANCE OF HIS  
 “ PUNISHING OUR ACTIONS, and consequently of our  
 “ being under his government, as declaring, by a  
 “ voice from Heaven, that, if we acted so, he would  
 “ inflict such pain upon us, and inflict it whether  
 “ it be greater or less \*.”

If, then, the reader keep in view that GOD is the

\* BUTLER'S Works, vol. i. p. 44. Similar observations by other authors will be found in the Appendix, No. I.

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creator; that Nature, in the general sense, means the world which He has made; and, in a more limited sense, the particular constitution which he has bestowed on any special object, of which we may be treating, and that a Law of Nature means the established mode in which that constitution acts, and the obligation thereby imposed on intelligent beings to attend to it, he will be in no danger of misunderstanding my meaning.

Every natural object has received a definite constitution, in virtue of which it acts in a particular way. There must, therefore, be as many natural laws, as there are distinct modes of action of substances and beings, viewed by themselves. But substances and beings stand in certain relations to each other, and modify each other's action, in an established and definite manner, according to that relationship; altitude, for instance, modifies the effect of heat upon water. There must, therefore, be also as many laws of nature, as there are *relations* between different substances and beings.

It is impossible, in the present state of knowledge, to elucidate all these laws; countless years may elapse before they shall be discovered; but we may investigate some of the most familiar and striking of them. Those that most readily present themselves bear reference to the great classes into which the objects around us may be divided, namely, Physical, Organic, and Intelligent. I shall



therefore confine myself to the physical laws, the organic laws, and the laws which characterise intelligent beings.

*1st*, The Physical Laws embrace all the phenomena of mere matter ; a heavy body, for instance, when unsupported, falls to the ground with a certain accelerating force, in proportion to the distance which it falls, and its own density ; and this motion is said to take place according to the law of gravitation. An acid applied to a vegetable blue colour, converts it into red, and this is said to take place according to a chemical law.

*2dly*, Organised substances and beings stand higher in the scale of creation, and have properties peculiar to themselves. They act, and are acted upon, in conformity with their constitution, and are therefore said to be subject to a peculiar set of laws, termed the Organic. The distinguishing characteristic of this class of objects, is, that the individuals of them derive their existence from other organised beings, are nourished by food, and go through a regular process of growth and decay. Vegetables and Animals are the two great subdivisions of it. The organic laws are different from the merely physical. A stone, for example, does not spring from a parent stone ; it does not take food from its parent, the earth ; or air ; it does not increase in vigour for a time, and then decay and suffer dissolution, all which pro-

cesses characterize vegetables and animals. The organic laws are superior to the merely physical. For example, a living man, or animal, may be placed in an oven, along with the carcass of a dead animal, and remain exposed to a heat, which will completely bake the dead flesh, and yet come out alive, and not seriously injured. The dead flesh is mere physical matter, and its decomposition by the heat instantly commences; but the living animal is able, by its organic qualities, to counteract and resist, to a certain extent, that influence. The expression Organic Laws, therefore, indicates that every phenomenon connected with the production, health, growth, decay and death of vegetables and animals, takes place with undeviating regularity, whenever circumstances are the same. Animals are the chief objects of my present observations.

*3dly*, Intelligent beings stand still higher in the scale than merely organised matter, and embrace all animals that have distinct consciousness, from the lowest of the inferior creatures up to man. The great divisions of this class are into Intelligent and Animal—and into Intelligent and Moral creatures. The dog, horse, and elephant, for instance, belong to the first class, because they possess some degree of intelligence, and certain animal propensities, but no moral feelings; man belongs to the second, because he possesses all the three. These various faculties have received a definite constitution from