

Dr. Patton on the Metaphysics of Oughtness.

DR. FRANCIS L. PATTON contributes to the current number of the *Presbyterian Review* an article on "The Metaphysics of Oughtness." We shall try to give a bare, but, we hope, not inaccurate outline of this paper.

Dr. Patton contends at the outset that experiential philosophers have failed in their attempts to derive the idea of oughtness from simpler elements. This idea is an ultimate psychological fact. The fact has a metaphysical aspect. By this is meant that the idea of oughtness is found among the *a priori* elements of knowledge. Like the ideas of Space, Time, Cause, Substance and Personal Identity, the idea of moral obligation is not derived from, but is one of the conditions that render experience possible. If the idea of oughtness is an *a priori* belief its consideration belongs to Metaphysic and not to Psychology. For this latter is an empirical science. Besides these *a priori* elements of knowledge, Metaphysic includes Ontology, the science of Being. There are included in Metaphysic (1) an explanation of *a priori* elements of knowledge; (2) a theory of the universe. Since these are included in the same science, any explanation of the idea of moral obligation must give an account of its relation to theories of the universe. Of these theories the chief are: (1) the Materialistic; (2) the Pantheistic; (3) the Theistic. If either of the first two theories be accepted, then Freedom of the Will is destroyed and the idea of moral obligation vanishes. The third theory alone correctly interprets oughtness. And the idea of oughtness corroborates the Theistic theory. The moral argument to the Divine existence is, in our author's opinion, altered but not destroyed by the assumption of the truth of the evolution theory. Even if that theory were true, "there is a teleology in human history and in the upward movements of the human spirit that finds no adequate explanation except through the hypothesis of an infinite God." Turning to seek an interpretation of the idea of oughtness, Dr. Patton objects to Kant's interpretation: (1) that it in the end lands us in Utilitarianism of the Benthamic type; (2) that Kant in making the autonomy of the will, "the sole principle of all moral laws and of all duties which conform to them," leaves no room for a moral standard of universal authority. After all, in following Kant's lead, we are brought to the choice of one of the alternatives: (1) the abandonment of *a priori* morality, (2) deference to an external will. Since empiricism does not account for the idea of oughtness as it exists, the latter of these alternatives must be chosen as the true interpretation of moral obligation.

Those who heard Dr. Patton's lecture on "The History of Theistic Beliefs" scarcely need to be told of the clearness and virility of his style. In the article in the *Review* there is not a single obscure or superfluous sentence. We cannot do better than advise our readers to peruse with attention this paper, expressing as it does the views of an acute and independent thinker on a most important subject.