A STUDY OF SCEPTICISM
IN MORALS.

by
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Idea of the "good" varies in time - in place - between individuals. The Sophists - individualism and nihilism - later Sophists carried earlier ideas to the extreme.

Montaigne - a sceptical humanist - uncertainty in everything - ideas of morality vary more than anything. Psychological hedonism - a sceptical theory. Hobbes - self-love is the basis of everything - self-preservation the greatest good - origin of the commonwealth - right in the commonwealth.

Mandeville - Morality has been imposed artificially - there is no real virtue - society really depends upon vice. Modern scepticism - implications of the Darwinian theory - faith weakened - the "gladiatorial theory of existence" - heredity all powerful - Free Will non-existent. Nietzsche - a "Transvaluation of Values" necessary - man a "sick" animal - rules of conduct foisted upon him - man grows ever "better".

Scepticism of the twentieth century - a result of the nineteenth century - influence of the idea of "Relativity" - each may decide for himself - modern moral scepticism depends upon the old arguments.

Scepticism of the average man usually based on Psychological hedonism. Argument rests on confusion between feelings
and objects of action - "pleasure in idea" to be distinguished from "idea of pleasure". Instinctive action is towards its object. A great deal of action is from habit - almost neutral for pleasure and pain. Acts of kindness spring from natural disposition - to be distinguished from those performed from a sense of superiority. Weakness of "selfish" theory most apparent in treatment of self-sacrifice - performance of duty may be a true motive. Pleasure may become a secondary motive. - exclusive pleasure-seeking is self-defeating. Confusion in the word "please". Modern psychology recognizes a variety of motives - subconscious impulses affect action - desire is not self-regarding only - pleasure determines the way rather than the end of action. Social psychology shows the inadequacy of an individualistic theory - natural tendencies promote the good of the race - sympathy is powerful. Narrow idea of self at the bottom of the theory.

Chapter iii. pages 35 - 42.

Evolutionary concept affected ethics - exaggeration of importance of "natural selection". Nietzsche - life is an expression of the "Will to Power" - man is but a bridge to "beyond-man" - pity is the most dangerous thing in the world - preserves the weak. Nietzsche opposed to sentiment and hypocrisy - his individualism counteracts romantic theories of the state - his philosophy is forward-looking - in progress much must be discarded - path to the higher is not easy. Progress for Nietzsche a smashing of all the old ideas - over-
looked co-operation seen in all natural development - solitary 
man is fictitious - altruistic instincts are not morbid. 
Society is not unnatural - may even set man free. Each stage 
in development is worth while. Moral practice precedes theory. 
Progress is in the direction of altruism. Nietzsche's account 
of Christianity is unfair. We may be superior to the natural 
process of development.

Chapter iv. pages 43 - 50.

Moral principles are not universal - Montaigne inferred 
conduct is a matter of caprice. There is an underlying 
unity. Science changes - progresses gradually towards truth - 
this does not destroy its validity. Morality too progresses - 
each new stage must build on the old. Historical relativity 
and individual relativity are not the same - the present sys­
tem is binding. - we cannot go back to a lower stage.

Necessity of moral leaders - originality is a part of "good­ness" - intelligence is needed to effect changes. Sceptics 
insist that they feel no obligation - probably mistaken -
none really cut themselves off. Answer to scepticism - belief 
in progress - a gradual realization of the good.
Chapter 1.

THE CHIEF ARGUMENTS OF MORAL SCEPTICISM.

"Nothing in the world varies so much as law and custom" and "There is no extreme which has not been accepted by some nation as common custom," said Montaigne. That which one age or one race holds to be good and desirable, a later age or another race often condemns with the utmost severity. Human sacrifice has been made not only by savages; there are evidences that it was the custom among the early Greeks and Romans, and as late as the last century among certain Hindu sects.* Spartan law ordered the exposure of weak infants. To the stoics, suicide might be honourable but this attitude was relentlessly opposed by the Christian church. By the Papal bull "Ad extirpanda", promulgated in 1252, the Church approved the use of torture for the discovery of heresy. Slavery was abolished in the United States of America less than a century ago.

* Essais ii - ch.xii - Apologie à Raimond Seiliand - p.261.
Nor is uniformity of opinion to be found in any particular age. The Chinese and the Hindus of today condemn Western ideas of the place of women in society and the Western nations in turn view Oriental nations with suspicion. The modern Eskimo is said to abandon the aged and weak when they impede progress, but we provide hospitals and charitable institutions.

Even amongst ourselves we find differences. To some, war is utterly abominable, not to be countenanced at all; while to others with an equally strict ethical code, the taking up of arms is quite justifiable. The right is often claimed today to end the lives of those afflicted with painful and incurable diseases but to many this differs not a whit from ordinary murder. The practice of vivisection has its supporters and also its bitter opponents.

These are but a few of the examples of the variety to be found in moral theory and practice. It was John Locke who said "Whether there be any such moral principles wherein all men do agree, I appeal to any who have been but moderately conversant in the history of mankind and looked abroad beyond the smoke of their own chimneys. Where is that practical truth that is universally received without doubt or question .....?" Pascal exclaimed "The meridian decides the truth. Right has its epochs. The entrance of Saturn

'John Locke - An Essay Concerning Human Understanding - Book 1. Ch. iii. p.35.'
into the sign of the lion marks the origin of a certain crime. Wonderful justice which is bounded by a river! Truth on this side of the Pyrenees, error on that!"

Here scepticism makes its appearance. If different ages fail to agree as to what is right, if those living have varying ideas, who is to decide between them? One advances just as strong arguments as the other. The average man's ideas of right and wrong seem to be determined by nothing more authoritative than the general state of opinion of the community in which he happened to be brought up. Then, are they binding upon him? There are fashions in virtue, and the qualities commended to-day will probably be discarded to-morrow. It would seem that each is at liberty to decide his own conduct; in other words that there is nothing objective about morality. "There is nothing right or wrong but thinking makes it so". Morality is an idol created by man himself and therefore he owes it no devotion.

The Greek sophists were probably the first systematically to question the existence of a moral law. Appearing in Athens at about the beginning of the fifth century B.C., a time of remarkable intellectual growth, they originally claimed to be teachers of virtue. The earlier Sophists did not cast doubt on the accepted moral system. That was left to their later disciples who concluded from the apparent freedom of nature

Pensées - Ch. iv - Quoted in Janet "The Theory of Morals" p. 310.
and the varying customs of men that law is nothing but the embodiment of the will of the rulers, and that notions of good and bad, right and wrong have no meaning beyond individual preference.

While the first Sophists did not question the objectivity of morality, they prepared the way for those who did, by stressing the subjective character of knowledge. Protagoras, born at Abdera about 440 B.C., probably influenced by the Heraclitean doctrine of the flux of all things, maintained that "Man is the measure of all things, of the existence of things that are, and of the non-existence of things that are not." 1 It is but a step from this to maintaining that the good is that which is good for each individual — a step, however which Protagoras did not take. Gorgias, the next great Sophist, went farther than Protagoras and taught that "Nothing exists; if anything did exist it could not be known by us; and lastly if anything were known it could not be imparted" 2. While Protagoras might be termed an individualist, Gorgias was a nihilist.

The possibility of knowledge having been called into question, morality was next attacked. Hippies, a younger contemporary of Protagoras concluded that the law of the state was wholly arbitrary and that there was no such thing as a

universal, natural right, valid in itself. He is said to have studied nature and to have been interested in the customs of the barbarian nations. It was probable such study that led him to his sceptical conclusions. Polus and Thrasymachus, also younger Sophists, are supposed to have agreed with him.

The later Sophists carried scepticism and individualism to the extreme. "Man is the measure of all things". They interpreted it as meaning that no one could know anything beyond his own sensations and that these provided the only standard of judgment. 'Let each be guided by his senses only', was their rule of conduct.

Callicles in Plato's "Gorgias" expressed the later Sophistic view when he said "But if there were a man who had sufficient force, he would shake off and break through and escape from all this; he would trample under foot all our formulas and spells and charms, and all our laws which are against nature."

The beginning of the Modern Age is marked by the rise of Humanism, the study of the Litterae Humaniores. This zeal for the Classics had varying effects. With some it led to a revival in philosophy; with others it took the form of a sceptical revolt against scholasticism.

Michel Eyguem de Montaigne (1533-1593) was a sceptical humanist. The tide of the Renaissance had swept over Europe in

when he lived and wrote. As in Periclean Athens, so in sixteenth century France, the bounds of learning had been enlarged tremendously and men were now disposed to put to question the knowledge which they had acquired.

Only forty years before Montaigne's birth, the new world had been discovered. In 1543, when he was ten years old, "The Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies" was published - Copernicus' great work, which literally turned men's thoughts about the world upside down. Just sixteen years before Montaigne was born, Luther nailed his famous ninety-five theses to the door of the church at Wittemberg. The counter reformation under Ignatius de Loyola began during his lifetime. At such a time when almost everything which had ever been thought true, was being contradicted, it is little wonder that there was scepticism. Copernicus had revolutionized scientific thought, Columbus geographical, and, what was perhaps most influential of all, the authority of the Church had been disputed. Montaigne himself always professed to be a good Catholic, but it has been well said that his faith was "a screen for scepticism .... a convenient shelf on which to lay mystery and to keep it from disturbing existence."

Montaigne did not call himself a sceptic but such he was. His "Essais" do not pretend to be a systematic argument for any particular point of view, but they are full of observations of the weakness and uncertainty of intellect. The longest of

1 Edith Sichel - Michel de Montaigne - p. 245.
them "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" is nothing but a collection of sceptical arguments. Yet even in it Montaigne refrained from labelling his attitude. With apparent detachment, rarely abandoned, he set down examples of contradictions to be found in every field of knowledge, noting how the individual judgment varies according to the mood, health and other such factors. Of the geo-centric theory he said "All the world believed it so until it occurred to Cleanthes the Sàmiens or Theophrastus Nicetatas of Syracuse, to declare that it was the earth that moved - and in our own time Copernicus has established this doctrine so that it is regularly of great service in all astronomical results. What do we gather but that it ought not to matter to us which of the two theories we accept? And who knows but that a third opinion a thousand years from now may not upset the two earlier ones?"

If Montaigne was able to multiply examples of differences in perception and reasoning, he found it no less possible to do so in regard to morality. Having enumerated many contradictory notions of good conduct he ridiculed those who sought for some common principle in them. "But they are amusing when to give some certainty to the laws, they say there are some fixed, perpetual and immutable which they term natural, that are implanted in men by their very nature; of these, some make three, some four, some more, some less; an indication that this is a proof as doubtful as the rest. Now they

Essais - ii - ch. xii - p.246.
are so unfortunate (for how can I name it other than unfortunate, that out of so infinite a number of laws there is not at least one that the hazard and recklessness of fate has permitted to be universally received by the consent of all nations?) - they are, I say, so unhappy, that out of these three or four laws chosen there is not a single one which is not contradicted and disavowed not by one nation but by several. Now this, apparently the only token by means of which they can point out natural laws - namely universality of approval. For that which nature has truly ordained for us, we follow undoubtedly by common consent; and not only every nation but every single man would resist with all the strength and force that he could, that which would drive him against this law ..... There is nothing in the world which differs so much as custom and law; a thing in one place is called abominable which in another is praised.....There is no extreme which has not been accepted by some nation as common custom."

Montaigne's comment on his own conduct is interesting, "My virtue is a virtue, or rather an innocence which is purely random and accidental......By lucky chance I come of a race famous for its honour and of an excellent father. I know not whether some part of his tastes have passed into me or whether home example and the good teaching I had in my childhood have

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Essais ii- Ch. xii - p. 261.  
Essais ii - ch. xi - De la Cruaute - p. 34.
helped me without my being aware; or else whether I was born thus; but anyway I hold most vices in abhorrence."

The realization of the diversity of custom has frequently resulted in a rejection of all attempts at formulating a system of ethics. Equally sceptical conclusions have been arrived at from the contemplation of human nature. It is a common assertion that man is utterly selfish; that he never acts from any motive other than a desire for his own pleasure; that conscious action seeks pleasure as its sole end. There is no distinction between egoism and altruism. Altruism is egoism which happens to benefit others. "Nature has placed man under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do."²

Psychological hedonism is a sceptical theory destroying the ordinary notions of good and evil by identifying the one with pleasure and the other with pain. It denies the possibility of all noble conduct, converting it into an egoistic search for pleasure.

It may be maintained that a similar scepticism underlies the view that it is reasonable to submit to the moral law because it ensures happiness in another existence. "Virtue is doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God and for the sake of everlasting happiness."³ Paley held that the only

¹Essais ii - ch.xi - De la Cruauté - p. 34.
The difference between prudence and virtue was that "in the one case, we consider what we shall gain or lose in the present world, in the other case, we consider also what we shall gain or lose in the world to come." Another writer with similar views went so far as to maintain that a man "doing all for the glory of God" must first convince himself that he is "acting most for his own benefit." As Sir Leslie Stephen said of this prudent attitude "God has spoken from this utilitarian Sinai and declared that vice is a bad speculation."

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1670) accepted the hedonistic explanation of conduct and reared upon it a complicated civil philosophy. Hobbes' great works were written during the English Civil War which explains a good deal of their character. In time of war humanity does not always appear in the most favorable light and scepticism is not unusual.

Hobbes was deeply interested in Galileo's work in the realm of mechanical physics. Just as Galileo by his contributions to the study of dynamics, was the founder of the new natural philosophy, so Hobbes regarded himself as the founder of civil philosophy or the science of the state. In building his philosophy, he determined to use strictly mathematico -

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physical methods, advancing step by step from the original definitions. Thus his work is essentially materialistic.

The constituent parts of the state are human beings, and so Hobbes investigated human nature before treating of the state. With Galileo's work in mind, he made motion the original principle of all things and defined all mental states, emotions, thoughts and feelings as the appearances of motions within the body. Pleasure, he said, was "a corroboration of vital motion and a help thereunto" while pain was a hindrance to it; and so all action was to be thought of as an attempt either to obtain pleasure or to avoid pain. "First I conceive that when it cometh into a man's mind to do or not to do some certain action, if he have no time to deliberate, the doing or abstaining necessarily follow the present thought he hath of the good or evil consequence thereof to himself.... Secondly I conceive, when a man deliberates whether he shall, do a thing or not do it, that he does nothing else but consider whether it would be better for himself to do it or not to do it." This means that there is no difference between instinctive and deliberate action since in every case, pleasure is aimed at, consciously. Hobbes considered it possible to trace back every emotion to the original elements of pleasure and pain. For example, pity is "grief for the calamity of another and ariseth from the imagination that the

1 Leviathan - M.iii -ch.vi- p.42.
2 Liberty and Necessity- M.iv - p.272.
like calamity may befall himself" while courage is "aversion
with the hope of avoiding hurt by resistance."

Hobbes held that the sole distinction between good and
evil was to be found in the fact that by nature one seeks
pleasure and avoids pain. "But whatsoever is the object of
any man's appetite or desire, that it is which he for his
part calleth good, and the object of his hate and aversion,
evil, and of his contempt vile and inconsiderable. For these
words of good and evil, and contemptible are ever used with
relation to the person that useth them, there being nothing
simply or absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil
to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves." This
view of morality is quite as individualistic and subjective
as anything ever held by the Sophists.

Since man has but one motive, it follows that it is his
right by nature to seek first that state in which there is the
greatest possibility of pleasure, and to avoid with every
means in his power the state in which there is no further pos­
sibility of it. Self-preservation, then, is the greatest good
and is the original principle of civil philosophy as motion is
of natural philosophy. "And forasmuch as necessity of nature
maketh men to will and desire bonum sibi, that which is good
for themselves, and to avoid that which is hurtful; but most
of all the terrible enemy of nature, death, from whom we ex­
pect both the loss of all power, and also the greatest of
bodily pains in the losing; it is not against reason that a

Leviathan-ch.vi-p.43. Leviathan-ch.vi - p.41.
man doeth all he can to preserve his own body and limbs both from death and pain. It is therefore a right of nature that every man may preserve his own life and limbs with all the power he hath."

The picture drawn by Hobbes of the "Natural condition of mankind" is pessimistic in the extreme. Since every man is continually striving "with all the power he hath" to secure his own happiness and to preserve his own life, a good deal of the strength of each is necessarily devoted to overpowering others who stand in the way of his happiness. The result is confusion and conflict and a state in which settled life of any sort, industry, the arts and letters are impossible. The state of nature is one of war - "bellum omnium contra omnes" - the more intense as "men have no pleasure, but on the contrary a great deal of grief in keeping company where there is no power able to overawe them"2

But such a state of war is the one thing most inimical to self-preservation, the law to which all are subject. For in it there is the continual possibility of violent death; nor can a man if he escapes death, be sure of being allowed to enjoy life, for others seeking their own pleasure will be almost sure to deprive him of his. And so the natural life of man is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

Thus reason demands that men should come to an agreement

1 Human Nature - M.iv - p. 83.
2 Leviathan - ch. xiii - p.117.
amongst themselves in order to secure the peace necessary for self-preservation and that each man should "be contented with so much against other men, as he would allow other men against himself." The only reasonable way to guarantee the continuance of peace is to invest the rights of all in the person of one, the sovereign "to the end that he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient for their peace and common defence." Undoubtedly it was his deep aversion to the civil strife that led Hobbes to maintain that subjects owe their sovereign unquestioning allegiance. "For it hath already been shown that nothing the sovereign representative can do, on what pretence soever, can properly be called injustice or injury; because every subject is author of every act the sovereign doeth." While in the state of nature, right and wrong have no meaning apart from individual desires and aversions, in the commonwealth, right is that which is according to the will of the sovereign and wrong is that which is contrary to it.

The fact that Hobbes laid down a great number of duties of citizens in the commonwealth does not deprive him of the title of moral sceptic. He did not believe that morality springs from man's nature, but rather that it is foreign to him and imposed from without from purely utilitarian considerations.

'Leviathan- ch.xiii - p.113.
1Ibid.- ch.xiv - p.118.
3Ibid.- ch.xxi - p.199.
Hobbes' pessimistic views could not fail to call forth opposition and for long after he died the work of British moralists consisted chiefly in attempts to refute his theory. The Earl of Shaftesbury's "Inquiry Concerning Virtues and Merit" one of the most optimistic of these, caused Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733) to reply with "The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits." Mandeville was at the opposite extreme from Shaftesbury. He was not a great theorist like Hobbes but he was quite as pessimistic and a good deal more impudent.

He, too, contended that morality is not natural but has been artificially imposed by society. However he was more suspicious of the origin of the state than was Hobbes. For instead of saying that men entered it by contract he maintained that they were tricked into it by clever moralists, law-givers and philosophers, and that rules of conduct are nothing but the means whereby man is made submissive. "The chief thing therefore which the lawgivers and other wise men, that have laboured for the establishment of society have endeavoured, has been to make the people they were to govern believe, that it was more beneficial for everybody to conquer than to indulge their appetites and much better to mind the public than what seemed to be their private interest." To find a way of making men believe this was the moralists' first task. "They thoroughly examined all the strength and
frailties of our nature and observing that none were so savage as not to be charmed with praise, or so despicable as patiently to bear contempt, justly concluded that flattery must be the most powerful argument that could be used to human creatures."

"Silly" man swallowed the bait of flattery and entered society. Once he was inside, it was much easier for the rulers to keep him "moral" for he soon observed that good conduct was advantageous; it protected him from the sometimes painful consequences of his own rashness and it served to restrain others who in their natural state would have molested him. In view of this latter consideration, the common man adopted the method of flattery and praised in his fellows any qualities which he thought would increase his own safety and well being. Hence society's power of coherence.

Mandeville was utterly sceptical of the existence of any genuine virtue. He asserted that "there is no merit in pleasing ourselves," but insisted that that is all we ever do. So-called "virtue" is a mere pretence to cloak selfishness. He used the illustration of a mother sacrificing herself for her child. Even the "vilest women" are capable of this, he said. While to most this would seem to imply that there is good even in "vile" women Mandeville's interpretation was that everyone is bad and altogether selfish.

Ibid.

The Fable of the Bees.

Ibid.
In a short doggerel poem he explained the alternative title "Private Vices, Public Benefits" by showing that a hive of bees, originally wicked and prosperous became impoverished when they reformed. By this he wished to illustrate his favorite contention, that while virtue in the common man is useful to the rulers, yet it is upon the vices such as selfish extravagance that society is really founded and that in them it finds its real strength.

Modern scepticism had its origin chiefly in the intellectual developments of the last century when tremendous advances were made in every branch of science. In the year 1859, Charles Darwin published his "Origin of Species." The revolutionary theory was not a new one; it is apparent in earlier thought as far back as the Greeks. But it was Darwin who gave it the stamp of scientific authority and made its general notions at least familiar to the man in the street. Various implications of evolution were construed by some as being destructive of all ethical theory.

In the first place it not only altered religious beliefs but it even deprived many of any faith whatsoever. These people would have been in complete agreement with La Place who when asked by Napoleon where God came into his theory, replied "Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis." Atheism was by no means confined to scientists but it spread everywhere, notably in the literary world.

'See A.W.Benn-"The History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century"-Vol. ii- ch.xvi.
To some the change appeared to be a release but to as many others it brought despair.

"Eat, drink and die, for all are soul bereaved:
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope
We are most hopeless who had once most hope,
And most beliefless that had most believed."

W.K. Clifford, the brilliant mathematician attacked any belief in God with a vigor that often amounted to ferocity. It was his proposal to substitute for it the cultivation of "Cosmic Emotion" - "an emotion which is felt in regard to the universe or the sum of things, viewed as a cosmos or order." Unfortunately such a substitution was not likely to prove attractive to the average mind and so it was that "there were thousands of minds anxious for faith yet unable to secure anything that could be said to be more than a tremulous hope."

Traditional religious belief overthrown, it is little wonder that many thought that traditional morality could be dispensed with too. It was not, however, the great opponents of religion who proposed to banish morality, but certain of their imitators. While the only sanction for morality is not to be found in religion, yet a general weakening of established faith always affects morality adversely; for the average man scarcely distinguishes the two.

2 Lectures and Essays - Vol. ii - p. 357.
3 W.H. Hutton - Criticisms on Contemporary Thought and Thinkers.
The evolutionary concept showed man as a mere speck in a vast inexorable movement and it made his conduct seem of but slight importance.

"Why should we bear with an hour of torture, a moment of pain

If every man die forever, if all his griefs are vain."  

It will have no significance in the end.

"And Hope will have broken her heart running after a shadow of good."  

It is useless to strive for perfection for "Man will go down to the pit and all his thoughts will perish... "Imperishable monuments' and 'immortal deeds', death itself and love stronger than death, will be as though they had never been. Nor will anything that is be better or worse for all that the labour, genius, devotion and suffering of men have striven through countless ages to effect."  

Apart from religious considerations there were other implications of "Darwinism" that might seem to be destructive of morality. Such was Huxley's opinion when he wrote "As I have already urged, the practice of that which is ethically best - what we call goodness or virtue - involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence."  

While

1 A. Tennyson-Despair - Quoted in Hutton-Contemporary Thought and Thinkers - Vol.ii - p. 201.
2 Ibid.
3 A. Balfour- The Foundations of Belief - p.29.
Huxley accepted the ethical code, and thought that it ought to oppose the ruthlessness of the evolutionary process, there were not wanting those who accepted "the gladiatorial theory of existence" and repudiated ethics.

Darwin's theory stressed heredity and on this score too, morality was held irrational. It was a popular inference that heredity determined character, in which case moral law was superfluous.

The bare possibility of any decision between right and wrong was often challenged by able thinkers. Free will became a term for theologians only. Clifford described the human being as an "automaton" but he was satisfied that this did not destroy ethical distinctions. But to lesser minds this might not appear to be the case. "Why should they refuse to wind up the automaton, say with whiskey or any other watchkey, that might seem most attractive, if they confidently held that whatever it was they might do, they would do as inevitably as a clock goes right or wrong."

The great nineteenth century antagonist of accepted moral codes was Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche seems to have carried the Darwinian "survival of the fittest" to its logical conclusion, though he himself always affected to despise Darwin.

It was Nietzsche's contention that the morality of the day was nothing but the sickly, effeminate code of Christianity that had unfortunately triumphed over the freer, nobler
life of earlier days. What was needed, he said, was a "Transvaluation of values." In other words "slave morality", as he called it, must go to make way for the super-man. "Mankind, en masse, sacrificed in order to ensure the growth of a single stronger species of man - that would be progress." He characterized the super-man as the "solitary beast of prey, species of man" whose morality involved a "triumphant Yea-saying" to himself. For him there existed no distinctions of right and wrong. "To speak of right and wrong in itself is altogether meaningless; in itself the act of injuring, violating, exploiting, destroying can of course not be anything wrong inasmuch as life essentially, i.e in its fundamental functions, works injury, violation, exploitation and destruction and cannot be conceived of as otherwise." ² "When mankind did not as yet feel ashamed of its instincts, life on earth was more pleasant than it is now there are pessimists." ³

And what have we in place of this "noble" morality? Nothing but "sickly effeminacy and moralization by means of which the animal man is taught to feel ashamed at last of all his instincts." ⁴ Man, a sick animal has turned "all those instincts of wild, free, roving man" in upon himself. His love of inflicting suffering has made him make himself suffer and

² Genealogy of Morals. (trans. Haussman and Gray) -p. 94.
³ Genealogy of Morals - p. 90.
⁴ Ibid. - p. 76.

Ibid. - p. 76.
Ibid. - p. 104.
"this is the origin of 'bad' conscience!"

It was also the origin of religion. Man in his natural and noble state hated society. When sick depression came upon him he turned "instinctively" to gregarious organization. This gave the "ascetic" priest his opportunity to offer man a cure. The cure consisted in submission to certain rules of conduct which labelled some things as "right" and "good", others as "wrong" and "evil" and for the first time suggested the antithesis between "selfish" and "unselfish".

Man accepted the "cure" and though the wily priest has persuaded him that he is now happier for it, in reality his sickness has increased with the growth of conscience. When the civilizing process began, some free spirits remained outside and for long spurned "slave" morality. The numbers of them grew less and less until at the conversion of the Roman Empire their kind disappeared entirely except for a rare individual (such apparently as Nietzsche thought himself).

"We see nothing to-day which will grow larger; we divine that it still goes downwards, ever downwards, downwards into the thinner, the more good-natured, the more prudent, the more comfortable, the more mediocre, the more indifferent, the more Chinese, the more Christian. Man no doubt grows ever better." ¹

¹Ibid. — p. 104.
"Genealogy of Morals — p. 104.
²Ibid. p. 42
The scepticism of the twentieth century does not differ greatly in its basis from that of the nineteenth. The Great War intensified but did not alter it.

Formerly men clung to certain ideals in the form of religion, government, philosophy and tradition but "the nineteenth century snatched these buoys from the sea of life because they shut off the horizon, limited freedom, dwarfed the world and man was put face to face with the infinite". So far nothing has been put in their place and man drifts rather aimlessly. Even the pursuit of scientific truth is not a substitute for the old traditions for the attainment of truth has never seemed so impossible. Nineteenth century science seemed to promise emancipation in a realm of mathematical certainty; but to-day science means "Relativity." The average man is bewildered but just as in the last century he made a craze of heredity, to-day he is trying to apply the notions of relativity to everything, including morals.

Largely because the nineteenth century destroyed the old structures, and partly because the plain man is speculating about Relativity, there is to-day a widespread distrust of anything resembling a system. The modern fears to be tied. He demands the right to try everything. He feels he is not one self but several and "each self, he perceives, has as good a right to exist as the others." Consistency is not to be desired; it belongs to the "old fashioned" virtues and

respectability of which the modern is rather contemptuous, agreeing with Shaw's character that the "old" morality means that "The more things a man is ashamed of, the more respectable he is."

But with all his disillusionment and individualism the modern, when pressed for reasons, uses the old arguments. Just like Montaigne and the Sophists he appeals to the diversity and variety of custom and opinion and from it deduces the uncertainty of moral obligation; or like Mandeville and Hobbes he insists upon the utter selfishness of all creatures and pours scorn upon the virtues as being nothing but carefully considered means of attaining selfish ends.

1Man and Superman - p. 13.
Chapter 2.

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEDONISM AND THE SELFISH THEORY.

If the average man happens to be a moral sceptic it is not usually because he has reflected on the relativity of morals shown in the variety of custom to be found between different ages and different races. This may never have occurred to him. His scepticism rests on the belief that all men are selfish, and that all action, even the most "altruistic," is done either to gain pleasure or to avoid pain. One man is a miser because it gives him pleasure to accumulate money; another is generous, that generosity will afford him pleasure. A third is cruel because it pleases him to inflict suffering; while yet another is kind because the thought of others in pain causes him such acute anguish that he must rid himself of this uncomfortable feeling. None is concerned about anything but the state of his own feelings.

To tell the average man that his views are based on an outworn psychology does not impress him greatly. He knows little or nothing about psychology and is probably very suspicious of its findings, preferring to appeal to "common-sense" which, according to him, is something quite different.

The whole argument of psychological hedonism rests on a confusion which can be made apparent even to "common-sense". It is quite true that most of the things which we pursue give us pleasure, and that if they gave us pain we should probably
avoid them. But this does not mean that it is the pleasure itself which is pursued. The things for which we strive are objects, not feelings. To attain them is pleasant, but this pleasure presupposes the existence of the desire for the object. Feelings cannot be separated from the actions which they accompany and therefore it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make them the sole ends of conduct. "That all particular appetites and passions are, towards external things themselves, distinct from the pleasure arising from them, is manifested from hence, that there could not be this pleasure, were it not for the prior suitableness between the object and the passion." Eating is pleasant because it is the satisfaction of the desire for food.

The same is true of the more complicated impulses. For example, a man wishes to have a beautiful garden. He has a picture of it in his mind, and this drives him on constantly to its attainment. Because of it he is willing to spend what may be tedious hours in digging and weeding. Undoubtedly the thought of the garden as it will be, gives him pleasure and the pleasure lightens his labour but what he desires primarily is the garden. Because he does desire it, the thought of it is pleasant.

Pleasures and pains are the feeling-tones accompanying action, and, because they are ever present in greater or less degree, the confusion of them with motives is so often made.

Butler-Sermon xi The Love of Our Neighbour p.486.
The thought of the object to be obtained is pleasing. We take pleasure in the idea but as has often been pointed out "pleasure in idea" is quite different from the "idea of pleasure." A woman may take pleasure in the thought of caring for her child, but it is not the idea of this pleasure that moves her but the thought of the actual needs of the child.

Instinctive action directs itself towards its object without any thought of attendant consequences. One who is hungry eats if he can. He wants food. The pleasure of eating may not occur to him. However it is possible that he will reflect on it, and in this case the "idea of pleasure" is part of the motive, but it is unnatural for it to be all of it. The fact that in the past eating has turned out to be pleasant most certainly predisposes one to it again; the idea of pleasure reinforces the original impulse.

It may be objected that instinctive action is something over which we have no control, but that action on a higher level is always for pleasure. But if one considers the daily round of his life, he must admit that ordinarily he acts without a thought of such results. He runs to catch the street-car because he wants to catch it, not because it will give him a comfortable feeling when he has caught it. When he arrives at work he goes through the usual round with scarcely a thought to consequences. Most of our ordinary activity is like that. We do it because it is a matter of habit. "Such an action is induced by the sense impressions of the moment;
they bring into play the specialized conative disposition which is the habit". When habits are being formed motives are considered. The first time the man ran for the streetcar, he probably thought much more definitely of the necessity of being at work. His work, when he thinks about it, he realizes is done partly for its own sake and partly to provide the means of sustenance for himself and his family. He does not see to it that his wife and family are fed and clothed because it would give him pain if they were not, although undoubtedly it would do so. He does it simply because he wants them to be fed and clothed. He desires their well-being in itself, and not merely as a means to his own satisfaction.

While much of our action is according to habit and almost neutral as far as pleasure and pain are concerned, we do not always behave like machines. We may go out of our way to be kind to others. The cynic attributes this either to a desire for public approval or to the knowledge that benevolence will impart a glow of self-righteous feeling. Undoubtedly acts of kindness are not neutral as to pleasure. To be considerate always gives pleasure to the ordinary human being; but this is due to the fact that kindness may be just as truly a part of human nature as any selfish impulse. The generous man acts as he does because it is his nature to do so. To twist his deeds into a deliberate search for selfish pleasure
is absolutely unwarranted. There are those who are charitable because such action gives them a feeling of superiority, but it is not hard to distinguish from the truly generous.

The weakness of the "selfish" explanation of human nature is most apparent when its upholders attempt to explain deeds of self-sacrifice. It is true that "the history of their psychology affords examples of expository contortion of natural processes numerous enough to stock the largest museum of pathological curiosities," According to them, a soldier exposes himself to the enemy bullets because it gives him more pleasure to do so than to be branded a coward. One member of a family sacrifices his chance of an education to another for the pleasure which his "unselfishness" will give him. The martyr goes to the stake because it would give him more pain to recant than to be burned. Each one of these, the soldier, the brother or sister, and the martyr, before sacrificing himself took time to make a careful estimate of the consequent pains and pleasures of the alternative courses open to him. Then he chose the one in which pleasure predominated.

This sounds absurd. Anyone who would weigh pains and pleasures in such a fashion is not normal; he is indeed "a pathological curiosity." And yet the question may be asked "Is the thought of failure not more unpleasant than the thought of sacrifice?" The answer is "Yes". The neglect of

J. Martineau p Types of Ethical Theory - Vol.ii - p. 269.
duty or failure to realize one's ideals is always painful, just because one does possess a sense of duty and ideals. The martyr prefers his course though the thought of life may tempt him very strongly. It is doing him an injustice to say that he would recant if he did not fear to lose his place in heaven. There have been atheist martyrs. The martyr, religious as well as atheist, because his faith or his conception of right is dearer to him than life. The only satisfactory way of explaining such preferences is to admit that there are within a man impulses which may he directed towards the well-being of others or to the advancement of causes quite apart from considerations of his own happiness.

One of the chief reasons for the popularity of psychological hedonism is the fact that while desires direct themselves towards objects, yet when their fulfillment is definitely pleasant as it often is, then the original desire is greatly strengthened. Pleasure may then become a secondary motive. In some cases it is the most important motive, but exclusive pleasure-seeking is abnormal and self-defeating. In fact it is scarcely possible. Even the most selfish people desire objects and not mere pleasure. Selfishness lies in the nature of the object desired. The hedonistic paradox arises from the fact that pleasure cannot be separated from its object, and thus can never successfully be made into a goal.

There is considerable confusion attaching to the use of the word "please." It may have nothing to do with "pleasure."
Most people, as we say, "do as they please". This expression however usually means that they "do as they choose." Choice, as we have seen, may be of either selfish or unselfish ends.

The entire pleasure-pain theory is disposed of by William James in these words; "A pleasant act and an act pursuing a pleasure are in themselves, however, two perfectly distinct conceptions, though they coalesce in one concrete phenomenon whenever a pleasure is deliberately pursued. I cannot help thinking that it is the confusion of pursued pleasure with mere pleasure of achievement which makes the pleasure theory of action so plausible to the ordinary mind. We feel an impulse, no matter whence derived; we proceed to act; and if hindered we feel displeasure; and if successful relief. Action in the line of present impulse is always for the time being the pleasant course; and the ordinary hedonist expresses this fact by saying that we act for the sake of the pleasure involved. But who does not see that for this sort of pleasure to be possible, the impulses must be there already as an independent fact? The pleasure of successful performance is the result of the impulse, not its cause. You cannot have your pleasure of achievement unless you have managed to get your impulse under headway beforehand by some previous means."

Modern psychology recognizes a great number of motives to action whereas psychological hedonism admits only those of pleasure and pain. An important new development is the real-

ization of the part played by unconscious impulses. We are not the cool calculating machine that Bentham believed us to be: "The lower brain centres are always receiving sensory impressions and sending out motor impulses that are never associated with our conscious life. Many of our thoughts and decisions are determined in large measure by previous subconscious experiences."

Behaviour is "a persistent trial or striving towards an end." It has three main stages, desire, deliberation and choice. Modern psychology recognizes that desire may vary. "It may arise at any mental level. There are e.g. sensuous desires, imaginal desires, rational desires, ideal or sentimental desires, and impulsive desires. In every case there is an object in mind not immediately realized, but tinged with feelings of attraction." This disposes of the theory that desire is self-regarding only. "Deliberation" and "choice" refer to the means used to bring about the desired end. The fact that they are necessary is due to the complexity of the neural pathways. "Volition is selective because it tends to bring about the fittest actions, instead of the most obvious."

The importance of pleasure and pain in deciding conduct is not denied by the psychologist. He admits their power to

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2 Wm. McDougall - An Introduction to Social Psychology - p. 305.
stamp in or to inhibit courses of action. On the whole, pleasure and pain determine the way in which an end is to be achieved, not the end itself. Thus altruistic action is quite possible. "Every emotion has a potential disinterestedness, so far as among the stimuli which excite it are some which excite it on behalf of another individual instead of on behalf of ourselves."

Social psychology has dealt with the "selfish" theory its most severe blow. The fact that such a science is necessary to explain even the individual nature shows the mistake made by Hobbes and others who thought of man as being "solitary" by nature. There are no evidences as yet discovered by anthropologists that men ever did live alone. Society has not been imposed artificially; it has grown from man's very nature. It is not a necessary evil which it was found expedient to adopt. The individual and the group cannot be separated for purposes of examination without leading to false conclusions. Both interested and disinterested motives operate in the lives of everyone. "The whole tendency of modern biology and comparative psychology is to regard these two types of impulse as equally fundamental or primary. All impulses we may say are directed upon their objects." Our natural tendencies promote not only the good of the individual but also that of the race.

"Sympathy" is now admitted to be an important part of man's natural endowment. In its passive form it shows itself in what McDougall calls the "sympathetic induction of emotions."

M. Ginsberg - The Psychology of Society - p. 16.
or feeling". The laughter of one person may send a whole crowd into fits of mirth. The sight of one gloomy face depresses everyone. Sympathy, however has an active side. It does not end in sentimental pity where such a feeling has been aroused. The helplessness and the misfortune of others are powerful means of rousing action.

The "Selfish" doctrine assumes a sharp antithesis between "selfish" and "unselfish," "egoistic" and "altruistic." These sharp distinctions depend upon a narrow view of the "self" as something rigid and unchanging and distinctly separated from the rest of the world. But as a matter of fact it is hard to say where "self" ends and "non-self" begins. Selves grow. They expand and tend to take in a great deal of what was once simply "environment." A man not only feels that his family and friends are a part of him but he includes anything in which he is deeply interested. Thus practically anyone or anything may be a matter of as much concern as the original "I". A man is not condemned as "Selfish" when he strives with all his power for a cause with which he has identified himself. There is no special virtue in upholding something which means nothing to one. The egoistic man is the one whose self is narrow and shrunken while the self of the altruistic man may extend almost indefinitely.
Chapter 3.

EVOLUTIONARY SCEPTICISM.

During the last half of the nineteenth century the evolutionary concept made its way into every branch of knowledge. Not only did it affect biology, but it revolutionized the prevailing ideas of psychology and economics and to a large extent upset ethical theory. In the latter field it frequently showed itself in an exaggeration of the importance of natural selection in the inevitable survival of the fittest. Nature in her inexorable move upwards shows no mercy to the weak; only the strong survive. But man has seen fit to try to alter this. He protects the weak; but as a result of opposing nature he is enfeebling the race. He attempts to justify his behaviour by appealing to his religious beliefs or his moral convictions. Any such attempts to contradict nature we are told, are doomed to failure. Religion and morality must go.

Nietzsche exhibited this point of view in its most striking form. "Life, he said, is an expression of the Will to Power". Nature is absolutely ruthless and so must man be. Man is not the goal of evolution, he is but a bridge to "beyond-man."

"What with man is the ape? A joke or a sore shame. Man shall be the same for beyond-man, a joke or a sore shame."

Thus Spake Zarathustra - p. 7.
Pity is the most dangerous thing in the world. Like all other attributes of "slave-morality" it serves only to preserve the weak and to retard progress.

Nietzsche was bitterly opposed to all sham and hypocrisy whether in religion or anywhere else. Of scholars, he said "when they give themselves the air of wisdom, I grow cold with their petty sayings and truths." Of the "manufacture of ideals" he had this to say, "and impotence which required not is to be falsified into "goodness", timorous meanness into 'humility', submission to those whom one hates into 'obedience!" Exaggerated and highly coloured as were all Nietzsche's statements, they cannot but shake the complacent out of their repose and force them for the time at least to be honest with themselves. They are a call to strength and a condemnation to sentimentality.

His extreme individualism was founded on a false psychology, but nevertheless it is an antidote for much of the nonsense that has been propounded about the state. Many theories, recognizing the fact that society is not a mere aggregate of individuals, have gone to the opposite extreme and treated it as something mystical far transcending the human creatures within it.

Nietzsche's philosophy is forward-looking in contrast to one which stagnates by drawing only on the wisdom of the past.

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]
\begin{itemize}
  \item The Genealogy of Morals - p. 71
  \item The Genealogy of Morals - p. 2147
\end{itemize}
"Your children’s land shall ye love (be this love your new nobility!) the land undiscovered in the remotest sea! For it I bid your sails seek and seek:"

It is perfectly true that in the march of progress much that heretofore has been prized must be destroyed, as useless impediments. "And who must be a creator in good and evil—verily he must first be a destroyer and break values into pieces." When tradition is valued for itself alone, it is not merely cramping, but it destroys all life and energy. When any institution has outgrown its usefulness, it is folly to preserve it. "What is falling already, shall be struck down."

The path to higher things, Nietzsche always insisted, not an easy or pleasant one. It involves suffering and any who try to evade this law of nature must be content with "mediocrity" and a thin meaningless existence.

When Nietzsche spoke of progress, he was not thinking of a gradual development from good to better. He meant the smashing of all the old ideas of "slave" morality which he believed to have been drawn principally from Christianity. He visualized a return to an extreme individualism and an abandonment of the entire social structure.

Nietzsche and all other advocates of "ruthlessness" saw only one side of the "survival of the fittest." What they

1 Thus Spake Zarathustra - p. 278.
2 Thus Spake Zarathustra - p. 157.
overlooked was the fact that there is a co-operation as well as rivalry even in the lowest forms of nature. If there were rivalry only, everything would perish, even the fittest. "The more one thinks of it the more he will see that conflict and co-operation are not separate things, but phases of one process which always involves something of both. Life seen largely, is an upward struggle in which now one of these phases, and now another, may be more conspicuous, but from which neither can be absent."

The solitary man, as far as we know, has never existed outside the pages of fiction. Man is a gregarious animal. To deny the operation of this instinct would be a very decided "Nay-saying" to the self. The same is true of all the altruistic instincts. They are not morbid. They are part of man's natural endowment, and may be just as truly products of evolution as the purely egoistic impulses. Nature's concern is largely for the preservation of the race not the individual. Thus egoism by itself is a contradiction of nature.

Many of those who have attacked the ethical codes of man have maintained that they were built on flattery. Such was Mandeville's contention. It cannot be denied that man is highly susceptible to praise and blame from his fellows. As William McDougall has said "The strength of the regard men pay to public opinion, the strength of their desire to secure the approval and avoid the disapproval of their fellow men, goes beyond all rational grounds; it cannot be wholly ex-

plained as due to regard for their own actual welfare or material prosperity, or to the anticipation of the pain or pleasure that would be felt on hearing men's blame or praise. It has played an important part in raising the level of human conduct. But this does not mean that action in reference to it is hypocritical. It simply means that a man cannot help paying heed to what others think. Man's sensitivity to these influences is not dying out; it is probably increasing. In other words it is doubtful whether there ever could be a proud, contemptuous creature who would go on his way utterly unconcerned with the opinions of others. At any rate there could not be many such individuals.

To those intoxicated by the apparent freedom of nature, society has seemed nothing but a system of restrictions. And yet there is a good deal of truth in the saying that "the state sets the mind free by promoting a growing sensitiveness and intelligence in ordering its social connections." If it were possible for everyone to live apart from society, it is not hard to see that existence would be very much as Hobbes depicted the natural condition of mankind," namely as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short," Such a state could hardly be called free. It would seem that if man is to be free even to exert his "Will to Power" he must admit some sort of organization. As has been pointed out,

1 Introduction to Social Psychology - p.163.
2 W.E. Hocking - "Men and the State" quoted in Dunham - "Principles of Ethics" - p. 133.
man, absolutely unrestrained, becomes not "superman" but "sub-man".

Another thing forgotten by Nietzsche and his followers is the fact that the present stage of development has its own worth. For example, the doctrine of the value of each stage asserts that childhood is something in itself and is not a mere preparation for adult life. Thus all childish activities have their own meaning and are not to be discouraged simply because they may not have any reference to later life. In the same way as far as man himself is concerned he is not a mere "bridge" any more than the ape is "a joke or a sore shame" to itself.

Because of man's inherited social capacity morality is not the cramping, unnatural set of restrictions that Nietzsche believed it to be. In the whole treatment of the question Nietzsche assumes that moral theory preceded moral practice. This was not so, however. For example, men did not agree in an arbitrary fashion that murder and stealing were to be called wrong, for which reason those who stole or committed murders were ever afterwards to be punished. What did happen was such acts were found to be detrimental to the group and for that reason they were condemned. On the other hand, such deeds as those of self-sacrifice were found to contribute to the general welfare. Therefore they were called "good". Conduct always came first, as the natural interplay between man and his environment. Only later was it made into a
Man's natural development beyond any doubt, has been in the direction of greater kindness. He possesses altruistic tendencies which are natural, though not as numerous, as his egoistic impulses. It is irrational to laud natural development and then ask man to suppress all but the egoistic side of nature.

The account of Christianity given by Nietzsche is quite unfair. He presents it only in the perverted forms which have at times characterized its history; never does he come to grips with Christianity itself. He pours scorn on the extreme asceticism of the Dark Ages as though that were a true and complete representation of the system. Self-denial and sacrifice are commended by the church as means to higher ends, not as ends in themselves. Nietzsche sets Christianity in direct opposition to normal self-love forgetting that one of its commands is "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Above all he condemns Christianity as a comfortable and easy belief which has been adopted by the weak to compensate them for their inferiority. The fact that Christianity demands a hard and a heroic way of life never seems to have occurred to him. "Quit you like men; be strong" is a Christian exhortation.

All who have attempted to prove that "natural selection" means the end of ethics, have fallen into a grave error. They have all assumed that if nature is absolutely relentless and
altogether cruel, then man must be so too. They forget that man can, if he so desires, be superior to nature and can bring this conflict under rational control. He need not acquiesce in it if it runs counter to what he thinks ought to be. The advocates of "ruthlessness" forget that natural selection is chiefly physical, and that, if all infants were subjected to extreme rigours, some of the cleverest might die; nor would those left be any better for having undergone such a process. Many of the world's greatest men, not only scientists, but soldiers, have not been strong physically. What is needed to produce a strong race is moderate severity, not excessive harshness. "Selection by a merely brutal struggle (which even among the animals is, in fact, modified by mutual aid) is out of place, retrogressive, impossible on a huge scale in human society; and a biology intelligent enough to grasp the implications of the social process must reject it."
Chapter 4.

THE RELATIVITY OF MORALS.

The discovery of conflicting ideas of the "good" often leads to a revolt against all ethical codes. Morality is not universal; therefore it is not valid, is the claim of the sceptics.

Montaigne thought that the diversity of custom proved conduct to be nothing but a matter of capricious choice. If a people, like the Spartans, were fond of stealing, they praised clever thieves. If another group had a taste for human flesh, cannibalism was a virtue among them. Chance preference has always determined the distinctions between right and wrong.

Many have followed Montaigne in holding that morality is but a set of conventions with no deeper meaning than the rules which determine the proper use of a knife and fork. They have all failed to see that common elements can be traced in all attempts at formulating rules of conduct. Thieving was not commended by the Spartans simply for itself, but because the practice of it tended to develop qualities valuable in a warlike state. Cannibalism may have arisen in a time of famine or it may have been a result of war. In any case, it was connected originally with the notion of tribal welfare. Today, stealing is detrimental to society and it is condemned.
The widening of sympathy beyond the tribe or even the nation, even in the absence of any other reason, would forbid cannibalism. The Eskimo abandons the feeble and aged, because attempts to preserve their lives would probable end in the extinction of the tribe. Our form of life is different. We are not nomads and the weak are not the same burden to us. That, coupled with the increase of the altruistic sentiments, causes us to care for them. The common element in all these cases is the subordination of the lower to what is held to be higher.

Travellers to other countries nearly always return with tales of the striking differences between foreign ideas of right and wrong and our own conception of them. In great part this is due to a natural tendency to notice anything that is unusual. Visitors to an Asiatic country, are more apt to notice one case of a baby being thrown into a river than they are to pay any heed to a thousand cases of children who are cared for by their parents.

It is significant that although China and Japan were until comparatively recently isolated from the Western nations, yet their virtues are very similar to our own.

Nevertheless it cannot be denied that moral theory and practice does present a tremendous diversity and that a common principle is often difficult to find. But any branch of science is in the same position. Chemistry is very different to-day from what it was a hundred and fifty years ago when
the idea of phlogiston served to explain combustion, and when
the newly discovered oxygen was so named because it was thought
to be a constituent of every acid. Almost from day to day
physical and chemical concepts undergo change. Astronomy has
abandoned countless explanations of the heavenly bodies.
Even to-day, outstanding authorities have different ideas as
to the nature and content of the universe. And yet no one
infers from these facts that science is doomed or that it can
be dispensed with. Everyone recognizes that it is developing
gradually in the direction of a complete explanation of
natural phenomena. The fact that it may never reach that ex-
planation does not destroy its validity. There is no proof
of a strictly mathematical sort that such is the case, or
that modern ideas of the world are any truer than were those
of the ancients. No one demands such a proof or doubts that
scientifically we are at least on the right road.

Why should morality be any more static than science?
Our ethical ideas, like our chemical and physical concepts,
are developing. Just as science need not be rejected because
of its imperfections, neither is it reasonable to discard
morality because it has of necessity often changed its stand-
ards. If it did not change them, it would certainly perish.
The moral law is not a statement of qualities that are always
right no matter what the circumstances. It is impossible to
give it a fixed content. All the universality it has lies in
the statement that the higher ought always to be sought in
preference to the lower. What is higher or lower upon the circumstances of life. From our point of view, it is wrong to abandon the weak, but from the Eskimo point of view it is right. This does not mean simply that we think it wrong while the Eskimo thinks it right. What it does mean is that in relation to one situation it is one thing; in relation to another its value changes. We can never put ourselves exactly in the position of savages and so their ideas can never be right for us. We have advanced from their position. Nor have we arrived at the absolutely "good", and we must continue to advance. A "transvaluation of values" is always necessary but not one such as Nietzsche proposed. Moral progress does not mean the complete annihilation of all former values. It means building on them or reconstructing them to fit new conditions. The formulation by Dalton of the Atomic Theory did not mean that all the chemistry that had gone before was to be swept away, any more than the acceptance of the electron theory has separated the modern scientist from the past. True progress depends upon intelligent use of the old in relation to the new.

Ethical relativity is often used by the individual to justify absolute license on his part. But as Urban points out "historical relativity" is not the same thing as "individual relativity." After all relativity means relativity to something, in this case to the environment. For example an individual might argue that there is no guarantee that in the
future, rights of property will exist; therefore he is under no obligation to refrain from appropriating whatever of his neighbour's possessions chance to take his fancy. But whether he is willing to admit it or not, he is under an obligation. As society is at present constituted, the rights of private property ought to be respected. Their fate in the future is another question. If one admits that we are all part of a great movement, he cannot claim the right to stand outside that movement, or to anticipate its direction unless he is a moral genius.

Similarly the notions of right and wrong held by other nations cannot be imported, just as they are, into our system. Because it is the custom in China for a young woman to be the slave of her mother-in-law, it cannot be inferred that young women in this country ought to occupy the same position. Nor, on the other hand, can we condemn the Chinese system simply because it differs from our own.

Those who interpret relativity as meaning complete freedom from control, are often guilty of advocating a return to lower standards. "The wisdom of the ages" is not a mere expression. It represents something which must be taken into account. Man is constantly struggling to adapt himself intelligently to his environment. In so doing, he has learned much. He has discovered the advisability of abolishing some practices; and to readopt is to start once again the process of discovering their inadequacy.
Nevertheless there is constant need for leaders who have the courage and the intelligence to break away from old forms. Society does not remain in one place for long. It moves on constantly. And so fresh standards are necessary all the time. To be "good" does not mean to copy in faithful detail some cherished model. Those who in the past were noted for their "goodness" were in some way or other original. They were not satisfied to let things rest as they were. "A new commandment give I unto you..." In every age some few men see more clearly than the rest of humanity the inadequacies of the prevailing system. "Where such men are powerful or persuasive they may indeed bring about a transvaluation of values; they may create a new morality. There are geniuses of the moral as well as the intellectual life, whose sudden insight becomes a standard for succeeding generations."

The moral geniuses of the past have destroyed and rebuilt intelligently. There are many who would like to be our leaders but few of them are fitted for the task. Unfortunately most of them are ready to discard what we have but, either because they lack ability or because they lose their first enthusiasm, few of them offer anything worth while to take its place. It is as though someone full of indignation at the squalor of slum-dwellings were to set fire to them all, but fail to provide their former inhabitants with new shelters. Even a poor dwelling is better than none at all.

'T. Edman - Human Traits and their Social Significance-p.423.
The moral sceptics are in the habit of telling us that, since they have discovered the origin of conscience, they feel themselves no longer bound by it. Even though the rest of the world believes that morality is reasonable, they themselves feel no obligation to order their conduct by any rules of ethics. A logical refutation of their view is probably impossible. All that is left is to observe their conduct to see if it is as free as they believe it to be. As a matter of fact, it is not. In practically every case they will be found to be labouring under some sense of duty, even if it be only the conviction that they ought to spread their views. No man ever really cuts himself off from the group to which he belongs. Nietzsche, for all his individualism, was a man of extremely kind heart. It is said of him that he always tried to keep his writings secret from his mother because he knew that the views expressed in them would grieve her. As a child he was known as "the little parson" because of his unusually strict views; this attitude was retained throughout his life. Much the same is true of his less gifted followers who boast loudly of their emancipation. Few of them could bring themselves to commit murder, even though it should remain undiscovered. Any who did would be certain to suffer remorse. The only humans who can separate themselves from their fellows and who are utterly without a feeling of moral obligation are the insane or feeble-minded - a fact testified to by modern psychiatry.
The only answer to moral scepticism is the idealistic one that we are progressing to better things; that our ethical systems are not arbitrary codes, to be shattered at will, but that they are necessary steps towards higher values; and that their imperfections correspond to our own.

That we are actually progressing is often questioned. Few would go back to the system of torture of the middle ages, nor would they care to see a revival of the intolerance of those days. It is doubtful whether any past age, impartially examined, could be proposed as a substitute for our own. Those who advocate a return to the past usually have romantic ideas about it. One of the reasons why we are so dissatisfied with modern conditions is that moral sensitiveness has developed much faster than it has been possible to put it into practice. We see faults that our ancestors would never have noticed. This wide gap between theory and practice gives the impression that we have gone back, not forward. Our very dissatisfaction with ourselves proves that we have a capacity for higher things.

From the conception of progress we draw the conclusion that the validity of ethical precepts does not require that they be universal. With change there must be diversity. Just as nature has made differences between individuals, races and countries, so there must be differences in conduct and behaviour. But these differences need not blind us to the fact that there is an underlying principle and that all of them are attempts, in their own time and place, to realize the good.
REFERENCES.


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