

Intelligence and Morals¹

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(53)

The division of mankind into the two camps of the redeemed and the condemned had not needed philosophy to produce it. But the Greek cleavage of men into separate kinds on the basis of their position within or without the city-state was used to rationalize this harsh intolerance. The hierarchic organization of feudalism, within church and state, of those possessed of sacred rule and those whose sole excellence was obedience, did not require moral theory to generate or explain it. But it took philosophy to furnish the intellectual tools by which such chance episodes were emblazoned upon the cosmic heavens as a grandiose spiritual achievement. No; it is all too easy to explain bitter intolerance and desire for domination. Stubborn as they are, it was only when Greek moral theory had put underneath them the distinction between the irrational and the rational, between divine truth and good and corrupt and weak human appetite, that intolerance on system and earthly domination for the sake of eternal excellence were philosophically sanctioned. The health and welfare of the body and the securing for all of a sure and a prosperous livelihood were not matters for which medieval conditions fostered care in any case. But moral philosophy

(54) was prevailed upon to damn the body on principle, and to relegate to insignificance as merely mundane and temporal the problem of a just industrial order. Circumstances of the times bore with sufficient hardness upon successful scientific investigation; but philosophy added the conviction that in any case truth is so supernal that it must be supernaturally revealed, and so important that it must be authoritatively imparted and enforced. Intelligence was diverted from the critical consideration of the natural sources and social consequences of better and worse into the channel of metaphysical subtleties and systems, acceptance of which was made essential to participation in the social order and in rational excellence. Philosophy bound the once erect form of human endeavor and progress to the chariot wheels of cosmology and theology.

Since the Renaissance, moral philosophy has repeatedly reverted to the Greek ideal of natural excellence realized in social life, under the fostering care of intelligence in action. The return, however, has taken place under the influence of democratic polity, commercial expansion, and scientific reorganization. It has been a liberation more than a reversion. This combined return and emancipation, having transformed our practice of life in the last four centuries, will not be content till it has written itself clear in our theory of that practice.

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(55) Whether the consequent revolution in moral philosophy be termed pragmatism or be given the happier title of the applied and experimental habit of mind is of little account. What is of moment is that intelligence has descended from its lonely isolation at the remote edge of things, whence it operated as unmoved mover and ultimate good, to take its seat in the moving affairs of men. Theory may therefore become responsible to the practices that have generated it; the good be connected with nature, but with nature naturally, not metaphysically, conceived, and social life be cherished in behalf of its own immediate possibilities, not on the ground of its remote connections with a cosmic reason and an absolute end.

There is a notion, more familiar than correct, that Greek thought sacrificed the individual to the state. None has ever known better than the Greek that the individual comes to himself and to his own only in association with others. But Greek thought subjected, as we have seen, both state and individual to an external cosmic order; and thereby it inevitably restricted the free use in doubt, inquiry, and experimentation, of the human intelligence. The *anima libera*, the free mind of the sixteenth century, of Galileo and his successors, was the counterpart of the disintegration of cosmology and its animistic teleology. The lecturer on political economy reminded us that his subject

(56) began, in the Middle Ages, as a branch of ethics, though, as he hastened to show, it soon got into better association. Well, the same company was once kept by all the sciences, mathematical and physical as well as social. According to all accounts it was the integrity of the number one and the rectitude of the square that attracted the attention of Pythagoras to arithmetic and geometry as promising fields of study. Astronomy was the projected picture book of a cosmic object lesson in morals, Dante's transcript of which is none the less literal because poetic. If physics alone remained outside the moral fold, while noble essences redeemed chemistry, occult forces blessed physiology, and the immaterial soul exalted psychology, physics is the exception that proves the rule: matter was so inherently immoral that no high-minded science would demean itself by contact with it.

If we do not join with many in lamenting the stripping from nature of those idealistic properties in which animism survived, if we do not mourn the secession of the sciences from ethics, it is because the abandonment by intelligence of a fixed and static moral end was the necessary precondition of a free and progressive science of both things and morals; because the emancipation of the sciences from ready made, remote, and abstract values was necessary to make the sciences available for creating and maintaining more and specific values here

(57) and now. The divine comedy of modern medicine and hygiene is one of the human epics yet to be written; but when composed it may prove no unworthy companion of the medieval epic of other worldly beatific visions. The great ideas of the eighteenth century, that expansive epoch of moral perception which ranks in illumination and fervor along with classic Greek thought, the great ideas of the indefinitely continuous progress of humanity and of the power and significance of freed intelligence, were borne by a single mother-experimental inquiry.

The growth of industry and commerce is at once cause and effect of the growth in science. Democritus and other ancients conceived the mechanical theory of the universe. The notion was not only blank and repellent, because it ignored the rich social material which Plato and Aristotle had organized into their rival idealistic views; but it was scientifically sterile, a piece of dialectics. Contempt for machines as the accouterments of despised mechanics kept the mechanical conception aloof from these specific and controllable experiences which alone could fructify it. This conception, then, like the idealistic, was translated into a speculative cosmology and thrown like a vast net around the universe at large, as if to keep it from coming to pieces. It is from respect for the lever, the pulley, and the screw that modern experimental

(58) and mathematical mechanics derives itself. Motion, traced through the workings of a machine, was followed out into natural events and studied just as motion, not as a poor yet necessary device for realizing final causes. So studied, it was found to be available for new machines and new applications, which in creating new ends also promoted new wants, and thereby stimulated new activities, new discoveries, and new inventions. The recognition that natural energy can be systematically applied, through experimental observation, to the satisfaction and multiplication of concrete wants is doubtless the greatest single discovery ever imported into the life of man—save perhaps the discovery of language. Science, borrowing from industry, repaid the debt with interest, and has made the control of natural forces for the aims of life so inevitable that for the first time man is relieved from overhanging fear, with its wolflike scramble to possess and accumulate, and is freed to consider the more gracious question of securing to all an ample and liberal life. The industrial life had been condemned by Greek exaltation of abstract thought and by Greek contempt for labor, as representing the brute struggle of carnal appetite for its own satiety. The industrial movement, offspring of science, restored it to its central position in morals. When Adam Smith made economic activity the moving spring of man's unremitting effort, from

(59) the cradle to the grave, to better his own lot, he recorded this change. And when he made sympathy the central spring in man's conscious moral endeavor, he reported the effect which the increasing intercourse of men, due primarily to commerce, had in breaking down suspicion and jealousy and in liberating man's kindlier impulses.

Democracy, the crucial expression of modern life, is not so much an addition to the scientific and industrial tendencies as it is the perception of their social or spiritual meaning. Democracy is an absurdity where faith in the individual as individual is impossible; and this faith is impossible when intelligence is regarded as a cosmic power, not an adjustment and application of individual tendencies. It is also impossible when appetites and desires are conceived to be the dominant factor in the constitution of most men's characters, and when appetite and desire are conceived to be manifestations of the disorderly and unruly principle of nature. To put the intellectual center of gravity in the objective cosmos, outside of men's own experiments and tests, and then to invite the application of individual intelligence to the determination of society, is to invite chaos. To hold that want is mere

negative flux and hence requires external fixation by reason, and then to invite the wants to give free play to themselves in social construction and intercourse, is to call down anarchy. Democ

(60) -racy is estimable only through the changed conception of intelligence, that forms modern science, and of want, that forms modern industry. It is essentially a changed psychology. The substitution, for a priori truth and deduction, of fluent doubt and inquiry meant trust in human nature in the concrete; in individual honesty, curiosity, and sympathy. The substitution of moving commerce for fixed custom meant a view of wants as the dynamics of social progress, not as the pathology of private greed. The nineteenth century indeed turned sour on that somewhat complacent optimism in which the eighteenth century rested: the ideas that the intelligent self-love of individuals would conduce to social cohesion, and competition among individuals usher in the kingdom of social welfare. But the conception of a social harmony of interests in which the achievement by each individual of his own freedom should contribute to a like perfecting of the powers of all, through a fraternally organized society, is the permanent contribution of the industrial movement to morals -even though so far it be but the contribution of a problem.

Intellectually speaking, the centuries since the fourteenth are the true middle ages. They mark the transitional period of mental habit, as the so-called medieval period represents the petrification, under changed outward conditions, of Greek ideas.

(61) The conscious articulation of genuinely modern tendencies has yet to come, and till it comes the ethic of our own life must remain undescribed. But the system of morals which has come nearest to the reflection of the movements of science, democracy, and commerce, is doubtless the utilitarian. Scientific, after the modern mode, it certainly would be. Newton's influence dyes deep the moral thought of the eighteenth century. The arrangements of the solar system had been described in terms of a homogeneous matter and motion, worked by two opposed and compensating forces: all because a method of analysis, of generalization by analogy, and of mathematical deduction back to new empirical details had been followed. The imagination of the eighteenth century was a Newtonian imagination; and this no less in social than in physical matters. Hume proclaims that morals is about to become an experimental science. Just as, almost in our own day, Mill's interest in a method for social science led him to reformulate the logic of experimental inquiry, so all the great men of the Enlightenment were in search for the organon of morals which should repeat the physical triumphs of Newton. Bentham notes that physics has had its Bacon and Newton; that morals has had its Bacon in Helvetius, but still awaits its Newton; and he leaves us in no doubt that at the moment of writing he was ready, modestly but

(62) firmly, to fill the waiting niche with its missing figure.

The industrial movement furnished the concrete imagery for this ethical renovation. The utilitarians borrowed from Adam Smith the notion that through industrial exchange in a free society the individual

pursuing his own good is led, under the guidance of the "invisible hand," to promote the general good more effectually than if he had set out to do it. This idea was dressed out in the atomistic psychology which Hartley built out from Locke-and was returned at usurious rates to later economists.

From the great French writers who had sought to justify and promote democratic individualism, came the conception that, since it is perverted political institutions which deprave individuals and bring them into hostility, nation against nation, class against class, individual against individual, the great political problem is such a reform of law and legislation, civil and criminal, of administration, and of education as will force the individual to find his own interests in pursuits conducing to the welfare of others.

Tremendously effective as a tool of criticism, operative in abolition and elimination, utilitarianism failed to measure up to the constructive needs of the time. Its theoretical equalization of the good of each with that of every other was practically

(63) perverted by its excessive interest in the middle and manufacturing classes. Its speculative defect of an atomistic psychology combined with this narrowness of vision to make light of the constructive work that needs to be done by the state, before all can have, otherwise than in name, an equal chance to count in the common good. Thus the age-long subordination of economics to politics was revenged in the submerging of both politics and ethics in a narrow theory of economic profit; and utilitarianism, in its orthodox descendants, proffered the disjointed pieces of a mechanism, with a monotonous reiteration that looked at aright they form a beautifully harmonious organism.

Prevision, and to some extent experience, of this failure, conjoined with differing social traditions and ambitions, evoked German idealism, the transcendental morals of Kant and his successors. German thought strove to preserve the traditions which bound culture to the past, while revising these traditions to render them capable of meeting novel conditions. It found weapons at hand in the conceptions borrowed by Roman law from Stoic philosophy, and in the conceptions by which Protestant humanism had re-edited scholastic Catholicism. Grotius had made the idea of natural law, natural right and obligation, the central idea of German morals, as thoroughly as Locke had made the individual desire for liberty and happiness the

(64) focus of English and then of French speculation. Materialized idealism is the happy monstrosity in which the popular demand for vivid imagery is most easily reconciled with the equally strong demand for supremacy of moral values; and the complete idealistic materialism of Stoicism has always given its ideas a practical influence out of all proportion to their theoretical vogue as a system. To the Protestant, that is the German, humanist, Natural Law, the bond of harmonious reason in nature, the spring of social intercourse among men, the inward light of individual conscience, united Cicero, St. Paul, and Luther in blessed union; gave a rational, not superrational basis for morals, and provided room for social legislation which at the same time could easily be held back from too ruthless application to dominant class interests.

Kant saw the mass of empirical and hence irrelevant detail that had found refuge within this liberal and diffusive reason. He saw that the idea of reason could be made self-consistent only by stripping it naked of these empirical accretions. He then provided, in his critiques, a somewhat cumbrous moving van for transferring the resultant pure or naked reason out of nature and the objective world, and for locating it in new quarters, with a new stock of goods and new customers. The new quarters were particular subjects, individuals;

(65) the stock of goods were the forms of perception and the functions of thought by which empirical flux is woven into durable fabrics; the new customers were a society of individuals in which all are ends in themselves. There ought to be an injunction issued that Kant's saying about Hume's awakening of him should not be quoted save in connection with his other saying that Rousseau brought him to himself, in teaching him that the philosopher is of less account than the laborer in the fields unless he contributes to human freedom. But none the less, the new tenant, the universal reason, and the old homestead, the empirical tumultuous individual, could not get on together. Reason became a mere voice which, having nothing in particular to say, said Law, Duty, in general, leaving to the existing social order of the Prussia of Frederick the Great the congenial task of declaring just what was obligatory in the concrete. The marriage of freedom and authority was thus celebrated with the understanding that sentimental primacy went to the former and practical control to the latter.

The effort to force a universal reason that had been used to the broad domains of the cosmos into the cramped confines of individuality conceived as merely "empirical," a highly particularized creature of sense, could have but one result: an explosion. The products of that explosion constitute the Post-Kantian philosophies. It was the work of

(66) Hegel to attempt to fill in the empty reason of Kant with the concrete contents of history. The voice sounded like the voice of Aristotle, Thomas of Aquino, and Spinoza translated into Swabian German; but the hands were as the hands of Montesquieu, Herder, Condorcet, and the rising historical school. The outcome was the assertion that history is reason, and reason is history: the actual is rational, the rational is the actual. It gave the pleasant appearance (which Hegel did not strenuously discourage) of being specifically an idealization of the Prussian nation, and incidentally a systematized apologetic for the universe at large. But in intellectual and practical effect, it lifted the idea of process above that of fixed origins and fixed ends, and presented the social and moral order, as well as the intellectual, as a scene of becoming, and it located reason somewhere within the struggles of life.

Unstable equilibrium, rapid fermentation, and a succession of explosive reports are thus the chief notes of modern ethics. Scepticism and traditionalism, empiricism and rationalism, crude naturalisms and all-embracing idealisms, flourish side by side all the more flourish, one suspects, because side by side. Spencer exults because natural science reveals that a rapid transit system of evolution is carrying us automatically to the goal of perfect man in perfect society; and his English idealistic

(67) contemporary, Green, is so disturbed by the removal from nature of its moral qualities, that he tries to show that this makes no difference, since nature in any case is constituted and known through a spiritual principle which is as permanent as nature is changing. An Amiel genteelly laments the decadence of the inner life, while his neighbor Nietzsche brandishes in rude ecstasy the banner of brute survival as a happy omen of the final victory of nobility of mind. The reasonable conclusion from such a scene is that there is taking place a transformation of attitude towards moral theory rather than mere propagation of varieties among theories. The classic theories all agreed in one regard. They all alike assumed the existence of *the end*, the *summum bonum*, the final goal; and of *the separate moral force* that moves to that goal. Moralists have disputed as to whether the end is an aggregate of pleasurable state of consciousness, enjoyment of the divine essence, acknowledgment of the law of duty, or conformity to environment. So they have disputed as to the path by which the final goal is to be reached: fear or benevolence? reverence for pure law or pity for others? self-love or altruism? But these very controversies implied that there was but the one end and the one means.

The transformation in attitude, to which I referred, is the growing belief that the proper busi-

(68) -ness of intelligence is discrimination of multiple and present goods and of the varied immediate means of their realization; not search for the one remote aim. The progress of biology has accustomed our minds to the notion that intelligence is not an outside power presiding supremely but statically over the desires and efforts of man, but is a method of adjustment of capacities and conditions within specific situations. History, as the lecturer on that subject told us, has discovered itself in the idea of process. The genetic standpoint makes us aware that the systems of the past are neither fraudulent impostures nor absolute revelations; but are the products of political, economic, and scientific conditions whose change carries with it change of theoretical formulations. The recognition that intelligence is properly an organ of adjustment in difficult situations makes us aware that past theories were of value so far as they helped carry to an issue the social perplexities from which they emerged. But the chief impact of the evolutionary method is upon the present. Theory having learned what it cannot do, is made responsible for the better performance of what needs to be done, and what only a broadly equipped intelligence can undertake: study of the conditions out of which come the obstacles and the resources of adequate life, and developing and testing the ideas that, as working hypotheses, may be used to dimin-

(69) -ish the causes of evil and to buttress and expand the sources of good. This program is indeed vague, but only unfamiliarity with it could lead one to the conclusion that it is less vague than the idea that there is a single moral ideal and a single moral motive force.

From this point of view there is no separate body of moral rules; no separate system of motive powers; no separate subject-matter of moral knowledge, and hence no such thing as an isolated ethical science. If the business of morals is not to speculate upon man's final end and upon an ultimate standard of right, it is to utilize physiology, anthropology, and psychology to discover all that can be discovered of man, his organic powers and propensities. If its business is not to search for the one

separate moral motive, it is to converge all the instrumentalities of the social arts, of law, education, economics, and political science upon the construction of intelligent methods of improving the common lot.

If we still wish to make our peace with the past, and to sum up the plural and changing goods of life in a single word, doubtless the term happiness is the one most apt. But we should again exchange free morals for sterile metaphysics, if we imagine that "happiness" is any less unique than the individuals who experience it; any less complex than the constitution of their capacities, or any less

(70) variable than the objects upon which their capacities are directed.

To many timid, albeit sincere, souls of an earlier century, the 'decay of the doctrine that all true and worthwhile science is knowledge of final causes seemed fraught with danger to science and to morals. The rival conception of a wide open universe, a universe without bounds in time or space, without final limits of origin or destiny, a universe with the lid off, was a menace. We now face in moral science a similar crisis and like opportunity, as well as share in a like dreadful suspense. 'The abolition of a fixed and final goal and causal force in nature did not, as matter of fact, render rational conviction less important or less attainable. It was accompanied by the provision of a technique of persistent and detailed inquiry in all special fields of fact, a technique which led to the detection of unsuspected forces and the revelation of undreamed of uses. In like fashion we may anticipate that the abolition of *the* final goal and *the* single motive power and *the* separate and infallible faculty in morals, will quicken inquiry into the diversity of specific goods of experience, fix attention upon their conditions, and bring to light values now dim and obscure. The change may relieve men from responsibility for what they cannot do, but it will promote thoughtful consideration of what they may do and the definition of responsibility for what

(71) they do amiss because of failure to think straight and carefully. Absolute goods will fall into the background, but the question of making more sure and extensive the share of all men in natural and social goods will be urgent, a problem not to be escaped nor evaded.

Morals, philosophy, returns to its first love; love of the wisdom that is nurse, as nature is mother, of good. But it returns to the Socratic principle equipped with a multitude of special methods of inquiry and testing; with an organized mass of knowledge, and with control of the arrangements by which industry, law, and education may concentrate upon the problem of the participation by all men and women, up to their capacity of absorption, in all attained values. Morals may then well leave to poetry and to art, the task (so unartistically performed by philosophy since Plato) of gathering together and rounding out, into one abiding picture, the separate and special goods of life. It may leave this task with the assurance that the resultant synthesis will not depict any final and all-inclusive good, but will add just one more specific good to the enjoyable excellencies of life.

Humorous irony shines through most of the harsh glances turned towards the idea of an experimental basis and career for morals. Some shiver in the fear that morals will be plunged into anarchic confusion—a view well expressed by a

(72) recent writer in the saying that if the a priori and transcendental basis of morals be abandoned " we shall have merely the same certainty that now exists in physics and chemistry " ! Elsewhere lurks the apprehension that the progress of scientific method will deliver the purposive freedom of man bound hand and foot to the fatal decrees of iron necessity, called natural law. The notion that laws govern and forces rule is an animistic survival. It is a product of reading nature in terms of politics in order to turn around and then read politics in the light of supposed sanctions of nature. This idea passed from medieval theology into the science of Newton, to whom the universe was the dominion of a sovereign whose laws were the laws of nature. From Newton it passed into the deism of the eighteenth century, whence it migrated into the philosophy of the Enlightenment, to make its last stand in' Spencer's philosophy of the fixed environment and the static goal.

No, nature is not an unchangeable order, unwinding itself majestically from the reel of law under the control of deified forces. It is an indefinite congeries of changes. Laws are not governmental regulations which limit change, but are convenient formulations of selected portions of change followed through a longer or shorter period of time, and then registered in statistical forms that are amenable to mathematical manipulation.

(73) That this device of shorthand symbolization presages the subjection of man's intelligent effort to fixity of law and environment is interesting as a culture survival, but is not important for moral theory. Savage and child delight in creating bogeys from which, their origin and structure being conveniently concealed, interesting thrills and shudders may be had. Civilized man in the nineteenth century outdid these bugaboos in his image of a fixed universe hung on a cast-iron framework of fixed, necessary, and universal laws. Knowledge of nature does not mean subjection to predestination, but insight into courses of change; an insight which is formulated in " laws," that is, methods of subsequent procedure.

Knowledge of the process and conditions of physical and social change through experimental science and genetic history has one result with a double name: increase of control, and increase of responsibility; increase of power to direct natural change, and increase of responsibility for its equitable direction toward fuller good. Theory located within progressive practice instead of reigning statically supreme over it, means practice itself made responsible to intelligence; to intelligence which relentlessly scrutinizes the consequences of every practice, and which exacts liability by an equally relentless publicity. As long as morals occupies itself with mere ideals, forces and conditions as they

(74) are will be good enough for " practical" men, since they are then left free to their own devices in turning these to their own account. As long as moralists plume themselves upon possession of the domain of the categorical imperative with its bare precepts, men of executive habits will always be at

their elbows to regulate the concrete social conditions through which the form of law gets its actual filling of specific injunctions. When freedom is conceived to be transcendental, the coercive restraint of immediate necessity will lay its harsh hand upon the mass of men.

In the end, men do what they can do. They refrain from doing what they cannot do. they do what their own specific powers in conjunction with the limitations and resources of the environment permit. The effective control of their powers is not through precepts, but through the regulation of their conditions. If this regulation is to be not merely physical or coercive, but moral, it must consist of the intelligent selection and determination of the environments in which we act; and in an intelligent exaction of responsibility for the use of men's powers. Theorists inquire after the " motive " to morality, to virtue and the good, under such circumstances. What then, one wonders, is their conception of the make-up of human nature and of its relation to virtue and to goodness? The pessimism that dictates such a ques-

(75) -tion, if it be justified, precludes any consideration of morals.

The diversion of intelligence from discrimination of plural and concrete goods, from noting their conditions and obstacles, and from devising methods for holding men responsible for their concrete use of powers and conditions, has done more than brute love of power to establish inequality and injustice among men. It has done more, because it has confirmed with social sanctions the principle of feudal domination. All men require moral sanctions in their conduct: the consent of their kind Not getting it otherwise, they go insane to feign it. No man ever lived with the exclusive approval of his own conscience. Hence the vacuum left in practical matters by the remote irrelevancy of transcendental morals has to be filled in somehow. It is filled in. It is filled in with class-codes, class-standards, class-approvals -with codes which recommend the practices and habits already current in a given circle, set, calling, profession, trade, industry, club, or gang. These class-codes always lean back upon and support themselves by the professed ideal code. This latter meets them more than half-way. Being in its pretense a theory for regulating practice, it must demonstrate its practicability. It is uneasy in isolation, and travels hastily to meet with compromise and accommodation the actual situation in all its brute

(76) unrationality. Where the pressure is greatest in the habitual practice of the political and economic chieftains-there it accommodates the most.

Class-codes of morals are sanctions, under the caption of ideals, of uncriticised customs; they are recommendations, under the head of duties, of what the members of the class are already most given to doing. If there are to obtain more equable and comprehensive principles of action, exacting a more impartial exercise of natural power and resource in the interests of a common good, members of a class must no longer rest content in responsibility to a class whose traditions constitute its conscience, but be made responsible to a society whose conscience is its free and effectively organized intelligence.

In such a conscience alone will the Socratic injunction to man to know himself be fulfilled.