

The Basis of Morality eBook

The Basis of Morality by Annie Besant

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

The Basis of Morality eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	5
Page 3.....	6
Page 4.....	7
Page 5.....	8
Page 6.....	9
Page 7.....	10
Page 8.....	11
Page 9.....	12
Page 10.....	13
Page 11.....	14
Page 12.....	15
Page 13.....	17
Page 14.....	18
Page 15.....	19
Page 16.....	20
Page 17.....	22
Page 18.....	23
Page 19.....	24

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
REVELATION		1
II		3
III		6
IV		10
V		16
THE VASANTA PRESS, ADYAR, MADRAS		19

Page 1

REVELATION

Must religion and morals go together? Can one be taught without the other? It is a practical question for educationists, and France tried to answer it in the dreariest little cut and dry kind of catechism ever given to boys to make them long to be wicked. But apart from education, the question of the bedrock on which morals rest, the foundation on which a moral edifice can be built that will stand secure against the storms of life—that is a question of perennial interest, and it must be answered by each of us, if we would have a test of Right and Wrong, would know why Right is Right, why Wrong is Wrong.

Religions based on Revelation find in Revelation their basis for morality, and for them that is Right which the Giver of the Revelation commands, and that is Wrong which He forbids. Right is Right because God, or a [R.][s.]hi or a Prophet, commands it, and Right rests on the Will of a Lawgiver, authoritatively revealed in a Scripture.

Now all Revelation has two great disadvantages as a basis for morality. It is fixed, and therefore unprogressive; while man evolves, and at a later stage of his growth, the morality taught in the Revelation becomes archaic and unsuitable. A written book cannot change, and many things in the Bibles of Religion come to be out of date, inappropriate to new circumstances, and even shocking to an age in which conscience has become more enlightened than it was of old.

The fact that in the same Revelation as that in which palpably immoral commands appear, there occur also jewels of fairest radiance, gems of poetry, pearls of truth, helps us not at all. If moral teachings worthy only of savages occur in Scriptures containing also rare and precious precepts of purest sweetness, the juxtaposition of light and darkness only produces moral chaos. We cannot here appeal to reason or judgment for both must be silent before authority; both rest on the same ground. “Thus saith the Lord” precludes all argument.

Let us take two widely accepted Scriptures, both regarded as authoritative by the respective religions which accept them as coming from a Divine Preceptor or through a human but illuminated being, Moses in the one case, Manu in the other. I am, of course, well aware that in both cases we have to do with books which may contain traditions of their great authors, even sentences transmitted down the centuries. The unravelling of the tangled threads woven into such books is a work needing the highest scholarship and an infinite patience; few of us are equipped for such labour. But let us ignore the work of the Higher Criticism, and take the books as they stand, and the objection raised to them as a basis for morality will at once appear.

Page 2

Thus we read in the same book: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." "Sanctify yourselves therefore and be ye holy." Scores of noble passages, inculcating high morality, might be quoted. But we have also: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly saying, let us go and serve other Gods ... thou shalt not consent unto him nor hearken unto him; neither shalt thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him, but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death." "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." A man is told, that he may seize a fair woman in war, and "be her husband and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be that if thou hast no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will." These teachings and many others like them have drenched Europe with blood and scorched it with fire. Men have grown out of them; they no longer heed nor obey them, for man's reason performs its eclectic work on Revelation, chooses the good, rejects the evil. This is very good, but it destroys Revelation as a basis. Christians have outgrown the lower part of their Revelation, and do not realise that in striving to explain it away they put the axe to the root of its authority.

So also is it with the Institutes of Manu, to take but one example from the great sacred literature of India. There are precepts of the noblest order, and the essence and relative nature of morality is philosophically set out; "the sacred law is thus grounded on the rule of conduct," and He declares that good conduct is the root of further growth in spirituality. Apart from questions of general morality, to which we shall need to refer hereafter, let us take the varying views of women as laid down in the present Sm[r.][t.]i as accepted. On many points there is no wiser guide than parts of this Sm[r.][t.]i, as will be seen in Chapter IV. With regard to the marriage law, Manu says: "Let mutual fidelity continue unto death." Of a father He declares: "No father who knows must take even the smallest gratuity for his daughter; for a man, who through avarice takes a gratuity, is a seller of his offspring." Of the home, He says: "Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, husbands, brothers and brothers-in-law who desire happiness. Where women are honoured, there the [D.]evas are pleased; but where they are not honoured, any sacred rite is fruitless." "In that family where the husband is pleased with his wife and the wife with her husband [note the equality], happiness will assuredly be lasting." Food is to be given first in a house to "newly-married

Page 3

women, to infants, to the sick, and to pregnant women". Yet the same Manu is supposed to have taken the lowest and coarsest view of women: "It is the nature of women to seduce men; for that reason the wise are never unguarded with females ... One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister or daughter; for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man." A woman must never act "independently, even in her own house," she must be subject to father, husband or (on her husband's death) sons. Women have allotted to them as qualities, "impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct". The Sh[=u][d.]ra servant is to be "regarded as a younger son"; a slave is to be looked on "as one's shadow," and if a man is offended by him he "must bear it without resentment"; yet the most ghastly punishments are ordered to be inflicted on Sh[=u][d.]ras for intruding on certain sacred rites.

The net result is that ancient Revelations, being given for a certain age and certain social conditions, often cannot and ought not to be carried out in the present state of Society; that ancient documents are difficult to verify—often impossible—as coming from those whose names they bear; that there is no guarantee against forgeries, interpolations, glosses, becoming part of the text, with a score of other imperfections; that they contain contradictions, and often absurdities, to say nothing of immoralities. Ultimately every Revelation must be brought to the bar of reason, and as a matter of fact, is so brought in practice, even the most "orthodox" Br[=a]hma[n.]a in Hin[d.] [=u]ism, disregarding all the Sh[=a]s[t.]raic injunctions which he finds to be impracticable or even inconvenient, while he uses those which suit him to condemn his "unorthodox" neighbours.

No Revelation is accepted as fully binding in any ancient religion, but by common consent the inconvenient parts are quietly dropped, and the evil parts repudiated. Revelation as a basis for morality is impossible. But all sacred books contain much that is pure, lofty, inspiring, belonging to the highest morality, the true utterances of the Sages and Saints of mankind. These precepts will be regarded with reverence by the wise, and should be used as authoritative teaching for the young and the uninstructed as moral textbooks, like—textbooks in other sciences—and as containing moral truths, some of which can be verified by all morally advanced persons, and others verifiable only by those who reach the level of the original teachers.

* * * * *

II

INTUITION

Page 4

When scholarship, reason and conscience have made impossible the acceptance of Revelation as the bedrock of morality, the student—especially in the West—is apt next to test “Intuition” as a probable basis for ethics. In the East, this idea has not appealed to the thinker in the sense in which the word Intuition is used in the West. The moralist in the East has based ethics on Revelation, or on Evolution, or on Illumination—the last being the basis of the Mystic. Intuition—which by moralists like Theodore Parker, Frances Power Cobb, and many Theists, is spoken of as the “Voice of God” in the human soul—is identified by these with “conscience,” so that to base morality on Intuition is equivalent to basing it on conscience, and making the dictate of conscience the categorical imperative, the inner voice which declares authoritatively “Thou shalt,” or “Thou shalt not”.

Now it is true that for each individual there is no better, no safer, guide than his own conscience and that when the moralist says to the inquirer: “Obey your conscience” he is giving him sound ethical advice. None the less is the thinker faced with an apparently insuperable difficulty in the way of accepting conscience as an ethical basis; for he finds the voice of conscience varying with civilisation, education, race, religion, traditions, customs, and if it be, indeed, the voice of God in man, he cannot but see—in a sense quite different from that intended by the writer—that God “in divers manners spoke in past times”. Moreover he observes, as an historical fact, that some of the worst crimes which have disgraced humanity have been done in obedience to the voice of conscience. It is quite clear that Cromwell at Drogheda was obeying conscience, was doing that which he conscientiously believed to be the Will of God; and there is no reason to doubt that a man like Torquemada was also carrying out what he conscientiously believed to be the Divine Will in the war which he waged against heresy through the Inquisition.

In this moral chaos, with such a clash of discordant “Divine Voices,” where shall sure guidance be found? One recalls the bitter gibe of Laud to the Puritan, who urged that he must follow his conscience: “Yea, verily; but take heed that thy conscience be not the conscience of a fool.”

Conscience speaks with authority, whenever it speaks at all. Its voice is imperial, strong and clear. None the less is it often uninformed, mistaken, in its dictate. There *is* an Intuition which is verily the voice of the Spirit in man, in the God-illuminated man, which is dealt with in the fifth chapter. But the Intuition recognised in the West, and identified with conscience, is something far other.

For the sake of clarity, we must define what conscience is since we have said what it is not: that it is not the voice of the Spirit in man, that it is not the voice of God.

Page 5

Conscience is the result of the accumulated experience gained by each man in his previous lives. Each of us is an Immortal Spirit, a Divine fragment, a Self: "A fragment of mine own Self, transformed in the world of life into an immortal Spirit, draweth round itself the senses, of which the mind is the sixth, veiled in Matter." Such is each man. He evolves into manifested powers all the potentialities unfolded in him by virtue of his divine parentage, and this is effected by repeated births into this world, wherein he gathers experience, repeated deaths out of this world into the other twain—the wheel of births and deaths turns in the [T.]riloka, the three worlds—wherein he reaps in pain the results of experiences gathered by disregard of law, and assimilates, transforming into faculty, moral and mental, the results of experience gathered in harmony with law. Having transmuted experience into faculty, he returns to earth for the gathering of new experience, dealt with as before after physical death. Thus the Spirit unfolds, or the man evolves—whichever expression is preferred to indicate this growth. Very similarly doth the physical body grow; a man eats food; digests it, assimilates it, transmutes it into the materials of his body; ill food causes pain, even disease; good food strengthens, and makes for growth. The outer is a reflection of the inner.

Now conscience is the sum total of the experiences in past lives which have borne sweet and bitter fruit, according as they were in accord or disaccord with surrounding natural law. This sum total of *physical* experiences, which result in increased or diminished life, we call instinct, and it is life-preserving. The sum total of our interwoven *mental and moral* experiences, in our relations with others, is moral instinct, or conscience, and it is harmonising, impels to "good"—a word which we shall define in our fourth chapter.

Hence conscience depends on the experiences through which we have passed in previous lives, and is necessarily an individual possession. It differs where the past experience is different, as in the savage and the civilised man, the dolt and the talented, the fool and the genius, the criminal and the saint. The voice of God would speak alike in all; the experience of the past speaks differently in each. Hence also the consciences of men at a similar evolutionary level speak alike on broad questions of right and wrong, good and evil. On these the "voice" is clear. But there are many questions whereon past experience fails us, and then conscience fails to speak. We are in doubt; two apparent duties conflict; two ways seem equally right or equally wrong. "I do not know what I *ought* to do," says the perplexed moralist, hearing no inner voice. In such cases, we must seek to form the best judgment we can, and then act boldly. If unknowingly we disregard some hidden law we shall suffer, and *that* experience will be added to our sum total, and in similar circumstances in the future, conscience, through the aid of this added experience, will have found a voice.

Page 6

Hence we may ever, having judged as best we can, act boldly, and learn increased wisdom from the result.

Much moral cowardice, paralysing action, has resulted from the Christian idea of “sin,” as something that incurs the “wrath of God,” and that needs to be “forgiven,” in order to escape an artificial—not a natural—penalty. We gain knowledge by experience, and disregard of a law, where it is not known, should cause us no distress, no remorse, no “repentance,” only a quiet mental note that we must in future remember the law which we disregarded and make our conduct harmonise therewith. Where conscience does not speak, how shall we act? The way is well known to all thoughtful people: we first try to eliminate all personal desire from the consideration of the subject on which decision is needed, so that the mental atmosphere may not be rendered a distorting medium by the mists of personal pleasure or pain; next, we place before us all the circumstances, giving each its due weight; then, we decide; the next step depends on whether we believe in Higher Powers or not; if we do, we sit down quietly and alone; we place our decision before us; we suspend *all* thought, but remain mentally alert—all mental ear, as it were; we ask for help from God, from our Teacher, from our own Higher Self; into that silence comes the decision. We obey it, without further consideration, and then we watch the result, and judge by that of the value of the decision, for it may have come from the higher or from the lower Self. But, as we did our very best, we feel no trouble, even if the decision should be wrong and bring us pain. We have gained an experience, and will do better next time. The trouble, the pain, we have brought on ourselves by our ignorance, we note, as showing that we have disregarded a law, and we profit by the additional knowledge in the future.

Thus understanding conscience, we shall not take it as a basis of morality, but as our best available individual light. We shall judge our conscience, educate it, evolve it by mental effort, by careful observation. As we learn more, our conscience will develop; as we act up to the highest we can see, our vision will become ever clearer, and our ear more sensitive. As muscles develop by exercise, so conscience develops by activity, and as we use our lamp it burns the more brightly. But let it ever be remembered that it is a man’s own experience that must guide him, and his own conscience that must decide. To overrule the conscience of another is to induce in him moral paralysis, and to seek to dominate the will of another is a crime.

* * * * *

III

UTILITY

Page 7

To those whose intelligence and conscience had revolted against the crude and immoral maxims mixed up with noble precepts in Revelation; to those who recognised the impossibility of accepting the varying voices of Intuition as a moral guide; to all those the theory that Morality was based on Utility, came as a welcome and rational relief. It promised a scientific certitude to moral precepts; it left the intellect free to inquire and to challenge; it threw man back on grounds which were found in this world alone, and could be tested by reason and experience; it derived no authority from antiquity, no sanction from religion; it stood entirely on its own feet, independently of the many conflicting elements which were found in the religions of the past and present.

The basis for morality, according to Utility, is the greatest happiness of the greatest number; that which conduces to the greatest happiness of the greatest number is Right; that which does not is Wrong.

This general maxim being laid down, it remains for the student to study history, to analyse experience, and by a close and careful investigation into human nature and human relations to elaborate a moral code which would bring about general happiness and well-being. This, so far, has not been done. Utility has been a “hand-to-mouth” moral basis, and certain rough rules of conduct have grown up by experience and the necessities of life, without any definite investigation into, or codifying of, experience. Man’s moral basis as a rule is a compound of partially accepted revelations and partially admitted consciences, with a practical application of the principle of “that which works best”. The majority are not philosophers, and care little for a logical basis. They are unconscious empirics, and their morality is empirical.

Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, considering that the maxim did not sufficiently guard the interests of the minority, and that, so far as was possible, these also should be considered and guarded, added another phrase; his basis ran: “The greatest happiness of the greatest number, with the least injury to any.” The rule was certainly improved by the addition, but it did not remove many of the objections raised.

It was urged by the Utilitarian that morality had developed out of the social side of human beings; that men, as social animals, desired to live in permanent relations with each other, and that this resulted in the formation of families; men could not be happy in solitude; the persistence of these groups, amid the conflicting interests of the individuals who composed them, could only be secured by recognising that the interests of the majority must prevail, and form the rule of conduct for the whole family. Morality, it was pointed out, thus began in family relations, and conduct which disrupted the family was wrong, while that which strengthened and consolidated it was right. Thus family morality was established. As families

Page 8

congregated together for mutual protection and support, their separate interests as families were found to be conflicting, and so a *modus vivendi* was sought in the same principle which governed relations within the family: the common interests of the grouped families, the tribe, must prevail over the separate and conflicting interests of the separate families; that which disrupted the tribe was wrong, while that which strengthened and consolidated it was right. Thus tribal morality was established. The next step was taken as tribes grouped themselves together and became a nation, and morality extended so as to include all who were within the nation; that which disrupted the nation was wrong, and that which consolidated and strengthened it was right. Thus national morality was established. Further than that, utilitarian morality has not progressed, and international relations have not yet been moralised; they remain in the savage state, and recognise no moral law. Germany has boldly accepted this position, and declares formally that, for the State, Might is Right, and that all which the State can do for its own aggrandisement, for the increase of its power, it may and ought to do, for there is no rule of conduct to which it owes obedience; it is a law unto itself. Other nations have not formularised the statement in their literature as Germany has done, but the strong nations have acted upon it in their dealings with the weaker nations, although the dawning sense of an international morality in the better of them has led to the defence of international wrong by “the tyrant’s plea, necessity”. The most flagrant instance of the utter disregard of right and wrong as between nations, is, perhaps, the action of the allied European nations against China—in which the Hun theory of “frightfulness” was enunciated by the German Kaiser—but the history of nations so far is a history of continual trappings on the weak by the strong, and with the coming to the front of the Christian white nations, and their growth in scientific knowledge and thereby in power, the coloured nations and tribes, whether civilised or savage, have been continually exploited and oppressed. International morality, at present, does not exist. Murder within the family, the tribe, and the nation is marked as a crime, save that judicial murder, capital punishment, is permitted—on the principle of (supposed) Utility. But multiple murder outside the nation—War—is not regarded as criminal, nor is theft “wrong,” when committed by a strong nation on a weak one. It may be that out of the widespread misery caused by the present War, some international morality may be developed.

We may admit that, as a matter of historical and present fact, Utility has been everywhere tacitly accepted as the basis of morality, defective as it is as a theory. Utility is used as the test of Revelation, as the test of Intuition, and precepts of Manu, Zarathushtra, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, are acted on, or disregarded, according as they are considered to be useful, or harmful, or impracticable, to be suitable or unsuitable to the times. Inconsistencies in these matters do not trouble the “practical” ordinary man.

Page 9

The chief attack on the theory of Utility as a basis for morality has come from Christians, and has been effected by challenging the word “happiness” as the equivalent of “pleasure,” the “greatest number” as equivalent to “individual,” and then denouncing the maxim as “a morality for swine”. “Virtue” is placed in antagonism to happiness, and virtue, not happiness, is said to be the right aim for man. This really begs the question, for what is “virtue”? The crux of the whole matter lies there. Is “virtue” opposed to “happiness,” or is it a means to happiness? Why is the word “pleasure” substituted for “happiness” when utility is attacked? We may take the second question first.

“Pleasure,” in ordinary parlance, means an immediate and transitory form of happiness and usually a happiness of the body rather than of the emotions and the mind. Hence the “swine”. A sensual enjoyment is a “pleasure”; union with God would not be called a pleasure, but happiness. An old definition of man’s true object is: “To know God, and to enjoy Him for ever.” There happiness is clearly made the true end of man. The assailant changes the “greatest happiness of the greatest number” into the “pleasure of the individual,” and having created this man of straw, he triumphantly knocks it down.

Does not virtue lead to happiness? Is it not a condition of happiness? How does the Christian define virtue? It is obedience to the Will of God. But he only obeys that Will as “revealed” so far as it agrees with Utility. He no longer slays the heretic, and he suffers the witch to live. He does not give his cloak to the thief who has stolen his coat, but he hands over the thief to the policeman. Moreover, as Herbert Spencer pointed out, he follows virtue as leading to heaven; if right conduct led him to everlasting torture, would he still pursue it? Or would he revise his idea of right conduct? The martyr dies for the truth he sees, because it is easier *to him* to die than to betray truth. He could not live on happily as a conscious liar. The nobility of a man’s character is tested by the things which give him pleasure. The joy in following truth, in striving after the noblest he can see—that is the greatest happiness; to sacrifice present enjoyment for the service of others is not self-denial, but self-expression, to the Spirit who is man.

Where Utility fails is that it does not inspire, save where the spiritual life is already seen to be the highest happiness of the individual, because it conduces to the good of all, not only of the “greatest number”. Men who thus feel have inspiration from within themselves and need no outside moral code, no compelling external law. Ordinary men, the huge majority at the present stage of evolution, need either compulsion or inspiration, otherwise they will not control their animal nature, they will not sacrifice an immediate pleasure to a permanent increase of happiness, they will not sacrifice personal gain to the common

Page 10

good. The least developed of these are almost entirely influenced by fear of personal pain and wish for personal pleasure; they will not put their hand into the fire, because they know that fire burns, and no one accuses them of a “low motive” because they do not burn themselves; religion shows them that the results of the disregard of moral and mental law work out in suffering after death as well as before it, and that the results of obedience to such laws similarly work out in post-mortem pleasure. It thus supplies a useful element in the early stages of moral development.

At a higher stage, love of God and the wish to “please Him” by leading an exemplary life is a motive offered by religion, and this inspires to purity and to self-sacrifice; again, this is no more ignoble than the wish to please the father, the mother, the friend. Many a lad keeps pure to please his mother, because he loves her. So religious men try to live nobly to please God, because they love Him. At a higher stage yet, the good of the people, the good of the race, of humanity in the future, acts as a potent inspiration. But this does not touch the selfish lower types. Hence Utility fails as a compelling power with the majority, and is insufficient as motive. Add to this the radical fault that it does not place morality on a universal basis, the happiness of *all*, that it disregards the happiness of the minority, and its unsatisfactory nature is seen. It has much of truth in it; it enters as a determining factor into all systems of ethics, even where nominally ignored or directly rejected; it is a better basis in theory, though a worse one in practice, than either Revelation or Intuition, but it is incomplete. We must seek further for a solid basis of morality.

* * * * *

IV

EVOLUTION

We come now to the sure basis of morality, the bedrock of Nature, whereon Morality may be built beyond all shaking and change, built as a Science with recognised laws, and in a form intelligible and capable of indefinite expansion. Evolution is recognised as the method of Nature, her method in all her realms, and according to the ascertained laws of Nature, so far as they are known, all wise and thoughtful people endeavour to guide themselves. In making Morality a Science, we give it a binding force, and render it of universal application; moreover, we incorporate into it all the fragments of truth which exist in other systems, and which have lent to them their authority, their appeal to the intellect and the heart.

Page 11

Let us first define Morality. It is the science of human relations, the Science of Conduct, and its laws, as inviolable, as sure, as changeless, as all other laws of Nature, can be discovered and formulated. Harmony with these laws, like harmony with all other natural laws, is the condition of happiness, for in a realm of law none can move without pain while disregarding law. A law of Nature is the statement of an inviolable and constant sequence external to ourselves and unchangeable by our will, and amid the conditions of these inviolable sequences we live, from these we cannot escape. One choice alone is ours: to live in harmony with them or to disregard them; violate them we cannot, but we can dash ourselves against them; then the law asserts itself in the suffering that results from our flinging ourselves against it, or from our disregarding its existence; its existence is proved as well by the pain that results from our disregard of it, as by the pleasure that results from our harmony with it. Only a fool deliberately and gratuitously disregards a natural law when he knows of its existence; a man shapes his conduct so as to avoid the pain which results from clashing with it, unless he deliberately disregards the pain in view of a result to be brought about, which he considers to be worth more than the purchase price of pain. The Science of Morality, of Right Conduct, "lays down the conditions of harmonious relations between individuals, and their several environments small or large, families, societies, nations, humanity as a whole. Only by the knowledge and observance of these laws can men be either permanently healthy or permanently happy, can they live in peace and prosperity. Where morality is unknown or disregarded, friction inevitably arises, disharmony and pain result; for Nature is a settled Order in the mental and moral worlds as much as in the physical, and only by knowledge of that Order and by obedience to it can harmony, health and happiness be secured."

The religious man sees in the laws of Nature the manifestation of the Divine Nature, and in obedience to and co-operation with them, he sees obedience to and co-operation with the Will of God. The non-religious man sees them as sequences he cannot alter, on harmony with which his happiness, his comfort, depends. In either case they have a binding force. The man belonging to any exoteric religion will modify by them the precepts of his Scriptures, realising that morality rises as Evolution proceeds. He does thus modify scriptural precepts by practical obedience or disregard, whether he do it by theory or not. But it is better that theory and practice should correspond. The intuitionist will understand that conscience, accumulated experience, has developed by experience within these laws. The utilitarian will see that the happiness of all, not only of the greatest number, must be ensured by a true morality, and will understand why Happiness is the result thereof. Manu indicates the various

Page 12

bases very significantly: “The whole Ve[d.]a is the source of the Sacred Law [Revelation], next the tradition [Conscience] and the virtuous conduct of those who know [Utility], also the customs of holy men [Evolution] and self-satisfaction [Mysticism]” (ii, 6.). It is true that happiness can result only by harmony with law, harmony with the Divine Will which is embodied in law—we need not quarrel over names—and the Science of Right Conduct, “by establishing righteousness brings about Happiness”. It may therefore be truly said that the object of Morality is Universal Happiness. Why the doing of a right action causes a flow of happiness in the doer, even in the midst of a keen temporary pain entailed by it, we shall see under “Mysticism”.

The moment we base Morality on Evolution, we see that it must change with the stage of evolution reached, and that the duty—that which ought to be done—of the civilised and highly advanced man is not the same as the duty of the savage. “One set of duties for men in the K[r.][t.]a age, different ones in the Tre[t.][=a] and in the Dv[=a]para, and another in the Kali.” (*Manusm[r.][t.]i*, i, 85.) Different ages bring new duties. But if Morality be based on Evolution we can at once define what is “Right” and what is “Wrong”. That is Right which subserves Evolution; that is Wrong which antagonises it. Or in other words, for those of us who believe that God’s method for this world is the evolutionary: that is Right which co-operates with His Will; that is wrong which works against it. “Revelation” is an attempt to state this at any given time; “Intuition” is the result of successful attempts to do this; “Utility” is the application of observed results of happiness and misery which flow from obedience to this, or disregard thereof.

Evolution is the unfolding and manifestation of life-energies, the unfolding of the capacities of consciousness, the manifestation of these ever-increasing capacities in ever-improving and more plastic forms. The primary truth of Morality, as of Religion and of Science, is the Unity of Life. One Life ever unfolding in endless varieties of forms; the essence of all beings is the same, the inequalities are the marks of the stage of its unfoldment.

When we base Morality on Evolution, we cannot have, it is obvious, one cut and dry rule for all. Those who want cut and dry rules must go to their Scriptures for them, and even then, as the rules in the Scriptures are contradictory—both as between Scriptures and within any given Scripture—they must call in the help of Intuition and Utility in the making of their code, in their selective process. This selective process will be largely moulded by the public opinion of their country and age, emphasising some precepts and ignoring others, and the code will be the expression of the average morality of the time. If this clumsy and uncertain fashion of finding a rule of conduct does not suit us, we must be willing to exert our intelligence, to take a large view of the evolutionary process, and to deduce our moral precepts at any given stage by applying our reason to the scrutiny of this process at that stage. This scrutiny is a laborious one; but Truth is the

prize of effort in the search therefor, it is not an unearned gift to the slothful and the careless.

Page 13

This large view of the evolutionary process shows us that it is best studied in two great divisions: the first from the savage to the highly civilised man who is still working primarily for himself and his family, still working for private ends predominantly; and the second, at present but sparsely followed, in which the man, realising the supreme claim of the whole upon its part, seeks the public good predominantly, renounces individual advantages and private gains, and consecrates himself to the service of God and of man. The Hindu calls the first section of evolution the Prav[r.][t.][t.]i M[=a]rga, the Path of Forthgoing; the second the Niv[r.][t.][t.]i M[=a]rga, the Path of Return. In the first, the man evolves by taking; in the second, by giving. In the first, he incurs debts; in the second, he pays them. In the first, he acquires; in the second, he renounces. In the first, he lives for the profit of the smaller self; in the second, for the service of the One Self. In the first, he claims Rights; in the second, he discharges Duties.

Thus Morality is seen from two view-points, and the virtues it comprises fall into two groups. Men are surrounded on every side by objects of desire, and the use of these is to evoke the desire to possess them, to stimulate exertion, to inspire efforts, and thus to make faculty, capacity—strength, intelligence, alertness, judgment, perseverance, patience, fortitude. Those who regard the world as God-emanated and God-guided, must inevitably realise that the relation of man—susceptible to pleasure and pain by contact with his environment—to his environment—filled with pleasure and pain-giving objects—must be intended to provoke in man the desire to possess the pleasure-giving, to avoid the pain-giving. In fact, God's lures to exertion are pleasures; His warnings are pains and the interplay between man and environment causes evolution. The man who does not believe in God has only to substitute the word "Nature" for "God" and to leave out the idea of design, and the argument remains the same: man's relation to his environment provokes exertion, and thus evolution. A man on the Path of Forthgoing will, at first, seize everything he desires, careless of others, and will gradually learn, from the attacks of the despoiled, some respect for the rights of others; the lesson will be learnt more quickly by the teaching of more advanced men—[R.][s.]his, Founders of Religions, Sages, and the like—who tell him that if he kills, robs, tramples on others, he will suffer. He does all these things; he suffers; he learns—his post-mortem lives helping him much in the learning. Later on, he lives a more controlled and regulated life, and he may blamelessly enjoy the objects of desire, provided he injure none in the taking. Hin[d.][=u]ism lays down, as the proper pursuits for the household life, the gaining of wealth, the performance of the duties of the position held, the gratification of desire. The desires will become subtler and

Page 14

more refined as intelligence fashions them and as emotions replace passions; but throughout the treading of the Path of Forthgoing, the “desire for fruit” is the necessary and blameless motive for exertion. Without this, the man at this stage of evolution becomes lethargic and does not evolve. Desire subserves Evolution, and it is Right. The gratification of Desire may lead a man to do injury to others, and as soon as he has developed enough to understand this, then the gratification becomes wrong, because, forgetting the Unity, he has inflicted harm on one who shares life with him, and has thus hampered evolution. The sense of Unity is the root-Love, the Uniter, and Love is the expression of the attraction of the separated towards union; out of Love, controlled by reason and by the desire for the happiness of all, grow all Virtues, which are but permanent, universal, specialised *forms* of love. So also is the sense of Separateness the root-Hate, the Divider, the expression of the repulsion of the separated from each other. Out of this grow all Vices, the permanent, universal, specialised *forms* of Hate. That which Love does for the Beloved, that Virtue does for all who need its aid, so far as its power extends. That which Hate wreaks on the Abhorred, that Vice does to all who obstruct its path, so far as its power extends.

“Virtues and Vices are fixed emotional states. The Virtues are fixed Love-emotions, regulated and controlled by enlightened intelligence seeing the Unity; the Vices are fixed Hate-emotions, strengthened and intensified by the unenlightened intelligence, seeing the separateness.” (*Universal Text Book*, ii, 32.) It is obvious that virtues are constructive and vices destructive, for Love holds together, while Hate disintegrates. Yet the modified form of Hate—antagonism, competition—had its part to play in the earlier stages of human evolution, developing strength, courage, and endurance, and while Love built up Nations within themselves, Hate made each strong against its competitor. And within Nations, there has been conflict of classes, class and caste war, and all this modified and softened by a growing sense of a common good, until Competition, the characteristic of the Path of Forthgoing tends to change into Co-operation, the characteristic of the Path of Return. The Path of Forthgoing must still be trodden by many, but the number is decreasing; more and more are turning towards the Path of Return. Ideals are formulated by the leaders of Humanity, and the Ideals held up to-day are increasingly those of Love and of Service. “During the first stage, man grasps at everything he desires and develops a strong individuality by conflict; in the second, he shares all he has, and yokes that individuality to service; ever-increasing separation is the key-note of the one; ever-increasing unity is the key-note of the other. Hence we need not brand as evil the rough aggression and the fierce struggles of barbarous

Page 15

times; they were a necessary stage of growth and were at that stage Right, and in the divine plan. But now those days are over, strength has been won; the time has come when the separated selves must gradually draw together, and to co-operate with the divine Will which is working for union is the Right. The Right which is the outcome of Love, directed by reason, at the present stage of evolution, then, seeks an ever-increasing realisation of Unity, a drawing together of the separated selves. That which by establishing harmonious relations makes for Unity is Right; that which divides and disintegrates, which makes for separation, is Wrong." (*ibid.*, 10, 11.)

Hind[u]ism, on which the whole of this is based, has added to this broad criterion the division of a life into four stages, to each of which appropriate virtues are assigned: the Student Period, with its virtues of perfect continence, industry, frugality, exertion; the Household Period, with its virtue of duties appropriate to the position, the earning and enjoying of wealth, the gratification of desires; the Retirement Period, with the virtues of the renouncing of worldly gain and of sacrifice; the Ascetic Period, of complete renunciation, meditation and preparation for post-mortem life. These indications make more easy the decisions as to Right and Wrong.

The more we think upon and work out into detail this view of Morality as based on Evolution, the more we realise its soundness, and the more we find that the moral law is as discoverable by observation, by reason, and by experiment, as any other law of Nature. If a man disregards it, either ignorantly or wilfully, he suffers. A man may disregard physical hygienic and sanitary laws because of his ignorance; none the less will he suffer from physical disease. A man may disregard moral laws because of ignorance; none the less will he suffer from moral disease. The sign of disease in both cases is pain and unhappiness; experts in both cases warn us, and if we disregard the warning, we learn its truth later by experience. There is no hurry; but the law is sure. Working with the law, man evolves swiftly with happiness; working against it, he evolves slowly with pain. In either case, he evolves, advancing joyously as a free man, or scourged onwards as a slave. The most obstinate fool in life's class, refusing to learn, fortunately dies and cannot quite escape after death the knowledge of his folly.

Let the reader try for himself the solution of moral problems, accepting, as a hypothesis, the facts of evolution and of the two halves of its huge spiral, and see for himself if this view does not offer a rational, intelligible, practical meaning to the much-vexed words, Right and Wrong. Let him see how it embraces all that is true in the other bases suggested, is their summation, and rationalises their precepts. He will find that Morality is no longer dependent on the maxims of great Teachers—though indeed

Page 16

they proclaimed its changeless laws—nor on the imperfect resultant of individual experiences, nor on the happiness of some only of the great human family, but that it inheres in the very nature of things, an essential law of happy life and ordered progress. Then indeed is Morality founded on a basis that cannot be moved; then indeed can it speak with an imperial authority the “ought” that must be obeyed; then it unfolds its beauty as humanity evolves to its perfecting, and leads to Bliss Eternal, the Brahman Bliss, where the human will, in fullest freedom, accords itself in harmony with the divine.

* * * * *

V

MYSTICISM

Mysticism cannot be spoken of as a basis of morality in the sense in which Revelation, Intuition, Utility and Evolution are bases, for it is valid only for the individual, not for everybody, for the true Mystic, the dictates of the Outer or Inner God are imperial, compelling, but to any one else they are entirely unauthoritative. None the less, as the influence of the Mystic is wide-reaching, and his dicta are accepted by many as a trustworthy revelation—are not all revelations communicated by Mystics?—or as the intuition of an illuminated conscience, or as showing the highest utility, or as the result of an evolution higher than the normal, it is worth while to consider their value.

Mysticism is the realisation of God, of the Universal Self. It is attained either as a realisation of God outside the Mystic, or within himself. In the first case, it is usually reached from within a religion, by exceptionally intense love and devotion, accompanied by purity of life, for only “the pure in heart shall see God”. The external means are prayer to and meditation on the Object of devotion—Shr[=i] R[=a]ma, Shr[=i] K[r.] [s.]h[n.]a, the Lord Jesus—long continued and persevering, and the devotee realises his Divinity by ecstasy attaining Union thereby. Such Mystics are, for the most part, valuable to the world as creating an atmosphere of spirituality, which raises the general level of religious feeling in those who come within its area; India has especially profited by the considerable number of such Mystics found within its borders in past times, and to a lesser extent to-day; every one who practises, for instance, meditation, knows that it is easier here than elsewhere, and all sensitive persons feel the Indian “atmosphere”. Outside this, such Mystics occasionally write valuable books, containing high ideals of the spiritual life. As a rule, they do not concern themselves with the affairs of the outer world, which they regard as unimportant. Their cry continually is that the world is evil, and they call on men to leave it, not to improve it. To them God and the world are in

opposition, “the world, the flesh, and the devil” are the three great enemies of the spiritual life. In the West, this is almost universal, for in the Roman Catholic

Page 17

Church seclusion is the mark of the religious life, and “the religious” are the monk and the nun, the “religious” and the “secular” being in opposition. In truth, where the realisation of God outside himself is sought by the devotee, seclusion is a necessity for success, if only for the time which is required for meditation, the essential preliminary of ecstasy. In the very rare Mystics of non-Catholic communions, full ecstasy is scarcely, if at all, known or even recognised; an overpowering sense of the divine Presence is experienced, but it is a Presence outside the worshipper; it is accompanied with a deliberate surrender of the will to God, and a feeling on the part of the man that he becomes an instrument of the divine Will; this he carries with him into outer life, and, undirected by love and the illuminated reason, it often lands the half-developed Mystic into fanaticism and cruelty; no one who has read Oliver Cromwell’s letters can deny that he was a Mystic, half-developed, and it is on him that Lord Rosebery founded his dictum of the formidable nature of the “practical Mystic”; the ever present sense of a divine Power behind himself gives such a man a power that ordinary men cannot successfully oppose; but this sense affords no moral basis, as, witness the massacre of Drogheda. Such a Mystic, belonging to a particular religion, as he always does, takes the revelation of his religion as his moral code, and Cromwell felt himself as the avenging sword of his God, as did the Hebrews fighting with the Amalekites. No man who accepts a revelation as his guide can be regarded as more than partially a Mystic. He has the Mystic temperament only, and that undoubtedly gives him a strength far beyond the strength of those who have it not.

The true Mystic, realising God, has no need of any Scriptures, for he has touched the source whence all Scriptures flow. An “enlightened” Brahmin, says Krishnakumar, has no more need of the Vedas, than a man needs a tank in a place which is overflowing with water. The value of cisterns, of reservoirs, is past, when a man is seated beside an ever-flowing spring. As Dean Inge has pointed out, Mysticism is the most scientific form of religion, for it bases itself, as does all science, on experience and experiment—experiment being only a specialised form of experience, devised either to discover or to verify.

We have seen the Mystic who realises God outside himself and seeks Union with Him. There remains the most interesting, the most effective form of Mysticism, the realisation by a man of God within himself. Here meditation is also a necessity, and the man who is born with a high capacity for concentration is merely a man who has practised it in previous lives. A life or lives of study and seclusion often precede a life of tremendous and sustained activity in the physical world. The realisation is preceded by control of the body, control of the emotions and control

Page 18

of the mind, for the power to hold these in complete stillness is necessary, if a man is to penetrate into those depths of his own nature in which alone is to be found the shrine of the inner God. The subtle music of that sphere is drowned by the clatter of the lower bodies as the most exquisite notes of the V[=i][n.]=[a] are lost in the crude harsh sound of the harmonium. The Voice of the Silence can only be heard in the silence, and all the desires of the heart must be paralysed ere can arise in the tranquillity of senses and mind, the glorious majesty of the Self. Only in the desert of loneliness rises that Sun in all His glory, for all objects that might cloud His dawning must vanish; only “when half-Gods go,” does God arise. Even the outer God must hide, ere the Inner God can manifest; the cry of agony of the Crucified must be wrung from the tortured lips; “My God, my God, why hast *Thou* forsaken me?” precedes the realisation of the God within.

Through this all Mystics pass who are needed for great service in the world, those whom Mr. Bagshot so acutely calls “materialised Mystics”. The Mystics who find God outside themselves are the “unmaterialised” Mystics, and they serve the world in the ways above mentioned; but the other, as Mr. Bagshot points out, transmute their mystic thought into “practical energy,” and these become the most formidable powers known in the physical world. All that is based on injustice, fraud and wrong may well tremble when one of these arises, for the Hidden God has become manifest, and who may bar His way?

Such Mystics wear none of the outer signs of the “religious”—their renunciation is within, not without, there is no parade of outer holiness, no outer separation from the world; Janaka the King, K[r.][s.]h[n.]a the Warrior-Statesman, are of these; clothed in cotton cloth or cloth of gold, it matters not; poor or rich, it boots not; failing or succeeding, it is naught, for each apparent failure is the road to fuller success, and both are their servants, not their masters; victory ever attends them, to-day or a century hence is equal, for they live in Eternity, and with them it is ever To-day. Possessing nothing, all is theirs; holding everything, nothing belongs to them. Misconception, misrepresentation, they meet with a smile, half-amused, all-forgiving; the frowns, the taunts, the slanders of the men they live to serve are only the proofs of how much these foolish ones need their help, and how should these foolish ones hurt those on whom the Peace of the Eternal abides?

These Mystics are a law unto themselves, for the inner law has replaced the external compulsion. More rigid, for it is the law of their own nature; more compelling, for it is the Voice of the divine Will; more exacting, for no pity, no pardon, is known to it; more all-embracing, for it sees the part only in the whole.

Page 19

But it has, it ought to have, no authority outside the Mystic himself. It may persuade, it may win, it may inspire, but it may not claim obedience as of right. For the Voice of the God within only becomes authoritative for another when the God within that other self answers the Mystic's appeal, and he recognises an ideal that he could not have formulated, unaided, for himself. The Mystic may shine as a Light, but a man must see with his own eyes, and there lies the world's safety; the materialised Mystic, strong as he is, cannot, by virtue of the God within him, enslave his fellow-men.

* * * * *

THE VASANTA PRESS, ADYAR, MADRAS