Chapter 1
The Present Need of Determining the Bases of Morality

By Peter Kropotkin

CHAPTER I
The Present Need of Determining the Bases of Morality

When we cast a glance upon the immense progress realized by the natural sciences in the course of the nineteenth century, and when we perceive the promises they contain for the future, we can not but feel deeply impressed by the idea that mankind is entering upon a new era of progress. It has, at any rate, before it all the elements for preparing such a new era. In the course of the last one hundred years, new branches of knowledge, opening entirely new vistas upon the laws of the development of human society, have grown up under the names of anthropology, prehistoric ethnology (science of the primitive social institutions), the history of religions, and so on. New conceptions about the whole life of the universe were developed by pursuing such lines of research as molecular physics, the chemical structure of matter, and the chemical composition of distant worlds. And the traditional views about the position of man in the universe, the origin of life, and the nature of reason were entirely upset by
the rapid development of biology, the appearance of the theory of evolution, and the progress made in the study of human and animal psychology. Merely to say that the progress of science in each of its branches, excepting perhaps astronomy, has been greater during the last century than during any three or four centuries of the ages preceding, would not be enough. We must turn back 2000 years, to the glorious times of the philosophical revival in Ancient Greece, in order to find another such period of the awakening of the human intellect. And yet, even this comparison would not be correct, because at that early period of human history, man did not enter into possession of all those wonders of industrial technique which have been lately arrayed in our service. The development of this technique at last gives man the opportunity to free himself from slavish toil.

At the same time modern humanity developed a youthful, daring spirit of invention, stimulated by the recent discoveries of science; and the inventions that followed in rapid succession have to such an extent increased the productive capacity of human labor as to make at last possible for modern civilized peoples such a general well-being as could not be dreamed of in antiquity, or in the Middle Ages, or even in the earlier portion of the nineteenth century. For the first time in the history of civilization, mankind has reached a point where the means of satisfying its needs are in excess of the needs themselves. To impose therefore, as has hitherto been done, the curse of misery and degradation upon vast divisions of mankind, in order to secure well-being and further mental development for the few is needed no more: well-being can be secured for all. Without placing on anyone the burden of oppressive, degrading toil, and humanity can at last rebuild its entire social life on the bases of justice. Whether the modern civilized nations will find in their midst the social constructive capacities, the creative powers and the daring required for utilizing the conquests of the human intellect in the interest of all, it is difficult to say beforehand.

Whether our present civilization is vigorous and youthful enough to undertake so great a task, and to bring it to the desired end, we cannot foretell. But this is certain: that the recent revival of science has created the intellectual atmosphere required for calling such forces into existence, and it has already given us the knowledge necessary for the realization of this great task.

Reverting to the sound philosophy of Nature which remained in neglect from the time of Ancient Greece until Bacon woke scientific research from its long slumber, modern science has now worked out the elements of a philosophy of the universe, free of supernatural hypotheses and the metaphysical "mythology of ideas," and at the same time so grand, so poetical and inspiring, and so expressive of freedom, that it certainly is capable of calling into existence the new forces. Man no longer needs to clothe his ideals of more beauty, and of a society based on justice, with the garb of superstition: he does not have to wait for the Supreme Wisdom to remodel society. He can derive his ideals from Nature and he can draw the necessary strength from the study of its life.

One of the greatest achievements of modern science was, that it proved the indestructibility of energy through all the ceaseless transformations which it undergoes in the universe. For the physicist and the mathematician this idea became a most fruitful source of discovery. It inspires in fact all modern research. But its philosophical import is equally great. It accustoms man to conceive the life of the universe as a never-ending series of transformations of energy: mechanical energy may become converted into sound, light...
electricity and conversely, each of these forms of energy may be converted into others. And among all these transformations the birth of our planet, its evolution, and its final unavoidable destruction and reabsorption in the great Cosmos are but an infinitesimally small episode- a mere moment in the life of the stellar worlds.

The same with the researches life concerning organic life. The recent studies in the wide borderland dividing the inorganic and organic worlds have divested life of its mystical character ten At the same time, our conception of life has been so widened that we grow accustomed now to conceive all the agglomerations matter in the universe- solid, liquid, and gaseous (such are the nebulae of the astral world)-as something living and going through the same cycles of evolution and decay as do living beings. The reverting to ideas which were budding once in Ancient Greece, modern science has retraced step by step that marvelous evolution of living matter, which, after having started with the simplest forms, hardly deserving the name of organism, has gradually produced the infinite variety of beings which now people and enliven our planet. And, by making us familiar with the thought that every organism is to an immense extent the product of its own environment, biology has solved one of the greatest riddles of Nature-it explained the adaptations to the conditions of life which we meet at every step.

Even in the most puzzling of all manifestations of life,-the domain of feeling and thought, in which human intelligence has to catch the very processes by means of which it succeeds in retaining and coordinating the impressions received from without-even in this domain, the darkest of all, man has already succeeded in catching a glimpse of the mechanism of thought by following the lines of research indicated by physiology. And finally, in the vast field of human institutions, habits and laws superstitions, beliefs, and ideals, such a flood of light has been thrown, by the anthropological schools of history law and economics that we can already maintain positively that "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" is no longer a dream a mere Utopia. It is possible, and it is also clear, that the prosperity and happiness of no nation or class could ever be based even temporarily upon the degradation of either classes, nations, or races.

Modern science has thus achieved a double aim. On the one side it has given to man a very valuable lesson of modesty. It has taught him to consider himself as but an infinitesimally small particle of the universe. It has driven him out of his narrow, egotistical seclusion, and has dissipated the self-conceit under which he considered himself the center of the universe and the object of the special attention of the Creator. It has taught him that without the whole the "ego" is nothing; that our "I" cannot even come to a self-definition without the "thou." But at the same time science has taught man how powerful mankind is in its progressive march, if it skillfully utilizes the unlimited energies of Nature.

Thus science and philosophy have given us both the material strength and the freedom of thought which are required for calling into life the constructive forces that may lead mankind to a new of progress. There is, however, one branch of knowledge which behind. It is ethics, the teaching of the fundamental principle morality. A system of ethics worthy of the present scientific revival, which would take advantage of all the recent acquisition reconstituting the very foundations of morality on a wider philosophical basis, and which would give to the civilized nations the inspiration required for the great task that lies before them-such a system has not yet been produced. But the need of it is felt every where. A new, realistic moral science is the need of the day a science as free from superstition, religious
dogmatism, and metaphysical mythology as modern cosmogony and philosophy already and
permeated at the same time with these higher feelings brighter hopes which are inspired by
the modern knowledge of and his history this is what humanity is persistently demanding.
That such a science is possible lies beyond any reasonable doubt. If the study of Nature
has yielded the elements of a philosophy which embraces the life of the Cosmos the
evolution of living beings the laws of physical activity and the development of society it
must also be able to give us the rational origin and tile sources of moral feelings. And it must
be able to show us where lie the forces that are able to elevate the moral feeling to an
always greater height and purity. If the contemplation of the Universe and a close
acquaintance with Nature were able to infuse lofty inspiration into the minds of the great
naturalists and poets of the nineteenth century,-if a look into Nature's breast quickened the
pulse of life for Goethe, Shelley, Byron, Lermontov, in the face of the raging storm, the calm
mountains, the dark forest and its inhabitants,-why should not a deeper penetration into the
life of man and destinies be able to inspire the poet in the same way? And when the poet
has found the proper expression for his sense of communion with the Cosmos and his unity
with his fellow-men, he becomes capable of inspiring millions of men with his high
enthusiasm. He makes them feel what is best in them and awakens their desire to become
better still. He produces in them those very ecstasies which were formerly considered as
belonging exclusively to the province of religion. what are, indeed, the Psalms, which are
often described as the highest expression of religious feeling, or the more poetical portions
of the sacred books of the East, but attempts to express man's ecstasy at the contemplation
of the universe-the first awakening of his sense of the poetry of nature?
The need of realistic ethics was felt from the very dawn of the scientific revival, when
Bacon, at the same time that he laid the foundations of the present advancement of
sciences, indicated also the main outlines of empirical ethics, perhaps with less
thoroughness than this was done by his followers, but with a width of conception which few
have been able to attain since, and beyond which we have not advanced much further in our
day.
The best thinkers of the seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries continued on the same lines,
Endeavoring to worth out systems of ethics independent of the imperatives of religion. In
England Hobbes, Cudworth, Locke, Shaftesbury, Paley, Hutcheson, Hume, and Adam Smith
boldly attached the problem on all sides. They indicated the natural sources of the moral
sense, and in their determinations Of the moral Ends they (except Paley) mostly stood on the
same empirical ground. They endeavored to combine in varied ways the "intellectualism"
and utilitarianism of Locke with the "moral sense" and sense of beauty of Hutcheson, the
"theory of association" of Hartley, and the ethics of feeling of Shaftesbury. Speaking of the
ends of ethics, some of them already mentioned the "harmony" between self-love and
regard for fellowmen, which acquired such an importance in the moral theories of the
nineteenth century, and considered it in connection with Hutcheson's "emotion of
approbation," or the "sympathy" of Hume and Adam Smith. And finally, if they found a
difficulty in explaining the sense Of duty on a rational basis, they resorted to the early
influences of religion or to some "inborn sense," or to some variety of Hobbe's theory, which
regards law as the principal cause of the formation of society, while considering the primitive
savage as an unsocial animal.
The French Encyclopedists and materialists discussed the problem on the same Lines, only
insisting more on self-love and trying to find the synthesis of the opposed tendencies of
human nature: the narrow-egoistic and the social. Social life they maintained invariably
favors the development of the better sides of human nature. Rousseau, with his rational religion, stood as a link between the materialists and the intuitionists, and by boldly attacking the social problems of the day he won a wider hearing than any one of them. On the other side even the utmost idealists, like Descartes and his pantheist follower Spinoza, and at one time even the "transcendentalist-idealistic" Kant, did not trust entirely to the revealed origin of the moral idealism and tried to give to ethics a broader foundation, even though they would not Part entirely with an extra-human origin of the moral law.

The same endeavor towards finding a realistic basis for ethics became even more pronounced in the nineteenth century, when quite a number of important ethical systems were worked out on the different bases of rational self-love, love of humanity (Auguste Comte, Littré and a great number of minor followers), sympathy and intellectual identification of one's personality with mankind (Schopenhauer), utilitarianism (Bentham and Mill), and evolution (Darwin, Spencer, Guyau), to say nothing of the systems reflecting morality, originating in La Rochefoucauld and Mandeville and developed in the nineteenth centenary by Nietzsche and several others, who tried to establish a higher moral standard by their bold attacks against the current half-hearted moral conceptions, and by a vigorous assertion of the supreme rights of the individual.

Two of the nineteenth century ethical systems-Comte's positivism and Bentham's utilitarianism- exercised, as is known, a deep influence upon the century's thought, and the former impressed with its own stamp all the scientific researches which make the glory of modern science. They also gave origin to a variety of sub-systems, so that most modern writers of mark in psychology, evolution, or anthropology have enriched ethical literature with some more or less original researches, of a high standard, as is the case with Feuerbach, Bain, Leslie Stephen, Proudhon, Wundt, Sidgwick, Guyau, Jodl, and several others. Numbers of ethical societies were also started for a wider propaganda of empirical ethics (i.e., not based on religion). At the same time, an immense movement, chiefly economical in its origins, but deeply ethical in its substance, was born in the first half of the nineteenth century under the names of Fourierism, Saint-Simonism, and Owenism, and later on of international socialism and anarchism. This movement, which is spreading more and more, aims, with the support of the working men of all nations, not only to revise the very foundations of the current ethical conceptions, but also to remodel life in such a way that a new page in the ethical life of mankind may be opened.

It would seem, therefore, that since such a number of rationalist ethical systems have grown up in the course of the last two centuries, it is impossible to approach the subject once more without falling into a mere repetition or a mere recombination of fragments of already advocated schemes. However, the very fact that each of the main systems produced in the nineteenth century-the positivism of Comte, the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, and the altruistic evolutionism, i.e., the theory of the social development of morality, of Darwin, Spencer, and Guyau-has added something important to the conceptions worked out by its predecessors,-proves that the matter is far from being exhausted.

Even if we take the last three systems only, we cannot but see that Spencer failed to take advantage of some of the hints which are found in the remarkable sketch of ethics given by Darwin in "The Descent of Man;" while Guyau introduced into morals such an important element as that of an overflow of energy in feeling, thought, or will, which had not been taken into account by his predecessors. If every new system thus contributes some new and valuable element, this very fact proves that ethical science is not yet constituted In fact, it never will be, because new factors and new tendencies always have to be taken into account
in proportion as mankind advances in its evolution.

That, at the same time, none of the ethical systems which were brought forward in the course of the nineteenth century has satisfied be it only the educated fraction of the civilized nations, hardly need be insisted upon. To say nothing of the numerous philosophical works in which dissatisfaction with modern ethics has been expressed, the best proof of it is the decided return to idealism which we see at the end of the nineteenth century. The absence of poetical inspiration in the positivism of Littré and Herbert Spencer and their incapacity to cope with the great problems of our present civilization; the narrowness which characterizes the chief philosopher of evolution, Spencer, in some, of his views; nay, the repudiation by the latter-day positivists of the humanitarian theories which distinguished the eighteenth-century Encyclopedists all these have helped to create a strong reaction in favor of a sort of mystico-religious idealism. As Fouillée very justly remarks, a one-sided interpretation of Darwinism, which was given to it by the most prominent representatives of the evolutionist school, (without a word of protest coming from Darwin himself for the first twelve years after the appearance of his "Origin of Species"), gave still more force to opponents of the natural interpretation of the moral nature of man, so-called "naturism."

Beginning as a protest against some mistakes of the naturalist philosophy, the critique soon became a campaign against protest knowledge altogether. The "failure of science" was triumphant announced. However, the scientists know that every exact science moves from one approximation to another, i.e., from a first approximate explanation of a whole series of phenomena to the next more accurate approximation. But this simple truth is completely ignored by the "believers," and in general by lovers of mysticism. Having learned that inaccuracies have been discovered in the first approximation, they hasten to proclaim the "bankruptcy of science" in general. Whereas, the scientists know that the most exact sciences, such as, for example, astronomy, follow just this road of successive approximations. It was a great discovery to find out that all the planets move around the sun, and it was the first "approximation" to suppose that they follow circular paths. Then it was discovered that they move along somewhat oblong circles, i.e., ellipses, and this was the second "approximation." This was followed by the third approximation when we learned that the planets follow a wavy course, always deviating to one or the other side of the ellipse, and never retracing exactly the same path; and now, at last, when we know that the sun is not motionless, but is itself flying through space, the astronomers are endeavoring to determine the nature and the position of the spirals along which the planets are traveling in describing slightly wavy ellipses around the sun.

Similar approximations from one near solution of the problem to the next, more accurate one, are practiced in all sciences. Thus, for example, the natural sciences are now revising the "first approximations" concerning life, physical activity, evolution of plant and animal forms, the structure of matter, and so on, which were arrived at in the years 1856-62, and which must be revised now in order to reach the next, deeper generalizations. And so this revision was taken advantage of by some people who know little, to convince others who know still less, that science, in general, has failed in its attempted solutions of all the great problems.

At present a great many endeavor to substitute for science "intuition," i.e., simply guess work and blind faith. Going back first to Kant, then to Schelling, and even to Lotze, numbers of writers have of late been preaching "spiritualism," "indeterminism," "apriorism," "personal idealism," "intuition," and so on-proving that faith, and not science, is the source of all true
knowledge. Religious faith itself is found insufficient. It is the mysticism of St. Bernard or of the Neo-Platonist which is now in demand. “Symbolism,” “the subtle,” “the incomprehensible” are sought for. Even the belief in the medieval Satan was resuscitated.

It is true that none of these currents of thought obtained a widespread hold upon the minds of our contemporaries; but we certainly see public opinion floating between the two extremes—between a desperate effort, on the one side, to force oneself to return to the obscure creeds of the Middle Ages, with their full accompaniment of superstition, idolatry, and even magic; and, on the opposite extreme, a glorification of “a-moralism” and a revival of that worship of “superior natures,” now invested with the names of “supermen” or “superior individualizations,” which Europe had lived through in the times of Byronism and early Romanticism.

It appears, therefore, more necessary than ever to see if the present skepticism as to the authority of science in ethical questions is well founded, and whether science does not contain already the elements of a system of ethics which, if it were properly formulated, would respond to the needs of the present day.

The limited success of the various ethical systems which were born in the course of the last hundred years shows that man cannot be satisfied with a mere naturalistic explanation of the origins of the moral instinct. He means to have a justification of it. Simply to trace the origin of our moral feelings, as we trace the pedigree of some structural feature in a flower, and to say that such-and-such causes have contributed to the growth and refinement of the moral sense, is not enough. Man wants to have a criterion for judging the moral instinct itself. Whereto does it lead us? Is it towards a desirable end, or towards something which, as some critics say, would only result in the weakening of the race and its ultimate decay?

If struggle for life and the extermination of the physically weak weakest is the law of Nature, and represents a condition of progress, is not then the cessation of the struggle, and the “industrial state” which Comte and Spencer promise us, the very beginning of the decay of the human race—as Nietzsche has so forcibly concluded? And if such an end is undesirable, must we not proceed, indeed, to a revaluation of all those moral “values” which tend to reduce the struggle, or to render it less painful?

The main problem of modern realistic ethics is thus, as has been remarked by Wundt in his “Ethics,” to determine, first of all, the moral end in view. But this end or ends, however ideal they may be, and however remote their full realization, must belong to the world of realities.

The end of morals cannot be “transcendental,” as the idealists desire it to be: it must be real. We must find moral satisfaction in life and not in some form of extra-vital condition. When Darwin threw into circulation the idea of “struggle for existence,” and represented this struggle as the mainspring of progressive evolution, he agitated once more the great old question as to the moral or immoral aspects of Nature. The origin of the conceptions of good and evil, which had exercised the best minds since the times of the Zend-Avesta, was brought once more under discussion with a renewed vigor, and with a greater depth of conception than ever. Nature was represented by the Darwinists as an immense battlefield upon which one sees nothing but an incessant struggle for life and an extermination of the weak ones by the strongest, the swiftest, and the cunningest: evil was the only lesson which man could get from Nature.

These ideas, as is known, became very widely spread. But if they are true, the evolutionist philosopher has to solve a deep contradiction which he himself has introduced into his
philosophy. He cannot deny that man is possessed of a higher conception of "good," and that a faith in the gradual triumph of the good principle is deeply seated in human nature, and he has to explain whence originates this conception of good and this faith in progress. He cannot be lulled into indifference by the Epicurean hope, expressed by Tennyson—that "somehow good will be the final goal of ill." Nor can he represent to himself Nature, "red in tooth and claw,"--as wrote the same Tennyson and the Darwinian Huxley,--at strife everywhere with the good principle--the very negation of it in every living being--and still maintain that the good principle will be triumphant "in the long run." He must explain this contradiction.

But if a scientist maintains that "the only lesson which Nature gives to man is one of evil," then he necessarily has to admit the existence of some other, extra-natural, or super-natural influence which inspires man with conceptions of "supreme good," and guides human development towards a higher goal. And in this way he nullifies his own attempt at explaining evolution by the action of natural forces only.3

In reality, however, things do not stand so badly as that, for the theory of evolution does not at all lead to the contradictions such as those to which Huxley was driven, because the study of nature does not in the least confirm the above-mentioned pessimistic view of its course, as Darwin himself indicated in his second work, "The Descent of Man." The conceptions of Tennyson and Huxley are incomplete, one-sided, and consequently wrong. The view is, moreover, unscientific, for Darwin himself pointed out the other aspect of Nature in a special chapter of "The Descent of Man." There is, he showed, in Nature itself, another set of facts, parallel to those of mutual struggle, but having a quite different meaning: the facts of mutual support within the species, which are even more important than the former, on account of their significance for the welfare of the species and its maintenance. This extremely important idea,—to which, however, most Darwinists refuse to pay attention, and which Alfred Russel Wallace even denies,—I attempted to develop further, and to substantiate with a great number of facts in a series of essays in which I endeavored to bring into evidence the immense importance of Mutual Aid for the preservation of both the animal species and the human race, and still more so for their progressive evolution.4

Without trying to minimize the fact that an immense number of animals live either upon species belonging to some lower division of the animal kingdom, or upon some smaller species of the same class as themselves, I indicated that warfare in Nature is chiefly limited to struggle between different species, but that within each species, and within the groups of different species which we find living together, the practice of mutual aid is the rule, and therefore this last aspect of animal life plays a far greater part shall does warfare in the economy of Nature. It is also more general, not only on account of the immense numbers of sociable species, such as the ruminants, most rodents, many birds, the ants, the trees, and so on, which do not prey at all upon their animals, and the overwhelming numbers of individuals which all sociable species contain, but also because nearly all carnivorous and rapacious species, and especially those of them which are not in decay owing to a rapid extermination by man or to some other cause, also practice it to some extent. Mutual aid is the predominant fact of nature.

If mutual support is so general in Nature, it is because it offers such immense advantages to all those animals which practice it, that it entirely upsets the balance of power to the disadvantage of the predatory creatures. It represents the best weapon in the great struggle for life which continually has to be carried on in Nature against climate, inundations, storms, frost, and the like, and continually requires new adaptations to the ever-changing
conditions of existence. Therefore, taken as a whole, Nature is by no means an illustration of the triumph of physical force, swiftness, cunning, or any other feature useful in warfare. It seems, on the contrary, that species decidedly weak, such as the ant, the bee, the pigeon, the cluck, the marmot and other rodents, the gazelle, the deer, etc., having no protective armor, no strong beak or fang for self-defense, and not at all warlike-nevertheless, succeed best in the struggle for life; and owing to their sociality and mutual protection, they even displace much more powerfully-built competitors and enemies. And, finally, we can take it as proved that while struggle for life leads indifferently to both progressive and regressive evolution, the practice of mutual aid is the agency which always leads to progressive development. It is the main factor in the progressive evolution of the animal kingdom, in the development of longevity, intelligence, and of that which we call the higher type in the chain of living creatures. No biologist has so far refuted this contention of mine.

Being thus necessary for the **preservation** of the welfare, and the progressive development of every species, the mutual-aid instinct has become what Darwin described as "a **permanent instinct**," which is **always at work** in all social animals, and especially in man. Having its origin at the very beginnings of the evolution of the animal world, it is certainly an instinct as deeply seated in animals, low and high, as the instinct of maternal love; perhaps even deeper, because it is present in such animals as the mollusks, some insects, and most fishes, which hardly possess the maternal instinct at all. Darwin was therefore quite right in considering that the instinct of "mutual sympathy" is **more permanently** at work in the social animals than even the purely egotistic instinct of direct self-preservation. He saw in it, as is known, the rudiments of the moral conscience, which consideration is, unfortunately, too often forgotten by the Darwinists.

But this is not all. In the same instinct we have the origin of those feelings of benevolence and of that partial identification of the individual with the group which are the starting-point of all the higher ethical feelings. It is upon this foundation that the higher sense of justice, or equity, is developed, as well as that which it is customary to call self-sacrifice. When we see that scores of thousands of different aquatic birds come in big flocks from the far South for nesting on the ledges of the "bird mountains" on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, and live here without fighting for the best positions; that several flocks of pelicans will live by the side of one another on the sea-shore, while each flock keeps to its assigned fishing ground; and that thousands of species of birds and mammals come in some way without fighting to a certain arrangement concerning their feeding areas, their nesting place" their night quarters, and their hunting grounds; or when we see that a young bird which has stolen some straw from another bird's nest is attacked by all the birds of the same colony, we catch on the spot the very origin and growth of the sense of equity and justice in animal societies. And finally, in proportion as we advance in every class of animals towards the higher representatives of that class (the ants, the wasps, and the bees among the insects, the cranes and the parrots among the birds, the higher ruminants, the apes, and then man among the mammals), we find that the identification of the individual with the interests of his group, and eventually even self-sacrifice for it, grow in proportion. In this circumstance we cannot but see the indication of the natural origin not only of the rudiments of ethics, but also of the higher ethical feelings.

It thus appears that not only does Nature fail to give us a lesson of a-moralism, i. e., of the indifferent attitude to morality which needs to be combated by some extra-natural influence, but we are bound to recognize that the very ideas of **bad and good**, and man's abstractions concerning "the supreme good" have been borrowed from Nature. They are
reflections in the mind of man of what he saw in animal life and in the course of his social life, and due to it these impressions were developed into general conceptions of right and wrong. And it should be noted that we do not mean here the personal judgments of exceptional individuals, but the judgment of the majority. They contain the fundamental principles of equity and mutual sympathy, which apply to all sentient beings, just as principles of mechanics derived from observation on the surface of the earth apply to matter in the stellar spaces.

A similar conception must also apply to the evolution of human character and human institutions. The development of man came about in the same natural environment, and was guided by it in the same direction, while the very institutions for mutual aid and support, formed in human societies, more and more clearly demonstrated to man to what an extent he was indebted to these institutions for his strength. In such a social environment the moral aspect of man was more and more developed. On the basis of new investigations in the field of history it is already possible to conceive the history of mankind as the evolution of an ethical factor, as the evolution of an inherent tendency of man to organize his life on the basis of mutual aid, first within the tribe, then in the village community, and in the republics of the free cities, these forms of social organization becoming in turn the bases of further progress, periods of retrogression notwithstanding. We certainly must abandon the idea of representing human history as an uninterrupted chain of development from the prehistoric Stone Age to the present time. The development of human societies was not continuous. It was started several times anew in India, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, and in Western Europe, beginning each time with the primitive tribe and then the village community. But if we consider each of these lines separately, we certainly find in each of them, and especially in the development of Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire, a continual widening of the conception of mutual support and mutual protection, from the clan to the tribe, the nation, and finally to the international union of nations. On the other hand, notwithstanding the temporary regressive movements which occasionally take place, even in the most civilized nations, there is at least among the representatives of advanced thought in the civilized world and in the progressive popular movements the tendency of always widening the current conception of human solidarity and justice, and of constantly improving the character of our mutual relations. We also mark the appearance, in the form of an ideal, of the conceptions of what is desirable in further development.

The very fact that the backward movements which take place from time to time are considered by the enlightened portion of the population as mere temporary illnesses of the social organism, the return of which must be prevented in the future, proves that the average ethical standard is now higher than it was in the past. And in proportion as the means of satisfying the needs of all the members of the civilized communities are improved, and the way is prepared for a still higher conception of justice for all, the ethical standard is bound to become more and more refined. Taking this viewpoint of scientific ethics, man is in a position not only to reaffirm his faith in moral progress, all pessimistic lessons to the contrary notwithstanding, but he can also put it on a scientific basis. He sees that this belief, although it originated only in one of those intuitions which always precede science, was quite correct, and is now confirmed by positive knowledge.

Footnotes

Thus it actually happened with Huxley in the course of his lecture on *Evolution and Ethics*, where he at first denied the presence of any moral principle in the life of Nature, and by that very assertion was compelled to acknowledge the existence of the ethical principle outside of nature. Then he retracted also this point of view in a later remark, in which he recognized the presence of the ethical principle in the social life of animals. [Volume 9 of *Collected Essays*, N.Y., contains the essay on *Evolution and Ethics*, written in 1893.]--Trans. Note.

**Chronology:**

- **November 30, 1923**: Chapter 1 -- Publication.
- **February 27, 2020**: Chapter 1 -- Last Updated on http://www.RevoltLib.com.

PDF file generated from:

http://www.RevoltLib.com/