THE ECONOMICS OF MORALITY

THE national welfare may be called the national economy, since in the national welfare a plurality of interests becomes a community, or economy, of interests. The national welfare is the one interest that virtually represents all of the interests of the nation: therefore, it is the most important interest of the nation. And every other interest of the nation is half dependent on this leading interest, just as the final, or real, effectiveness of every individual workman is half dependent on the officials, the leaders, of the business in which he is engaged.

Now, as an interest, the national welfare is dealt with in two very different, though complementary, ways. The first way is by means of codes of political laws. It is extremely difficult for many, if any, men to grasp and retain in mind the end, or ideal, of national welfare in its relation to present conditions; and therefore, these codes of political laws are substituted in men's minds for the real end of national welfare. It would be out of the question to decree that all men act in whatever way gives best promise of helping to attain the end of national welfare, for since most men's minds are very confused in regard to the proper method of attaining this ideal, there would result confused and conflicting actions and modes of life. It would be impossible to establish the guilt of offenders. But codes of political laws are easy to understand, and therefore to obey. They deal with particular modes of action, rather than action in general. They make clearer to men what their duties are with respect to political, or civil life, and in so doing they enable courts to punish offenders more readily.

Codes of laws are based solidly on the experience of the race in trying to attain the end of national welfare. Whatever modes of action have proven useful in attaining the end of national welfare are made legal; whatever modes of action have proved injurious are made illegal. Now it sometimes happens that the experience on which a law is based is forgotten by the nation, and that the nation fails to enforce the law, or changes it, until experience again proves

its wisdom. But as a general rule laws are enforced, even if their *raison d'être* be temporarily forgotten. Authorities realize that it is very hard for most men to realize the importance of many laws, or to foresee the full consequences of disobeying any law, and therefore authorities enforce laws with a strictness corresponding to the importance of the laws. It is demanded of men that they obey laws faithfully and somewhat blindly.

It is very necessary that men establish codes of laws to assist in attaining the end of national welfare; but codes of laws are not all that men need. They are intended chiefly for men's *wills*, since they must be obeyed rather blindly, for men's intellects cannot have anything like free play in respect of laws. Yet the intellect is just as important as is the will, and provision should be made for the intellect. The will should be obedient, and the intellect clear.

To satisfy this need men have developed the science of political economy. Principles of political economy are not enforced, as are political laws; for things that are left to the intellect are to be decided by the intellect. Principles of political economy are based solidly on the experience of the race, as are political laws: but political laws are *commands*, whereas principles of political economy are *assertions*, or *suggestions*. Political laws compel the individual, principles of political economy assist the individual. People *must* have political laws, since there can be no government without laws; and people *should* have principles of political economy, since governments cannot be efficient where political economy is unknown. Between the right-of-ways of laws there is much individual freedom of action; and in order to make the most of this freedom of action, individuals are taught political economy, as far as is practicable. It is not necessary for all persons to understand political economy—only a small part of the population of any nation understands it—yet the welfare of all nations is at least double what it would be if political economy were unknown.

Now *morality* is also an economy; it is the *universal* economy of interests. Morality is the one interest that represents all other interests; it unites all interests. In morality all other interests have their being. All parties to life are irrevocably committed to morality; it is the chief end of life. Whenever another interest becomes exaggerated, conflicts with morality, it must sooner or later give in. Its very life depends on morality, as a branch depends on its vine. In attaining the moral end it is important to use two different, though complementary methods analogous to those used in attaining the

end of national welfare. In the experience of the race certain modes of action have proved beneficial; these have become morally legal. Other modes have proved injurious; these have become morally illegal. It is hard for most men to foresee the consequences of disobeying these moral laws, and therefore they are expected to be obeyed almost blindly as well as faithfully, like political laws.

With the universal welfare, morality, as with the national welfare, it is important that people develop and teach principles of economy—in this case principles of *moral* economy. Men should be obedient to moral laws, and should understand principles of moral economy. Between the right-of-ways of moral laws there is always room for a very great amount of individual freedom of action. Therefore, the individual will always be able to do more good if he understands principles of moral economy. And just as the national welfare is *now* twice what it *would be* if political economy were not taught, so it is that morality, the universal welfare, *would be* twice what it *now is* if moral economy were taught.

It cannot be denied that morality is more than a question of economy; for morality cannot be adequately defined in terms of any interest, even as virtue, happiness, wealth, honor, or economy, since these are all elements in all interests. Morality is like a cord of many threads. All of the threads lead to the end of the cord, to the moral end; and therefore any thread will serve as a guide. Because, to be truly moral an act must satisfy all of the threads of cord; it must satisfy at once the demands of virtue, happiness, honor, wealth, economy. If it fails to satisfy all of these it will be found to fail to satisfy any. And if an act fully satisfies any one of these it will be found to satisfy all of these. If one had exhaustive knowledge of the nature of any one side of morality it would suffice to guide one to right action in all things, without knowledge of the nature of any other side of morality. But it is impossible to have such knowledge. Therefore, one should not attempt to live up to the requirements of only one side of morality, to regard morality as a question of only one interest; for just as an object is seen better in two lights than in one, so morality is understood better in two lights than in one. Morality is without doubt just as much a question of economy as it is a question of virtue, happiness, wealth, or honor. And in connection with this it may be said that the national welfare is a question, not only of economy, but also of virtue, happiness, wealth and honor, since all of these are inseparably connected with the national welfare. The difference between the

national welfare and morality, the universal welfare, is therefore mainly a difference in degree: the national welfare is a limited interest, whereas morality is an unlimited interest.

Just as morality is the representative of all other interests, and therefore the equal in importance to all other interests combined, so moral economy is the representative of the economies of all other interests combined. Moral economy is the economy of the whole body of interests; and the economy of *any whole* is exactly equal in importance to the combined economies of *all parts*.

It may be thought by some that teaching principles of moral economy means the interference on the part of some men in the internal affairs of others, but such is not the case. For teaching general principles is part of the work in all sciences, yet no one regards teaching other sciences as an interference on the part of some men in the internal affairs of others. For the individual is almost wholly dependent on general principles in dealing with his particular problems. The individual will always have his individual problems, and no science attempts to solve them for him. Principles of moral economy, like principles of political economy, seem clearer as they are studied in relation to one another.

The following are fundamental principles of moral economy, and give an idea of the general nature of the subject:

1. The more leading one's position is in any field, the greater is his chance of seeing the needs of that field in their true relation.

The officials of any business see the needs of that business more clearly than do the employees of that business; the leaders of an army see the needs of that army, the materials and movements necessary, better than do men in the ranks. It is the same with all governments, whether city, state, or national; it is the same with all interests *in* the world, and with the general interest *of* the world. There is much unrest at present, and therefore people do not readily see the truth of this principle. Now it is true that there are some cases in which leaders do not see the needs in their field so clearly as do some of their followers, but the cases are relatively very few. The exceptions cannot disprove the rule; with this, as with a mosaic, the parts do not give a perfect idea of the whole. It is easier to see the truth of this principle in dealing with classes than it is in dealing with individuals; for there can be no doubt but that the leading classes in all fields see the needs of their fields more clearly than do other classes, and as we come down the scale of classes we find that

the lower the class in any field, the less clearly it sees the needs of its field.

II. The more urgent any need in any field becomes, the greater becomes its chance of receiving the attention of leaders in its field.

This is moral economy's law of supply and demand. It is based on Principle I. All true needs are *moral demands*; and whenever any need becomes more urgent, whenever there is a greater moral demand for anything, the need receives greater attention from leaders in its field. All needs, all interests are related, and if any need becomes sufficiently urgent it will not only receive attention from the leaders in its immediate field, but it will also receive attention from the leaders in related, often more important, fields. There are, of course, exceptions to this principle. However, there are fewer real exceptions to it than there are apparent ones. For instance, most people have exaggerated ideas of the importance of some needs; and the leaders in the fields of these needs, who see the real importance of these needs, and who give them the proper share of their attention, seem to be neglecting these needs. This seeming neglect causes people to think that leaders do not see needs in their proper relations to one another, or that, if they do, they do not attend to needs according to their urgency. In this, people are assuming as a basis of argument the very thing that they undertake to prove. Of course, leaders, like their followers, have a limited amount of attention to divide among needs; they must be frugal with their attention. Though leaders work to the limit of their capacity, they cannot give any need all of the attention it deserves. They, therefore, endeavor to find out which needs deserve their attention most, and which needs may best be left to their subordinates. This principle does not mean that leaders should be left *alone* to attend to needs; for no leaders can accomplish much more than other men, unless their followers do their share of the work. Followers must co-operate with leaders, everyone must make as great an effort as possible; but since followers often interfere with leaders by trying to advise them, or by acting with too little confidence in them, it is important that followers keep in mind the nature of leadership. This principle should be remembered in choosing work, whether it be work of a few hours, or life work. For it is seldom that people do not overvalue some lines of work. It is quite the usual thing for people to think that certain lines of work are more important, and more neglected than they are, unless this law of supply and demand is considered. There are everywhere misfits, who

know they are misfits, yet who continue their present work, thinking it to be important, and neglected. In a few instances they are right, but in most instances they are wrong. If they all understood this principle, most of them would change to other occupations which are more useful, and at which they have more ability.

Now a philanthropist may understand scientific philanthropy, and yet not know how to do most actual good with his money. For scientific philanthropy is not so comprehensive as is moral economy; a gift may seem of greatest value from the standpoint of scientific philanthropy, and yet, from the more comprehensive standpoint of moral economy the gift may seem of value, but not of greatest value. For moral economy is concerned in all needs, no matter what their nature; it overlooks none.

III. The greater the difference in position in any field between two men in that field, the less the chance of its paying society for one of them to attempt to advise or consult the other about matters concerning that field.

There is little that ordinary men in any field know that men of importance, leaders, in that field do not also know; and therefore men should be careful in advising men of more importance than themselves in any field about matters concerning that field. Also, men should be certain that their need for advice is sufficiently urgent before they ask men of more importance than themselves for advice; for advising requires time, and the more important the man, the more important his time. Men of more importance should also remember this—they should be certain that they can get good advice from the man of lower position before they ask him for advice, and they should be certain that the man of lower position is sufficiently in need of advice before they take time from their important work to advise him. Of course, large bodies of men, through their spokesmen, are more likely able to give useful advice than single men, or small bodies of men; and large bodies of men are more likely to be worth advising than single men, or small bodies of men. Three things, therefore, should be considered in advising, or consulting; the *urgency* of the need for advice, or the *certainty* that one's advice will prove helpful; the *size* of the body of men that needs advice, or wishes to advise; and the *importance* of the man or group, of men that needs advice, or wishes to advise.

IV. In choosing one's work, whether it be work of a few hours,

or life work, one should give equal consideration to two things: the usefulness of the work; and one's ability to do the work.

Many people choose their work according to their ability to do it; many others choose their work according to the usefulness of the work. Everyone should give equal consideration to both factors, and choose the work that, from both factors, promises to be the most useful in which he can engage. This work will in most instances be neither the work for which he has the very greatest ability, nor that which is most useful, or important. Because, one usually has *much greater ability* for some *much less useful* lines of work, and also *much less ability* for *much more useful* lines of work. One may have very little ability as a statesman, and very great ability as a janitor, and decide to be neither, to be an engineer, or journalist. In estimating the usefulness of any line of work one should not forget Principle II, for it is impossible to make anything like a correct estimate, unless moral economy's law of supply and demand is considered.

On these fundamental principles of moral economy it is possible to build a system quite as vast as that of political economy, and in all probability much more so, since moral economy is the representative of all other economies, since moral economy is fully comprehensive.

Now morality seldom receives the credit or attention it deserves; there is a vague feeling among some men that, even were there no moral order, things would somehow, in some order, function, and perhaps, in some material respects, grow or develop. Few see that morality is the sole interest that, like gravitation, at once holds things together, and properly separates them. As was shown above, the efficiency of all bodies of men or interests is dependent half on the leaders of the bodies. The vast majority of men have a very indefinite idea of the proportion of welfare, or efficiency, that is due their leaders. Almost all admit that the leaders are the most important men of any body of men with respect to the efficiency of that body, but few men admit that half of the efficiency of most bodies of men is due to the leaders. As a general thing, leaders individually receive *in amount more*, and *in proportion to the value of their services less*, than do followers. The individual usually overrates his own importance, and underrates that of his leaders; he usually over-rates the interest, or economy, in which he is interested, and underrates the leading interest of all—morality—and the leading economy of all—moral economy. This is simply part of the universal tendency

to bring things to a general level in respect of rewards, or credit for, services rendered. Few men will agree that moral economy deserves a place in education, and in thought, ahead of political economy; but to one who has considered all sides of moral organization this conclusion is unavoidable.

In the field of every economy there are possible lines of action ranging all the way from those whose economic value is clear to those whose economic value is obscure. All in all, common sense is less than half so adequate as it is if combined with knowledge of principles of economy. Principles of moral economy should not overrule moral laws, but should be applied where they do not conflict with moral laws. Moral laws should receive all of the attention that they now receive, and probably more; but principles of moral economy should receive, in relation to moral laws, just as much attention as do principles of political economy, in relation to political laws.

There is already education in morals to quite an extent; but there is no education in moral economy whatsoever. The science of moral economy is very important, very urgent; the development of this science will yield greatest returns for the effort spent on it. Scientific philanthropy, social efficiency, political engineering, and kindred subjects, are somewhat like moral economy; but all of these are relatively narrow in scope, they might be called *branches* of moral economy. Principles of moral economy are universal principles; they are useful to all men who are trying to do good, useful in all walks of life.

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