

THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIENCE AS A PHASE OF SOCIOLOGY.

CONSCIENCE is usually looked upon as the crowning feature of evolution. But its history is interwoven by subtle threads with many other phases of our social or spiritual life. It is connected intimately with the development of political institutions, and it is very closely identified with the rise of the religious consciousness, or the story of religion. It is involved, too, with the growth of what is called the sympathy side of human nature.

Somehow the opinion has lingered on, and held its own with considerable tenacity, that in the growth of the moral sense there is a certain element of mystery. Many thinkers at the present time deny all this, and claim that the new standpoint of evolution not only describes the stages in the growth of conscience, but gives an explanation as to how it arose. They are not ready, in a word, to admit that anything essentially new has appeared in what we term the ethical impulses. As we are all aware, the schools in ethical philosophy are divided on this point, and may perhaps never come to an agreement.

For my own part, I am inclined to hold on to the element of mystery here, although not disposed to insist that others should accept it. All my study in evolution thus far has not convinced me that a full explanation has been found for the appearance or development of conscience. It is one thing to describe the stages of its growth or to trace the steps according to which it has manifested itself. But it is another thing to *account for its appearance*.

It strikes me that we have a full explanation of a process only when the mind is able to anticipate what is coming, by a knowledge of what has gone before, according to a series of laws or relationships already discovered. The "struggle for existence," in a sense, is such a law among organisms in the animal kingdom. By a knowledge of this law one could prophesy that the strongest and best-proportioned muscular system would triumph,

provided no new factor made its appearance. But by means of this law could it have been anticipated theoretically that *mind* would come in and give the triumph at last to a creature on an inferior plane so far as the muscular system is concerned?

Apply this to what we ordinarily call moral feeling. If, on walking along the street, we were to see a Chinaman fall down suddenly, from no manifest cause, we should step over and observe what had taken place, inferring that the man was seriously ill. The chances are that we are not fond of Chinamen, and our first impulse might be to go on and let him alone. Yet I venture to say that with most of us the course would be precisely the contrary. We should step to the nearest telephone and call for an ambulance—saying to ourselves: We ought to see that this man is sent to the city hospital. And the Chinaman will be taken there, looked after, nursed, and tended just about the same as if he were an ordinary white citizen of this country.

Why is that city hospital there? The answer would be that the people of each community feel that they ought to have a place for the sick who cannot provide for themselves. Any kind of a sick person? we ask; of any race, from any part of the world? Yes, it is said, there ought to be a hospital for any sick person, of any race, from any clime on earth.

So far as the investigations I have made in the theory of evolution are concerned, they do not explain that city hospital and the course we pursue in sending the Chinaman there. Hospitals, as such, may come by the laws of evolution. The struggle for existence requires co-operation, a high development of what we term social tissue in the organizations of clans or societies. Natural selection would develop sympathies between members of the same clan, leading to the appearance of asylums for the sick within the tribe, the clan, or a given society. But there it would stop. It is against natural selection, against the struggle for existence or the theory of the survival of the fittest, for such an asylum to welcome *any* human creature.

I fail to see how we have an explanation of the growth of sympathy between *all* human creatures. If anyone had undertaken in advance to anticipate what the laws of evolution would

work out along this line, he would have said that they would have led the individuals of the strong societies to crush out the individuals of the weak societies, to kill them off, leaving only certain races surviving.

A good deal of this has gone on. The mystery of it is why more of it has not taken place, and why at the most advanced stage of evolution it is not becoming more rather than less pronounced. The theory of evolution will explain the growth of sympathies between members of the same race or between individuals of the same social structure. But the last step, by which sympathy is extended to every human creature and a conception of a universal human social structure arises, does not seem to be in keeping with the laws or tendencies prevailing in earlier times. Yet conscience, as we now understand it, applies to *man as such*, and not just to the man with whom I have some special affiliation. It is even hinted that there is more than one *species* of human beings, considering them as animal organisms. If so, why this tie in spite of varying species?

Could any finite intelligence who knew what the theory of evolution meant, and what had been the tendencies or laws by which the process had gone on, have in the faintest degree anticipated the rise of the religion of Buddhism? We have there a religion founded on the sense of pity—not, however, pity for others as being of the same tribe, but pity for each other as fellow human creatures. Take again the lines in which Cardinal Wolsey gives a summary of the mistakes of his life: “Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition.” One asks: Could any finite intelligence have prophesied, throughout all the stages in the history of evolution, that any one living creature should have used language of this kind? As for the charge against ambition or self-assertion, why, it has been by such ambition, one may say, that the human race came into existence. The story of evolution is a story of what is alluded to in these lines as “ambition.”

Yet I fancy that most of us in reading these lines approve them, regard them as ideally true, as the best or finest utterance of the human consciousness. But natural selection, a struggle

for existence, and the survival of the strongest, as we ordinarily understand those terms, do not explain such approval on our part. They do not account for the fact that any human creature should have uttered such words. In substance, we have what is called a "variation." But the why and wherefore of it we cannot explain. It just came. A variation has set in, leading to a moral sense, conscience, ethical impulses; and the higher or highest forms of these were not to be anticipated or foretold, so far as we can see, by what had gone before in the earlier stages of evolution.

This, too, would apply to the finest bit of ethical analysis we have, probably, in the world's literature—in the chapters from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, where the hero Jean Valjean is debating whether he shall give himself up and go back to prison for the sake of saving a miserable, low-down, but innocent creature.

For my own part, I look for a reaction in ethical philosophy from its conciliatory attitude toward the conventional doctrine of evolution. It has yielded too much. For a time it was on the point of surrendering the spiritual element in human nature altogether. The discovery of the earlier stages in the appearance of conscience may have led us carelessly into assuming that in its final form it was a form of animal sympathy, only much enlarged. The time has come when we should reassert the fact of the spiritual element in human nature, and the new features which this element introduces.

Does all this mean, then, that evolution has nothing to say with regard to conscience or the moral sense? On the contrary, until this theory appeared, it has been practically impossible to have any intelligible understanding with regard to what conscience amounted to or what the sense of duty involved. This new standpoint has simply transformed ethical philosophy, just as it has given birth to the social sciences and transformed the science of biology. People have had the fact of conscience before them for a long while. It was talked about in the days of Rome. Men have been aware of it as a part of their spiritual experiences; but, owing to a lack of a theory of evolution, they have gone utterly astray as to what it meant.

We used to be told that every human creature had a moral sense by which he could distinguish right from wrong, just about as he has an eye enabling him to distinguish between colors, or between black and white; but if we were forced today to accept this standpoint, we should find ourselves in a very muddled state of mind. It would have gone on all right, perhaps, until the science of anthropology arose, up to the time when the investigations were undertaken into the conditions of undeveloped or savage races; although, as a matter of fact, the theory had given trouble enough even among developed minds, owing to what seemed to be a *conflict of duties* arising every now and then.

The rise of conscience in primitive times may have been something like the first appearance of an eye-organ in low types, where we observe a few pigment cells by which the creature may distinguish feebly between light and no light, between utter darkness and glaring sunshine. That is about all the moral sense we can discern in many savage races. The conscience we discern there would seem to be very closely identified with the rise of the first elements of fellow-feeling between members of the same tribe, restraining individuals in that tribe from killing each other or stealing from each other. Even on that score, it does not show itself there above the very lowest stage. It is customary, as we all know now, among certain races to kill off the old people. Children bury their aged fathers or mothers alive. I doubt whether in the strict sense of the term we can say that conscience appears there, any more than we can say that the pigment cells in a low organism are the same thing as an eye. We could not expect a full-fledged conscience in a half-fledged soul, any more than we could expect a complex eye in a simple, one-celled organism.

What evolution as a theory has done for ethical philosophy has been, therefore, to show us that the moral sense has come by a process of growth, like all other features or phases of mental or spiritual experience. It appears gradually. There has been, as we now realize, no fully equipped organ of moral sense such as the primitive human creature was supposed to be endowed with. In a word, conscience is coming, rather than

has come; it is evolving now, rather than completely evolved. There is more conscience in the average citizen of this country today, by a great deal, than was manifest in the average citizen of Athens two thousand years ago. It is still in one way comparatively feeble, in contrast with what we may expect it to become by and by.

The stories which have come home to us from travelers among savage races, telling us of the moral state of such people, are anything but pleasing or suggestive of a developed ethical sense. And it is such facts which have upset the old theories with regard to a moral sense. If it had not been for this new standpoint of evolution, ethical philosophy would have come to a standstill, or the whole doctrine of conscience would perhaps have been abandoned in despair.

I believe it is true that the moral sense *starts* in the feelings. But one clue to the confusion prevailing on the subject lies in the fact that people have not understood or appreciated that real conscience, in the truest sense of the word, does not come until self-conscious, independent personality appears. Until this later phase in soul-life develops, moral sense is sporadic; hardly, in the strict meaning of the word, a moral sense at all.

At the start it is a story of the rise of what we may term scruples. We can faintly conceive of animals having scruples, as we understand the word. The dog, for instance, may get it into his consciousness somehow that he must not take food from the table, even if he is left in a room alone. Yet with such creatures it is a sense of indefinite fear bred into them, rather than a picture of the act and its consequences rising before them. When the dog overcomes the fear, swallows the food, and then cringes seemingly in shame, I fancy that what develops in his consciousness is more an indefinite dread of punishment, taking on only the *appearance* of a conscience, rather than being the actual scruples I speak of.

But, on the other hand, when a savage, in a fit of violent anger, kills the dog he has been fond of, and which has been fond of him, and then has a gnawing sense of regret, as if wishing he had not done it, in this there may be the dawn

of what we should call a scruple. We have come to the point where there is a conscious relationship between conduct and result, between a definite act and a sense of responsibility for it. The savage at least knows what he has done, recalls the affection of the brute, and his own affection for the brute, and is aware that he might have avoided the act. He may not only feel uncomfortable over it, but clearly may be conscious of a wish that he had not done it. In that wish, that one had not done a certain act, we have the "scruple" showing itself, and the glimmerings of a moral sense. It would be more pronounced, for instance, if among members of the same clan or tribe two individual human beings, who have worked together and been of service to each other, fall into strife and one kills the other. Even where no punishment is to follow, or the slayer has no fear of consequences, there may still be the scruple in the wish that he had not done the deed. To be sure, such a wish is but an incipient phase, and does not amount to much — a vague sense of regret, nothing more.

It has reached a much higher phase, and launched the human creature on a very much more advanced stage, when the scruple comes in before the act, now and then keeping him from following out his first impulse or committing the deed of anger. When scruples act as a check on impulses, the higher soul is getting a start. And I suppose the moral sense may arise to this extent among the lower savage tribes — although it would prevail, of course, only between members of the same tribe.

We sometimes wonder that the primitive human creature is so low-down, vindictive, or "brutalized," as it were, with so little recognition of human rights, so feeble a sense of justice; with such a weak respect for himself, or for man as man, or for a fellow human creature. Why is it that in a large number of instances we find such distorted, perverted, monstrous conditions? How is it that it should be the glory among certain tribes of people to have committed murder? What is to explain the fact that among many races a man feels a sense of shame, positive humiliation, until he has butchered some other human creature? How is it that, among other races, stealing,

theft, robbery, of the most brutal kind, should be held in esteem, as an indication of manhood and prowess? What is to explain the extraordinary instances of cruelty which are told of savage races, the utter absence of what we should call the sense of pity or mercy? Fancy the state of feeling among people who take the keenest delight in torturing to death other fellow-creatures, and who may get their highest satisfaction by inflicting such tortures. How shall we account for the downright pleasure taken in cruelty, in murder, in the sacrifice of human blood?

And the pathetic part of it is that this is not the exception, but, if anything, the rule. Among savage races the peace-loving, peaceable tribes are the exception. There are such. They do exist. But, on the whole, I suppose it is true that one takes one's life in one's hands if one goes among savages.

Nature was many millions of years making the brute creature, and only a few hundred thousand years making the human creature. We know that the law of blood, as it were, is the law of brute creation; and it must be remembered that we are the heirs of all that has gone before. We have got the man in us now as a new phase, but also there is in us as an inheritance all the brute life which has preceded. Is it strange, then, that the human element should be, at the start and for a long while, comparatively weak? Is it astonishing that conscience should not shine bright and clear, be strong and controlling over the human creature? We must bear in mind that it is doing battle with hereditary tendencies established by millions of years of bygone history.

We should look, therefore, upon that primitive state of savage races, which was the state of our forefathers not many thousand years ago, rather with pity than with a sense of loathing. The manhood was coming, but not yet come; conscience evolving, but not yet evolved. If we are heirs of all the brutal vindictiveness of our animal ancestry, we are also heirs of the courage, the capacity for devotion within the tribe, of our human ancestors. If there is a holding together of the social tissue today, it is partly owing to the way our primitive, savage ancestors evolved a sense of loyalty to the clan or the tribe.

It is certainly a long, long distance from the primitive sav-

age who may be haunted with a wish that he had not killed his dog or companion in a fit of anger, to a Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*, who goes back to prison in order to save from pursuit an inferior specimen of his fellow human creatures ; or to the mournful soliloquy of Wolsey over the mistake of self-asserting ambition. In fact, I doubt whether we can do anything more than construct a series of bridges as stages from the one phase to the other.

The advance of the human race has been marked conspicuously by the growth of intelligence. And a finite mind who had undertaken to prophesy by the laws of evolution what would have been the outcome through this growth of knowledge and increasing supremacy of intelligence, would have assumed, as man came to know more and apply his mind more fully to human conduct, while keeping the same human nature, that the tendency would have been for him to pursue a course of extirpation toward the physically weak. Sentiment would naturally have given way, one would suppose, to practical schemes for carrying out what we might call *nature's laws*. On the physical side, it is against the interests of the race for the weak to survive.

And, in point of fact, there is an indication of this very line of opinion appearing here and there today among those who adopt the theory of evolution as explaining the appearance of conscience, and who take the laws by which the human race has been evolved in the past as the lines according to which the human creature should be guided in the future. Here and there a philosopher of this type attacks most vigorously the whole system of the modern world in its care for the weaker specimens of the race ; in its philanthropy, its hospital systems, or its schemes for popular education. They assure us that this is all a mistake and fundamentally wrong, because against the laws which have brought the human race into existence.

But while here and there an instance of this kind occurs, the human race, as it advances in intelligence, has been pursuing precisely the opposite course. More care is taken of the weak than ever before. The tendency, which was so feeble in early times, to treat every man as an end in himself, is growing rather than declining.

On the whole, taking it as a fact of history over the last twenty-five hundred or three thousand years, we have reason to believe that with the growth of intelligence there has been an advance on the conscience side as well as on the side of the sympathies. And I fail to see how natural selection, acting by itself as a law of evolution, should necessarily work out such a result. The final statement of ethical philosophy has been that every man should be treated as an end in himself. This we take to be the culmination in the evolution of conscience or moral sense ; and I cannot conceive how any of those tendencies which have been at work evolving life for the last ten million years should ever have led to such a conception. It establishes a new standard in the survival of the fittest, from what has been the standard up to the appearance of the human race.

At the last stage, when sympathy extends to *man as man*, there is a new ideal element appearing, suggestive of something more than sympathy. It is a spiritual law. Adding up units of sympathy will not necessarily give us the recognition of man as an end in himself, as a law of conscience, any more than adding up what we know about the various elements in chemistry will give us the new features appearing in the compound when those elements are brought together. The appearance of sympathy and the expansion of the circle to which it applies may be a necessary step in the process, but this does not imply that the new factor is the same thing as sympathy.

If all that we are today has been a product of the struggle for existence in the animal kingdom, then I fail to see why it is that the standpoint of Nietzsche should not have received a spontaneous and universal welcome as soon as it was put forth. Conscience is in the way, and we should get rid of it. This is precisely the attitude we should expect would have appeared, according to the doctrine of natural selection. Why is it, then, that this standpoint should affect many of us with positive loathing or disgust ? We say : This will do very well for a brute, but not for man. How is it that we should have any such feeling ? Natural selection fails to account for the fact that somehow, in spite of ourselves, we admire the standpoint of the Sermon on the

Mount as an ideal, even if we may not practice it. The struggle for existence surely would have tended to develop, if anything, a feeling of contempt on the part of human nature for such an ideal. It is only explainable on the supposition of the existence of a spiritual element in man, which does not exist in the brute.

There comes a time in the development of the subjective life when man begins to see his conduct in its relations. It is no longer wholly a matter of sentiment. He is not acting merely by instinct or habit. He reaches the point where he reflects on his conduct, and may ask himself what will be the influence of his acts on those around him, or on himself. At this point he is at the verge of reaching the conception of law, *ethical* law. And the strange part of it is that, when he does come to the stage of thought, and sees conduct in such relations, his sagacity does not lead him to cast aside even the scruples he may have had before. At first, what we seem to come upon in the primitive mind is just the faint consciousness of distinction between the two kinds of conduct, the bad and the good, with the most extraordinary confusion as to what kind is the good conduct and what kind the bad conduct. The rudimentary distinction shows itself perhaps long before there is any consensus of opinion or feeling in the way it is applied. In fact, what we observe is that custom or conventionality has a great deal to do in determining how this distinction between right and wrong shall be *applied*; and the story of the evolution of conscience or the moral sense is perhaps less a series of stages of advance in the *emphasis* on the distinction between right and wrong, than it is a series of changes in the method of its application.

We need only instance the respect for life which exists at the present day. If ever there was a race of advanced intelligence in early times, it was the Greek people. They were much given to debating about good and evil, and to analyzing the experiences of conscience. Ethical philosophy began at Athens. Yet those who talked most about conscience, believed in it most fully, giving it such importance, seem to have had no profound respect for life as such. It was usual, for instance, as we know, where a father had more children than he wished, for him to put

the new arrivals out to die. Scarcely any scruple prevailed at that time among the highly intelligent people of Athens concerning such conduct. It was done as a matter of course. The short interval of two thousand years has elapsed. And now, if a man were to take such a step, whoever he might be, a jury of his peers would sentence him to death forthwith. If the act were deliberately done, there would probably be no debate on the matter at all.

Conscience existed to an extraordinary degree *in certain respects* among the Greek people. The stage of Athens was a great ethical platform or school for ethical instruction. But scruples with regard to life, and respect for life as such, had not yet developed. I suppose that a man of ordinary moral sense or intelligence in this country today, who should act on a first impulse and throw away the life of his child, might be haunted with remorse to a degree we can scarcely describe. It would not be surprising if such a person after a while were to give himself up to the law and ask to be punished for his crime.

In an act of this latter kind we see developing, along with conscience as a sentiment, a certain peculiar element of authority which would appear to be wanting in the moral sense as it shows itself in its most rudimentary or incipient phases. It is this *compelling* characteristic or element of authority which is one of the most perplexing features to explain or account for. The man who has been guilty of a crime, and voluntarily surrenders himself to justice, would seem to be acting under an influence as powerful as that of hypnotic suggestion. He is taking a course from which he shrinks, and against which the ordinary self within him will loudly rebel; but by and by that force becomes so strong that he cannot refuse to listen to it, until at last he may give up and yield to an authority in himself which he is unable to account for and which he would be glad to repudiate.

It is in the effort to explain this authoritative element in conscience that the philosophical mind has displayed its greatest acumen. But I doubt whether the effort as yet has been successful. By some persons it is accounted for as the "voice of

God" speaking directly in human consciousness. The evolutionist may undertake to explain it by a process of "heredity and natural selection," claiming that this impelling force either grows out of the fear of punishment, or else appears as a phase in the development of the sympathies.

But, whatever may have been its sources, when the impelling force of conscience speaks or acts, it is one force or one voice, rather than many forces or many voices, that we feel within ourselves. At the time when the moral sense asserts itself I do not think we are conscious of its possible complex origin. We may writhe under it, shrink from it or welcome it. But we do not at such times analyze it or take it to pieces. The man who is goaded by remorse over a crime of which he has been guilty is not relieved very much by trying to reason away his conscience. When we are quite at peace within ourselves, we may analyze it, and fancy that we have caused it by that process to dissolve and vanish out of sight; but it is pretty sure to come back again, when the occasion arises which normally calls it forth.

At the point when the moral sense, after beginning in vague scruples, finally assumes the further element of authority as a single impelling force within ourselves, we may say that the story of its evolution takes on a new character. It then becomes essentially a department in the study of the science of sociology. We come now to the great subject of heredity. Whether or not acquired traits are transmitted in the individual texture of living human creatures, we are perfectly convinced that sentiments and opinions are handed down from age to age, that there is an inheritance through the social medium of what is done or said on the part of individuals.

It is just here, of course, where the human race stands head and shoulders above the whole animal kingdom. This is one cause which leads to such a marked contrast in the story of evolution among human creatures, and which may make the process of evolution far more rapid in its workings. With the additional element of thought as the endowment of man, along with the gift of language, there has been established a new medium through which the laws of evolution may work.

In a sense, therefore, after the element of authority once has become established in connection with conscience, the story of its evolution becomes a story of its growth in this social consciousness; because it is from this social medium of public opinion that we are more or less guided in the way we apply the authority of the moral sense to the problems of life. If we were to go into this story in detail, we should be obliged to sketch out the stages of change or advance in what people have come to look upon as good conduct or evil conduct from age to age.

We might illustrate in the feeling concerning war. It is said, for instance, that Julius Cæsar slaughtered at least one million lives in the country we now call France, when he was adding that portion of Europe to the Roman empire. I am not sure that Cæsar had any scruples as to what he was doing. I do not know that he even undertook to justify himself for the course he was pursuing. It was accepted as a matter of course that a strong, powerful country would try to conquer or swallow up the weaker countries. Had there been no offense whatever given on the part of Gaul against the people of Rome, and Cæsar had proceeded to conquer that country at the cost of a million lives, it is doubtful whether he would have taken the trouble to apologize for it.

Nearly two thousand years have gone by. It is not quite sure that conscience *on the inside* has advanced from what it was in the city of Rome in those days. At any rate, we do know that under the Cæsars there was in many persons a refined moral sense. Now, on the contrary, we notice what an effort the people of a country make to show a justification for a war they are undertaking—the reasons they give, the way they go aside to study up the history of the case, and prove that they are in the right, and that the moral sense authorizes the course they are pursuing.

Whether this is a growth in conscience as such, I am not sure. But it is an extraordinary advance in the *social* consciousness. Nations have come to the point where they cannot pursue a war of aggrandizement without somehow furnishing at least superficial reasons justifying their course. If they do not do this,

they will be hampered in what they are undertaking; there will be a minority opposing them at every step with moral scruples. In a word, there has been a colossal advance in the way the moral sense is *applied* to the problems of life. And it has come within the short space of two thousand years or less.

We have already instanced the advance in the same way in the social consciousness with regard to the respect for life, or in regard to the rights of any individual who may be stricken with disease and not able to provide for himself. Think, for example, again of the astonishing change in the course of two thousand years, by which the compelling force of conscience leads us to recognize it as a principle that a fellow human creature should not be allowed to die of hunger. Would the moral sense of Athens or Rome twenty centuries ago have been disturbed if the people had learned that thousands or millions of human creatures were dying of starvation in other parts of the world? Would they have gone out of their way to send food, or medicines, or clothing to such creatures? I doubt if such a thought would have entered their minds.

See, further, how delicate and complex the problem has become with regard to the applications of conscience, when we actually hesitate about helping a poor fellow human creature, lest by giving the assistance in the wrong way we do him more harm than good. Think what it means for a man to be troubled with twinges of conscience, because from an impulse of charity, by a transient misunderstanding of his moral sense, he had given money to an unhappy creature, and then realized that the man might go and spend it in the wrong way and be further demoralized.

At times it may strike us the other way—as if there had been a reaction, as if scruples were less strong nowadays than formerly. And, in a certain sense, this is true along special lines. It takes a long while, humanly speaking, to build up a public or social sentiment with regard to the application of the moral sense to certain kinds of problems. If the social structure is going through rapid changes, the evolution of conscience, in certain forms of its application, may lag behind for a time.

Hence it is that the authority of conscience is much stronger nowadays in the conduct between one and another individual, than between one individual and a group of individuals in the form of a corporation. It astonishes us to discover how necessary it is that street-car companies should keep such a check upon their employees who collect the fares. Not one man in ten thousand of those persons would perhaps steal from another or take money from any individual human creature. Yet now and then such men have to be discharged because they have appropriated to themselves a part of the proceeds which should normally go into the treasury of the company.

It means, in substance, that a public sentiment has not yet established itself with regard to the application of conscience on the part of the individual in his conduct toward an impersonal corporation; because such corporations are comparatively new in the social structure. It may take half a century or a whole century before there has been enough sentiment accumulating and being transmitted by inheritance in the social medium, to establish a sensitive conscience in this new direction.

It is the same with many an individual who would have no scruple about not paying his street-car fare if the conductor passes him by and fails to collect it. Yet the same person might perhaps be haunted with positive remorse if he had bought something of his grocer and failed to pay for it because the grocer forgot to charge it on the bill.

What I am saying in regard to the application of conscience to impersonal corporations is even more striking in regard to the application of conscience to our conduct in relation to the government—the city, or state, or nation—to which we belong. At first one is appalled by the lack of scruple on the part of the citizens in regard to the duty of paying taxes. But we should not forget that a very rapid change has taken place in the social structure on this score. Not many years ago taxes closely resembled what we should consider actual theft on the part of the monarch in relation to the people. In regard to what they had to pay, the people had nothing to say on the matter. Under those circumstances it was perfectly natural that there should

have been no conscience about refusing to pay what was felt to be theft or robbery, as in many instances was the actual case. Now, on the other hand, with the growth of democracy, the people have a voice in saying how they shall be taxed. But we are still heirs of the former social sentiment, where conscience authorized a defiance of the tax collector, if it could be done. It will take some time for the development of a new sentiment in regard to this matter in the application of a moral sense to the problem of paying taxes. Yet I am inclined to think that at the end of another century people will begin to have sharp twinges of conscience at smuggling in goods at the custom house, or in paying a smaller share of the taxes than is due from them.

The sudden rapid change in political institutions and in the social structure from this standpoint within the last century has really caused a temporary weakening of the authority of conscience along such special lines. The sad part of it is that such a weakening may go farther, and shake the foundations of the moral sense at their very source. It is just this fact, more than any other, which should encourage us to do all we can to build up a higher public sentiment with regard to conduct between the individual and impersonal corporations, or between the individual and his city, state, or nation. Otherwise, the whole standard of moral character may collapse.

I have dwelt on the fact that conscience, *in its higher forms*, is a comparatively new phase in evolution. The evidence for this assertion is on the surface, in the quick relapse to primitive states of feeling when certain changes occur. In war, taking the life of a fellow human creature for the time being becomes a duty. But under the influences of such rapid shifting in the applications of the moral sense, soldiers from civilized races relapse oftentimes into a state of positive savagery.

We shall by and by come to see that, if the evolution of conscience goes on, and with it the advancement of civilization, it will come only by a positive *effort* in fostering the moral sense, and being on the guard lest society take courses that may cause such a temporary step backward. When the relapse has occurred

it takes a long while to bring public sentiment or the social conscience back to the same position it held before.

The final stage, however, in the evolution of the moral sense carries us a long distance from its starting-point. It strikes me as perplexing that, when speaking of moral conduct, this is assumed to apply only to relations between one and another person. Many people would fancy that morality has no meaning save as it refers to conduct between human creatures in their relations to each other. In telling the story of morality, its growth or evolution, it is usual to describe how respect for rights took shape, and to what extent men refrained from murder, stealing, or telling lies; as if lying, stealing, or murder practically made up the whole of what we call bad conduct, against which the ethical sense is supposed to set itself. In a word, the evolution of conscience is often supposed to be only another name for the evolution of what is termed altruism, fellow-feeling, mutual goodwill, and the conduct which flows from such goodwill. In discussing the origin of morality, we are supposed to try to explain why man is not wholly a selfish being, or how it is to be accounted for that unselfishness got root in human nature. If we can account for this, it is often assumed that we have covered the whole subject.

But this is only half the story. The last phase in the evolution of conscience is of another kind. We have built only half our bridges by sketching out the growth of altruistic sentiment and the recognition of the commands of the decalogue. Conscience at its highest stage would seem to take on a form of egoism instead of altruism, although of a peculiar kind. It would by no means be the same egoism which prevailed at the start, when the sympathies were first getting shape and fellow-feeling was arising. It would not mean the brute self-assertiveness, the struggle of might to conquer and absorb everything for one's self.

We must take into account that the soul or the spiritual life changes as the human creature goes on advancing, and as he is gradually emancipated from the social tissue or the social consciousness. When self-conscious personality arises, the experi-

ences of the soul have another character. So long as the human creature is just a part of the social tissue, the relations to be considered in the applications of the moral sense to conduct are those between man and his fellows. If we pronounce judgment, we should say that an act was wrong because it injured another man. On the other hand, when the soul has assumed its real shape, the judgment is pronounced from another standpoint. The act might be beneficial to a fellow-creature, and yet we might decide against it. In a word, the relation from that time exists between the act, on the one hand, and the motive, purpose, impulse, or ideal, within the man himself, on the other. It would be perfectly conceivable, as we have intimated already, for a man to be guilty of a crime, and become so haunted with remorse as finally to give himself up to the punishment of the law, even though he had no religious scruples whatever. Conscience would act in such a case with reference to a man's conduct in relation to himself. We say that such a man has broken a law of his own being, that he has acted in defiance of his best self, or his true self.

Suppose the case of a man lost in a wilderness, with no hope whatever of escape for the rest of his life; left there to spend all his days in solitude. What if such an individual, in the first despair over the outlook, should give himself over to a drunken debauch—assuming he had the means for this at command.

In such a case, would conscience have anything to say, as a subjective experience? We should answer, I suppose, that it would depend on the man. Yes, beyond a doubt. But it is true—is it not?—that after that debauch was over, the individual might go through an experience of intense shame. And why? He would have broken no command of the decalogue. He would have committed no offense against his fellow-men. Would it be the moral sense speaking there? Yes, I believe it would be precisely what we term conscience. But in such a case it would be a subjective relationship. The man had broken a law of his own being—apart from any religious law he may also have defied. In a moment of despondency he had allowed himself to relapse from his manhood to the state of the brute.

There had been a surrender on the part of the *man* in him, on the part of that something in his nature which lifted him above the animal kingdom, by a superior endowment making him one of a spiritual kingdom.

If we are able to trace the entire origin of conscience to what has been going on in the animal kingdom, and to see it as the compounding of instincts which have proved useful in binding creatures together in societies, then why is it that enlightenment and intelligence should not extirpate conscience, as a burden or a bore? The very man who believes all this, and has accepted it theoretically as a philosopher, may nevertheless find himself writhing under the pangs of remorse, which he cannot extirpate. It would imply that there was something in him which his doctrine had not accounted for.

As I conceive it, when our inner, spiritual life has reached a certain stage, when the soul has come to a certain degree of its high development, the gnawings of conscience because one has been guilty of theft, or a lie, or murder, may not be because one has been guilty of a breach of fellow-feeling, or done an injury to some other person, but because one has broken a law of one's own nature. As we should express it in common language, *he has gone back on himself*. And in such cases conscience would be the voice holding the man up to his level as a man, as a member of the kingdom of men, rather than as a member of the animal kingdom.

The kingdom of souls is not the same as the kingdom of physical nature. In every living human creature there is a potential element which cuts him off from the whole brute kingdom. We can never carry development beyond a certain point with the animal creature. At a certain stage we reach a condition of arrested development. All the effort we may make will not help us any further with that creature. With the human being we are not prepared to accept the doctrine of a necessarily arrested development. The potentiality there we look upon as unlimited. If there is mystery at this point, it is only the mystery we must face, and should be proud to recognize or accept, in believing in our superiority to the brute kingdom. The

moral sense or conscience, therefore, in the final stage of soul-development or spiritual culture, is what holds the soul to its high level, or what is goading the human creature on to reach or fulfil all the capacities of his nature, *to live his life out as a member of the kingdom of souls*. In an act of theft or murder, as much as in an act of drunken debauchery, he has broken the law of a spiritual kingdom. He has committed an offense against himself or his own soul.

Once more, it strikes me, we are in the realm of the unexplainable in the story of conscience. Does the struggle for existence account for the self-loathing at the loss of one's self-respect? Can it show why a man should feel haunted, almost as with remorse, if on looking back over the past week he is aware that he has lived, *but accomplished nothing*? The gnawing sense of regret over wasted opportunity or a wasted life, over the consciousness of having possessed gifts one has not put to use, the disappointment at having lived on an inferior plane instead of rising to the full height of one's being and capacities—this surely is a phase of the moral sense. But could the coming of all this have been anticipated according to the assumed laws of evolution? Humanly speaking, *it just came!* We fail to see just what *utility* function it serves in the economy of nature. On the intellectual side, as on the sympathy side, conscience would seem as yet in its appearance to belong to the sphere of mystery. Evolution does not explain a Sartor Resartus any more than it explains a Jean Valjean.

I speak of this as the final stage, not as if it were a stage which shows itself in all people, or even in every individual among civilized races. It is the direction toward which the evolution of conscience *is tending*. True, the remorse over an act of treachery, of theft, or of meanness toward a fellow-being, is probably greater than would ensue from surrendering one's self to a drunken debauch. In the last instance one may say that one has injured no one but one's self, and that no one but one's self is concerned. Yet I am not sure but that for a highly developed human being to be guilty of such an act of meanness or treachery to a fellow human being indicates a lesser relapse

than an act of drunken debauchery would imply. From the highest standpoint the voice of conscience would speak the same with reference to either experience.

It would seem, therefore, as if it were only in the middle period of the evolution of conscience that we must turn to the science of sociology for explanation as to its history. Our relation to a social medium has been an essential step in the process. But in its highest form ethical law is not dealing with social relationships. Its one exaction is that each man *shall keep his spiritual nature untarnished*. This is what I should understand by speaking of it as "the law of one's own being." In doing this we shall, as a matter of course, recognize and obey the codes of law which connect us with our fellows. In acting against one another, by injuring one another, we should be lapsing to the stage of the brute. Spiritual forces would act as one force; competition there would have no meaning. Among *souls*, brotherhood would be the natural thing.

If I am right, then the story of evolution would tell us, as the last, crowning feature of all, that the kernel or core of all religions points in the same way: To thine own self be true. In the highest sense of the word, it would mean the same thing as being true to one's God, and true to one's fellow-men; because it would mean being true to the soul or to the highest self.

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