

*Pëtr Kropotkin*

# Anarchist Morality

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## Note For *Anarchist Morality*

This study of the origin and function of what we call “morality” was written for pamphlet publication as a result of an amusing situation. An anarchist who ran a store in England found that his comrades in the movement regarded it as perfectly right to take his goods without paying for them. “To each according to his need” seemed to them to justify letting those who were best able foot the bills. Kropotkin was appealed to, with the result that he not only condemned such doctrine, but was moved to write the comrades this sermon.

Its conception of morality is based on the ideas set forth in *Mutual Aid* and later developed in his *Ethics*. Here they are given special application to “right and wrong” in the business of social living. The job is done with fine feeling and with acute shafts at the shams of current morality.

Kropotkin sees the source of all so-called moral ideas in primitive superstitions. The real moral sense which guides our social behavior is instinctive, based on the sympathy and unity inherent in group life. Mutual aid is the condition of successful social living. The moral base is therefore the good old golden rule “Do to others as you would have others do to you in the same circumstances,” — which disposed of the ethics of the shopkeeper’s anarchist customers.

This natural moral sense was perverted, Kropotkin says, by the superstitions surrounding law, religion and authority, deliberately cultivated by conquerors, exploiters and priests for their own benefit. Morality has therefore become the instrument of ruling classes to protect their privileges.

He defends the morality of killing for the benefit of mankind — as in the assassination of tyrants — but never for self. Love and hate he regards as greater social forces for controlling wrong-doing than punishment, which he rejects as useless and evil. Account-book morality — doing right only to receive a benefit — he scores roundly, urging instead the satisfactions and joy of “sowing life around you” by giving yourself to the uttermost to your fellow-men. Not of course to do them good, in the spirit of philanthropy, but to be one with them, equal and sharing.

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## I

The history of human thought recalls the swinging of a pendulum which takes centuries to swing. After a long period of slumber comes a moment of awakening.

Then thought frees herself from the chains with which those interested — rulers, lawyers, clerics — have carefully enwound her.

She shatters the chains. She subjects to severe criticism all that has been taught her, and lays bare the emptiness of the religious political, legal, and social prejudices amid which she has vegetated. She starts research in new paths, enriches our knowledge with new discoveries, creates new sciences.

But the inveterate enemies of thought — the government, the lawgiver, and the priest — soon recover from their defeat. By degrees they gather together their scattered forces, and remodel their faith and their code of laws to adapt them to the new needs. Then, profiting by the servility of thought and of character, which they themselves have so effectually cultivated; profiting, too, by the momentary disorganization of society, taking advantage of the laziness of some, the greed of others, the best hopes of many, they softly creep back to their work by first of all taking possession of childhood through education.

A child's spirit is weak. It is so easy to coerce it by fear. This they do. They make the child timid, and then they talk to him of the torments of hell. They conjure up before him the sufferings of the condemned, the vengeance of an implacable god. The next minute they will be chattering of the horrors of revolution, and using some excess of the revolutionists to make the child "a friend of order." The priest accustoms the child to the idea of law, to make it obey better what he calls the "divine law," and the lawyer prates of divine law, that the civil law may be the better obeyed.

And by that habit of submission, with which we are only too familiar, the thought of the next generation retains this religious twist, which is at once servile and authoritative, for authority and servility walk ever hand in hand. During these slumbrous interludes, morals are rarely discussed. Religious practices and judicial hypocrisy take their place. People do not criticize, they let themselves be drawn by habit, or indifference. They do not put themselves out for or against the established morality. They do their best to make their actions appear to accord with their professions.

All that was good, great, generous or independent in man, little by little becomes moss-grown; rusts like a disused knife. A lie becomes a virtue, a platitude a duty. To enrich oneself, to seize one's opportunities, to exhaust one's intelligence, zeal and energy, no matter how, become the watchwords of the comfortable classes, as well as of the crowd of poor folk whose ideal is to appear bourgeois. Then the degradation of the ruler and of the judge, of the clergy and of the more or less comfortable classes becomes so revolting that the pendulum begins to swing the other way.

Little by little, youth frees itself. It flings overboard its prejudices, and it begins to criticize. Thought reawakens, at first among the few; but insensibly the

awakening reaches the majority. The impulse is given, the revolution follows. And each time the question of morality comes up again. "Why should I follow the principles of this hypocritical morality?" asks the brain, released from religious terrors. Why should any morality be obligatory?"

Then people try to account for the moral sentiment that they meet at every turn without having explained it to themselves. And they will never explain it so long as they believe it a privilege of human nature, so long as they do not descend to animals, plants and rocks to understand it. They seek the answer, however, in the science of the hour.

And, if we may venture to say so, the more the basis of conventional morality, or rather of the hypocrisy that fills its place is sapped, the more the moral plane of society is raised. It is above all at such times precisely when folks are criticizing and denying it, that moral sentiment makes the most progress. It is then that it grows, that it is raised and refined.

Years ago the youth of Russia were passionately agitated by this very question. "I will be immoral!" a young nihilist came and said to his friend, thus translating into action the thoughts that gave him no rest. "I will be immoral, and why should I not? Because the Bible wills it? But the Bible is only a collection of Babylonian and Hebrew traditions, traditions collected and put together like the Homeric poems, or as is being done still with Basque poems and Mongolian legends. Must I then go back to the state of mind of the half-civilized peoples of the East?"

"Must I be moral because Kant tells me of a categorical imperative, of a mysterious command which comes to me from the depths of my own being and bids me be moral? But why should this 'categorical imperative' exercise a greater authority over my actions than that other imperative, which at times may command me to get drunk. A word, nothing but a word, like the words 'Providence,' or 'Destiny,' invented to conceal our ignorance.

"Or perhaps I am to be moral to oblige Bentham, who wants me to believe that I shall be happier if I drown to save a passerby who has fallen into the river than if I watched him drown?"

"Or perhaps because such has been my education? Because my mother taught me morality? Shall I then go and kneel down in a church, honor the Queen, bow before the judge I know for a scoundrel, simply because our mothers, our good ignorant mothers, have taught us such a pack of nonsense? "I am prejudiced, — like everyone else. I will try to rid myself of prejudice! Even though immorality be distasteful, I will yet force myself to be immoral, as when I was a boy I forced myself to give up fearing the dark, the churchyard, ghosts and dead people — all of which I had been taught to fear.

“It will be immoral to snap a weapon abused by religion; I will do it, were it only to protect against the hypocrisy imposed on us in the name of a word to which the name morality has been given!”

Such was the way in which the youth of Russia reasoned when they broke with old-world prejudices, and unfurled this banner of nihilist or rather of anarchist philosophy: to bend the knee to no authority whatsoever, however respected; to accept no principle so long as it is unestablished by reason.

Need we add, that after pitching into the waste-paper basket the teachings of their fathers, and burning all systems of morality, the nihilist youth developed in their midst a nucleus of moral customs, infinitely superior to anything that their fathers had practiced under the control of the “Gospel,” of the “Conscience,” of the “Categorical Imperative,” or of the “Recognized Advantage” of the utilitarian. But before answering the question, “Why am I to be moral?” let us see if the question is well put; let us analyze the motives of human action.

## II

When our ancestors wished to account for what led men to act in one way or another, they did so in a very simple fashion. Down to the present day, certain catholic images may be seen that represent this explanation. A man is going on his way, and without being in the least aware of it, carries a devil on his left shoulder and an angel on his right. The devil prompts him to do evil, the angel tries to keep him back. And if the angel gets the best of it and the man remains virtuous, three other angels catch him up and carry him to heaven. In this way everything is explained wondrously well.

Old Russian nurses full of such lore will tell you never to put a child to bed without unbuttoning the collar of its shirt. A warm spot at the bottom of the neck should be left bare, where the guardian angel may nestle. Otherwise the devil will worry the child even in its sleep.

These artless conceptions are passing away. But though the old words disappear, the essential idea remains the same.

Well brought up folks no longer believe in the devil, but as their ideas are no more rational than those of our nurses, they do but disguise devil and angel under a pedantic wordiness honored with the name of philosophy. They do not say “devil” nowadays, but “the flesh,” or “the passions.” The “angel” is replaced by the words “conscience” or “soul,” by “reflection of the thought of a divine creator” or “the Great Architect,” as the Free-Masons say. But man’s action is still represented as the result of a struggle between two hostile elements. And a man is always

considered virtuous just in the degree to which one of these two elements — the soul or conscience — is victorious over the other — the flesh or passions.

It is easy to understand the astonishment of our great-grandfathers when the English philosophers, and later the Encyclopedists, began to affirm in opposition to these primitive ideas that the devil and the angel had nothing to do with human action, but that all acts of man, good or bad, useful or baneful, arise from a single motive: the lust for pleasure.

The whole religious confraternity, and, above all, the numerous sects of the pharisees shouted “immorality.” They covered the thinkers with insult, they excommunicated them. And when later on in the course of the century the same ideas were again taken up by Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Tchernischevsky, and a host of others, and when these thinkers began to affirm and prove that egoism, or the lust for pleasure, is the true motive of all our actions, the maledictions redoubled. The books were banned by a conspiracy of silence; the authors were treated as dunces.

And yet what can be more true than the assertion they made?

Here is a man who snatches its last mouthful of bread from a child. Every one agrees in saying that he is a horrible egoist, that he is guided solely by self-love.

But now here is another man, whom every one agrees to recognize as virtuous. He shares his last bit of bread with the hungry, and strips off his coat to clothe the naked. And the moralists, sticking to their religious jargon, hasten to say that this man carries the love of his neighbor to the point of self-abnegation, that he obeys a wholly different passion from that of the egoist. And yet with a little reflection we soon discover that however great the difference between the two actions in their result for humanity, the motive has still been the same. It is the quest of pleasure.

If the man who gives away his last shirt found no pleasure in doing so, he would not do it. If he found pleasure in taking bread from a child, he would do that but this is distasteful to him. He finds pleasure in giving, and so he gives. If it were not inconvenient to cause confusion by employing in a new sense words that have a recognized meaning, it might be said that in both cases the men acted under the impulse of their egoism. Some have actually said this, to give prominence to the thought and precision to the idea by presenting it in a form that strikes the imagination, and at the same time to destroy the myth which asserts that these two acts have two different motives. They have the same motive, the quest of pleasure, or the avoidance of pain, which comes to the same thing.

Take for example the worst of scoundrels: a Thiers, who massacres thirty-five thousand Parisians, or an assassin who butchers a whole family in order that he may wallow in debauchery. They do it because for the moment the desire of glory or of money gains in their minds the upper hand of every other desire. Even pity

and compassion are extinguished for the moment by this other desire, this other thirst. They act almost automatically to satisfy a craving of their nature. Or again, putting aside the stronger passions, take the petty man who deceives his friends, who lies at every step to get out of somebody the price of a pot of beer, or from sheer love of brag, or from cunning. Take the employer who cheats his workmen to buy jewels for his wife or his mistress. Take any petty scoundrel you like. He again only obeys an impulse. He seeks the satisfaction of a craving, or he seeks to escape what would give him trouble.

We are almost ashamed to compare such petty scoundrels with one who sacrifices his whole existence to free the oppressed, and like a Russian nihilist mounts the scaffold. So vastly different for humanity are the results of these two lives; so much do we feel ourselves drawn towards the one and repelled by the other.

And yet were you to talk to such a martyr, to the woman who is about to be hanged, even just as she nears the gallows, she would tell you that she would not exchange either her life or her death for the life of the petty scoundrel who lives on the money stolen from his work-people. In her life, in the struggle against monstrous might, she finds her highest joys. Everything else outside the struggle, all the little joys of the bourgeois and his little troubles seem to her so contemptible, so tiresome, so pitiable! "You do not live, you vegetate," she would reply; "I have lived."

We are speaking of course of the deliberate, conscious acts of men, reserving for the present what we have to say about that immense series of unconscious, all but mechanical acts, which occupy so large a portion of our life. In his deliberate, conscious acts man always seeks what will give him pleasure.

One man gets drunk, and every day lowers himself to the condition of a brute because he seeks in liquor the nervous excitement that he cannot obtain from his own nervous system. Another does not get drunk; he takes no liquor, even though he finds it pleasant, because he wants to keep the freshness of his thoughts and the plentitude of his powers, that he may be able to taste other pleasures which he prefers to drink. But how does he act if not like the judge of good living who, after glancing at the menu of an elaborate dinner rejects one dish that he likes very well to eat his fill of another that he likes better.

When a woman deprives herself of her last piece of bread to give it to the first comer, when she takes off her own scanty rags to cover another woman who is cold, while she herself shivers on the deck of a vessel, she does so because she would suffer infinitely more in seeing a hungry man, or a woman starved with cold, than in shivering or feeling hungry herself. She escapes a pain of which only those who have felt it know the intensity.

When the Australian, quoted by Guyau, wasted away beneath the idea that he has not yet revenged his kinsman's death; when he grows thin and pale, a prey



to the consciousness of his cowardice, and does not return to life till he has done the deed of vengeance, he performs this action, a heroic one sometimes, to free himself of a feeling which possesses him, to regain that inward peace which is the highest of pleasures.

When a troupe of monkeys has seen one of its members fall in consequence of a hunter's shot, and comes to besiege his tent and claim the body despite the threatening gun; when at length the Elder of the band goes right in, first threatens the hunter, then implores him, and finally by his lamentations induces him to give up the corpse, which the groaning troupe carry off into the forest, these monkeys obey a feeling of compassion stronger than all considerations of personal security. This feeling in them exceeds all others. Life itself loses its attraction for them while they are not sure whether they can restore life to their comrade or not. This feeling becomes so oppressive that the poor brutes do everything to get rid of it.

When the ants rush by thousands into the flames of the burning ant-hill, which that evil beast, man, has set on fire, and perish by hundreds to rescue their larvae, they again obey a craving to save their offspring. They risk everything for the sake of bringing away the larvae that they have brought up with more care than many women bestow on their children.

To seek pleasure, to avoid pain, is the general line of action (some would say law) of the organic world.

Without this quest of the agreeable, life itself would be impossible. Organisms would disintegrate, life cease.

Thus whatever a man's actions and line of conduct may be, he does what he does in obedience to a craving of his nature. The most repulsive actions, no less than actions which are indifferent or most attractive, are all equally dictated by a need of the individual who performs them. Let him act as he may, the individual acts as he does because he finds a pleasure in it, or avoids, or thinks he avoids, a pain.

Here we have a well-established fact. Here we have the essence of what has been called the egoistic theory.

Very well, are we any better off for having reached this general conclusion?

Yes, certainly we are. We have conquered a truth and destroyed a prejudice which lies at the root of all prejudices. All materialist philosophy in its relation to man is implied in this conclusion. But does it follow that all the actions of the individual are indifferent, as some have hastened to conclude? This is what we have now to see.

### III

We have seen that men's actions (their deliberate and conscious actions, for we will speak afterwards of unconscious habits) all have the same origin. Those that are called virtuous and those that are designated as vicious, great devotions and petty knaveries, acts that attract and acts that repel, all spring from a common source. All are performed in answer to some need of the individual's nature. All have for their end the quest of pleasure, the desire to avoid pain.

We have seen this in the last section, which is but a very succinct summary of a mass of facts that might be brought forward in support of this view. It is easy to understand how this explanation makes those still imbued with religious principles cry out. It leaves no room for the supernatural. It throws over the idea of an immortal soul. If man only acts in obedience to the needs of his nature, if he is, so to say, but a "conscious automaton," what becomes of the immortal soul? What of immortality, that last refuge of those who have known too few pleasures and too many sufferings, and who dream of finding some compensation in another world?

It is easy to understand how people who have grown up in prejudice and with but little confidence in science, which has so often deceived them, people who are led by feeling rather than thought, reject an explanation which takes from them their last hope.

### IV

Mosaic, Buddhist, Christian and Mussulman theologians have had recourse to divine inspiration to distinguish between good and evil. They have seen that man, be he savage or civilized, ignorant or learned, perverse or kindly and honest, always knows if he is acting well or ill, especially always knows if he is acting ill. And as they have found no explanation of this general fact, they have put it down to divine inspiration. Metaphysical philosophers, on their side, have told us of conscience, of a mystic "imperative," and, after all, have changed nothing but the phrases.

But neither have known how to estimate the very simple and very striking fact that animals living in societies are also able to distinguish between good and evil, just as man does. Moreover, their conceptions of good and evil are of the same nature as those of man. Among the best developed representatives of each separate class, — fish, insects, birds, mammals,— they are even identical.

Forel, that inimitable observer of ants, has shown by a mass of observations and facts that when an ant who has her crop well filled with honey meets other

ants with empty stomachs, the latter immediately ask her for food. And amongst these little insects it is the duty of the satisfied ant to disgorge the honey that her hungry friends may also be satisfied. Ask the ants if it would be right to refuse food to other ants of the same anthill when one has had one's share. They will answer, by actions impossible to mistake, that it would be extremely wrong. So selfish an ant would be more harshly treated than enemies of another species. If such a thing happens during a battle between two different species, the ants would stop fighting to fall upon their selfish comrade. This fact has been proved by experiments which exclude all doubt.

Or again, ask the sparrows living in your garden if it is right not to give notice to all the little society when some crumbs are thrown out, so that all may come and share in the meal. Ask them if that hedge sparrow has done right in stealing from his neighbor's nest those straws he had picked up, straws which the thief was too lazy to go and collect himself. The sparrows will answer that he is very wrong, by flying at the robber and pecking him.

Or ask the marmots if it is right for one to refuse access to his underground storehouse to other marmots of the same colony. They will answer that it is very wrong, by quarrelling in all sorts of ways with the miser.

Finally, ask primitive man if it is right to take food in the tent of a member of the tribe during his absence. He will answer that, if the man could get his food for himself, it was very wrong. On the other hand, if he was weary or in want, he ought to take food where he finds it; but in such a case, he will do well to leave his cap or his knife, or even a bit of knotted string, so that the absent hunter may know on his return that a friend has been there, not a robber. Such a precaution will save him the anxiety caused by the possible presence of a marauder near his tent.

Thousands of similar facts might be quoted, whole books might be written, to show how identical are the conceptions of good and evil amongst men and the other animals. The ant, the bird, the marmot, the savage have read neither Kant nor the fathers of the Church nor even Moses. And yet all have the same idea of good and evil. And if you reflect for a moment on what lies at the bottom of this idea, you will see directly that what is considered good among ants, marmots, and Christian or atheist moralists is that which is useful for the preservation of the race; and that which is considered evil is that which is hurtful for race preservation. Not for the individual, as Bentham and Mill put it, but fair and good for the whole race.

The idea of good and evil has thus nothing to do with religion or a mystic conscience. It is a natural need of animal races. And when founders of religions, philosophers, and moralists tell us of divine or metaphysical entities, they are only recasting what each ant, each sparrow practices in its little society.

Is this useful to society? Then it is good. Is this hurtful? Then it is bad.

This idea may be extremely restricted among inferior animals, it may be enlarged among the more advanced animals; but its essence always remains the same.

Among ants it does not extend beyond the anthill. All sociable customs, all rules of good behavior are applicable only to the individuals in that one anthill, not to any others. One anthill will not consider another as belonging to the same family, unless under some exceptional circumstances, such as a common distress falling upon both. In the same way the sparrows in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, though they will mutually aid one another in a striking manner, will fight to the death with another sparrow from the Monge Square who may dare to venture into the Luxembourg. And the savage will look upon a savage of another tribe as a person to whom the usages of his own tribe do not apply. It is even allowable to sell to him, and to sell is always to rob the buyer more or less; buyer or seller, one or other is always "sold." A Tchoutche would think it a crime to sell to the members of his tribe: to them he gives without any reckoning. And civilized man, when at last he understands the relations between himself and the simplest Papuan, close relations, though imperceptible at the first glance, will extend his principles of solidarity to the whole human race, and even to the animals. The idea enlarges, but its foundation remains the same.

On the other hand, the conception of good or evil varies according to the degree of intelligence or of knowledge acquired. There is nothing unchangeable about it. Primitive man may have thought it very right — that is, useful to the race — to eat his aged parents when they became a charge upon the community — a very heavy charge in the main. He may have also thought it useful to the community to kill his new-born children, and only keep two or three in each family, so that the mother could suckle them until they were three years old and lavish more of her tenderness upon them.

In our days ideas have changed, but the means of subsistence are no longer what they were in the Stone Age. Civilized man is not in the position of the savage family who have to choose between two evils: either to eat the aged parents or else all to get insufficient nourishment and soon find themselves unable to feed both the aged parents and the young children. We must transport ourselves into those ages, which we can scarcely call up in our mind, before we can understand that in the circumstances then existing, half-savage man may have reasoned rightly enough.

Ways of thinking may change. The estimate of what is useful or hurtful to the race changes, but the foundation remains the same. And if we wished to sum up the whole philosophy of the animal kingdom in a single phrase, we should see that ants, birds, marmots, and men are agreed on one point.

The morality which emerges from the observation of the whole animal kingdom may be summed up in the words: "Do to others what you would have them do to you in the same circumstances".

And it adds: "Take note that this is merely a piece of advice; but this advice is the fruit of the long experience of animals in society. And among the great mass of social animals, man included, it has become habitual to act on this principle. Indeed without this no society could exist, no race could have vanquished the natural obstacles against which it must struggle."

Is it really this very simple principle which emerges from the observation of social animals and human societies? Is it applicable? And how does this principle pass into a habit and continually develop? This is what we are now going to see.

## V

The idea of good and evil exists within humanity itself. Man, whatever degree of intellectual development he may have attained, however his ideas may be obscured by prejudices and personal interest in general, considers as good that which is useful to the society wherein he lives, and as evil that which is hurtful to it.

But whence comes this conception, often so vague that it can scarcely be distinguished from a feeling? There are millions and millions of human beings who have never reflected about the human race. They know for the most part only the clan or family, rarely the nation, still more rarely mankind. How can it be that they should consider what is useful for the human race as good, or even attain a feeling of solidarity with their clan, in spite of all their narrow, selfish interests?

This fact has greatly occupied thinkers at all times, and it continues to occupy them still. We are going in our turn to give our view of the matter. But let us remark in passing that though the explanations of the fact may vary, the fact itself remains none the less incontestable. And should our explanation not be the true one, or should it be incomplete, the fact with its consequences to humanity will still remain. We may not be able fully to explain the origin of the planets revolving round the sun, but the planets revolve none the less, and one of them carries us with it in space.

We have already spoken of the religious explanation. If man distinguishes between good and evil, say theologians, it is God who has inspired him with this idea. Useful or hurtful is not for him to inquire; he must merely obey the fiat of his creator. We will not stop at this explanation, fruit of the ignorance and terrors of the savage. We pass on.

Others have tried to explain the fact by law. It must have been law that developed in man the sense of just and unjust, right and wrong. Our readers may judge of this explanation for themselves. They know that law has merely utilized the social feelings of man, to slip in, among the moral precepts he accepts, various mandates useful to an exploiting minority, to which his nature refuses obedience. Law has perverted the feeling of justice instead of developing it. Again let us pass on.

Neither let us pause at the explanation of the Utilitarians. They will have it that man acts morally from self-interest, and they forget his feelings of solidarity with the whole race, which exist, whatever be their origin. There is some truth in the Utilitarian explanation. But it is not the whole truth. Therefore, let us go further.

It is again to the thinkers of the eighteenth century that we are indebted for having guessed, in part at all events, the origin of the moral sentiment.

In a fine work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, left to slumber in silence by religious prejudice, and indeed but little known even among anti-religious thinkers, Adam Smith has laid his finger on the true origin of the moral sentiment. He does not seek it in mystic religious feelings; he finds it simply in the feeling of sympathy.

You see a man beat a child. You know that the beaten child suffers. Your imagination causes you yourself to suffer the pain inflicted upon the child; or perhaps its tears, its little suffering face tell you. And if you are not a coward, you rush at the brute who is beating it and rescue it from him.

This example by itself explains almost all the moral sentiments. The more powerful your imagination, the better you can picture to yourself what any being feels when it is made to suffer, and the more intense and delicate will your moral sense be. The more you are drawn to put yourself in the place of the other person, the more you feel the pain inflicted upon him, the insult offered him, the injustice of which he is a victim, the more will you be urged to act so that you may prevent the pain, insult, or injustice. And the more you are accustomed by circumstances, by those surrounding you, or by the intensity of your own thought and your own imagination, to act as your thought and imagination urge, the more will the moral sentiment grow in you, the more will it become habitual.

This is what Adam Smith develops with a wealth of examples. He was young when he wrote this book which is far superior to the work of his old age upon political economy. Free from religious prejudice, he sought the explanation of morality in a physical fact of human nature, and this is why official and non-official theological prejudice has put the treatise on the Black List for a century.

Adam Smith's only mistake was not to have understood that this same feeling of sympathy in its habitual stage exists among animals as well as among men.

The feeling of solidarity is the leading characteristic of all animals living in society. The eagle devours the sparrow, the wolf devours the marmot. But the eagles and the wolves respectively aid each other in hunting, the sparrow and the marmot unite among themselves against the beasts and birds of prey so effectually that only the very clumsy ones are caught. In all animal societies solidarity is a natural law of far greater importance than that struggle for existence, the virtue of which is sung by the ruling classes in every strain that may best serve to stultify us.

When we study the animal world and try to explain to ourselves that struggle for existence maintained by each living being against adverse circumstances and against its enemies, we realize that the more the principles of solidarity and equality are developed in an animal society and have become habitual to it, the more chance has it of surviving and coming triumphantly out of the struggle against hardships and foes. The more thoroughly each member of the society feels his solidarity with each other member of the society, the more completely are developed in all of them those two qualities which are the main factors of all progress: courage on the one hand, and on the other, free individual initiative. And on the contrary, the more any animal society or little group of animals loses this feeling of solidarity – which may chance as the result of exceptional scarcity or else of exceptional plenty – the more do the two other factors of progress courage and individual initiative, diminish. In the end they disappear, and the society falls into decay and sinks before its foes. Without mutual confidence no struggle is possible; there is no courage, no initiative, no solidarity— and no victory! Defeat is certain.

We can prove with a wealth of examples how in the animal and human worlds the law of mutual aid is the law of progress, and how mutual aid with the courage and individual initiative which follow from it secures victory to the species most capable of practicing it. Now let us imagine this feeling of solidarity acting during the millions of ages which have succeeded one another since the first beginnings of animal life appeared upon the globe. Let us imagine how this feeling little by little became a habit, and was transmitted by heredity from the simplest microscopic organism to its descendants – insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, man – and we shall comprehend the origin of the moral sentiment, which is a necessity to the animal like food or the organ for digesting it.

Without going further back and speaking of complex animals springing from colonies of extremely simple little beings, here is the origin of the moral sentiment. We have been obliged to be extremely brief in order to compress this great question within the limits of a few pages, but enough has already been said to show that there is nothing mysterious or sentimental about it. Without this solidarity of the individual with the species, the animal kingdom would never have developed or

reached its present perfection. The most advanced being upon the earth would still be one of those tiny specks swimming in the water and scarcely perceptible under a microscope. Would even this exist? For are not the earliest aggregations of cellules themselves an instance of association in the struggle?

## VI

Thus by an unprejudiced observation of the animal kingdom, we reach the conclusion that wherever society exists at all, this principle may be found: Treat others as you would like them to treat you under similar circumstances.

And when we study closely the evolution of the animal world, we discover that the aforesaid principle, translated by the one word Solidarity, has played an infinitely larger part in the development of the animal kingdom than all the adaptations that have resulted from a struggle between individuals to acquire personal advantages.

It is evident that in human societies a still greater degree of solidarity is to be met with. Even the societies of monkeys highest in the animal scale offer a striking example of practical solidarity, and man has taken a step further in the same direction. This and this alone has enabled him to preserve his puny race amid the obstacles cast by nature in his way, and to develop his intelligence.

A careful observation of those primitive societies still remaining at the level of the Stone Age shows to what a great extent the members of the same community practice solidarity among themselves.

This is the reason why practical solidarity never ceases; not even during the worst periods of history. Even when temporary circumstances of domination, servitude, exploitation cause the principle to be disowned, it still lives deep in the thoughts of the many, ready to bring about a strong recoil against evil institutions, a revolution. If it were otherwise society would perish. For the vast majority of animals and men this feeling remains, and must remain an acquired habit, a principle always present to the mind even when it is continually ignored in action.

It is the whole evolution of the animal kingdom speaking in us. And this evolution has lasted long, very long. It counts by hundreds of millions of years.

Even if we wished to get rid of it we could not. It would be easier for a man to accustom himself to walk on fours than to get rid of the moral sentiment. It is anterior in — animal evolution to the upright posture of man.

The moral sense is a natural faculty in us like the sense of smell or of touch.

As for law and religion, which also have preached this principle, they have simply filched it to cloak their own wares, their injunctions for the benefit of the conqueror, the exploiter, the priest. Without this principle of solidarity, the



justice of which is so generally recognized, how could they have laid hold on men's minds? Each of them covered themselves with it as with a garment; like authority which made good its position by posing as the protector of the weak against the strong. By flinging overboard law, religion and authority, mankind can regain possession of the moral principle which has been taken from them. Regain that they may criticize it, and purge it from the adulterations wherewith priest, judge and ruler have poisoned it and are poisoning it yet.

Besides this principle of treating others as one wishes to be treated oneself, what is it but the very same principle as equality, the fundamental principle of anarchism? And how can any one manage to believe himself an anarchist unless he practices it?

We do not wish to be ruled. And by this very fact, do we not declare that we ourselves wish to rule nobody? We do not wish to be deceived, we wish always to be told nothing but the truth. And by this very fact, do we not declare that we ourselves do not wish to deceive anybody, that we promise to always tell the truth, nothing but the truth, the whole truth? We do not wish to have the fruits of our labor stolen from us. And by that very fact, do we not declare that we respect the fruits of others' labor?

By what right indeed can we demand that we should be treated in one fashion, reserving it to ourselves to treat others in a fashion entirely different? Our sense of equality revolts at such an idea.

Equality in mutual relations with the solidarity arising from it, this is the most powerful weapon of the animal world in the struggle for existence. And equality is equity. By proclaiming ourselves anarchists, we proclaim beforehand that we disavow any way of treating others in which we should not like them to treat us; that we will no longer tolerate the inequality that has allowed some among us to use their strength, their cunning or their ability after a fashion in which it would annoy us to have such qualities used against ourselves. Equality in all things, the synonym of equity, this is anarchism in very deed. It is not only against the abstract trinity of law, religion, and authority that we declare war. By becoming anarchists we declare war against all this wave of deceit, cunning, exploitation, depravity, vice — in a word, inequality — which they have poured into all our hearts. We declare war against their way of acting, against their way of thinking. The governed, the deceived, the exploited, the prostitute, wound above all else our sense of equality. It is in the name of equality that we are determined to have no more prostituted, exploited, deceived and governed men and women.

Perhaps it may be said — it has been said sometimes “But if you think that you must always treat others as you would be treated yourself, what right have you to use force under any circumstances whatever? What right have you to level a cannon at any barbarous or civilized invaders of your country? What right have

you to dispossess the exploiter? What right to kill not only a tyrant but a mere viper?"

What right? What do you mean by that singular word, borrowed from the law? Do you wish to know if I shall feel conscious of having acted well in doing this? If those I esteem will think I have done well? Is this what you ask? If so the answer is simple.

Yes, certainly! Because we ourselves should ask to be killed like venomous beasts if we went to invade Burmese or Zulus who have done us no harm. We should say to our son or our friend: "Kill me, if I ever take part in the invasion!"

Yes, certainly! Because we ourselves should ask to be dispossessed, if giving the lie to our principles, we seized upon an inheritance, did it fall from on high, to use it for the exploitation of others.

Yes, certainly! Because any man with a heart asks beforehand that he may be slain if ever he becomes venomous; that a dagger may be plunged into his heart if ever he should take the place of a dethroned tyrant.

Ninety-nine men out of a hundred who have a wife and children would try to commit suicide for fear they should do harm to those they love, if they felt themselves going mad. Whenever a good-hearted man feels himself becoming dangerous to those he loves, he wishes to die before he is so.

Perovskaya and her comrades killed the Russian Czar. And all mankind, despite the repugnance to the spilling of blood, despite the sympathy for one who had allowed the serfs to be liberated, recognized their right to do as they did. Why? Not because the act was generally recognized as useful; two out of three still doubt if it were so. But because it was felt that not for all the gold in the world would Perovskaya and her comrades have consented to become tyrants themselves. Even those who know nothing of the drama are certain that it was no youthful bravado, no palace conspiracy, no attempt to gain power. It was hatred of tyranny, even to the scorn of self, even to the death.

"These men and women," it was said, "had conquered the right to kill"; as it was said of Louise Michel, "She had the right to rob." Or again, "They have the right to steal," in speaking of those terrorists who lived on dry bread, and stole a million or two of the Kishineff treasure.

Mankind has never refused the right to use force on those who have conquered that right, be it exercised upon the barricades or in the shadow of a cross-way. But if such an act is to produce a deep impression upon men's minds, the right must be conquered. Without this, such an act whether useful or not will remain merely a brutal fact, of no importance in the progress of ideas. People will see in it nothing but a displacement of force, simply the substitution of one exploiter for another.

## VII

We have hitherto been speaking of the conscious, deliberate actions of man, those performed intentionally. But side by side with our conscious life we have an unconscious life which is very much wider. Yet we have only to notice how we dress in the morning, trying to fasten a button that we know we lost last night, or stretching out our hand to take something that we ourselves have moved away, to obtain an idea of this unconscious life and realize the enormous part it plays in our existence.

It makes up three-fourths of our relations with others. Our ways of speaking, smiling, frowning, getting heated or keeping cool in a discussion, are unintentional, the result of habits, inherited from our human or pre-human ancestors (only notice the likeness in expression between an angry man and an angry beast), or else consciously or unconsciously acquired.

Our manner of acting towards others thus tends to become habitual. To treat others as he would wish to be treated himself becomes with man and all sociable animals, simply a habit. So much so that a person does not generally even ask himself how he must act under such and such circumstances. It is only when the circumstances are exceptional, in some complex case or under the impulse of strong passion that he hesitates, and a struggle takes place between the various portions of his brain — for the brain is a very complex organ, the various portions of which act to a certain degree independently. When this happens, the man substitutes himself in imagination for the person opposed to him; he asks himself if he would like to be treated in such a way, and the better he has identified himself with the person whose dignity or interests he has been on the point of injuring, the more moral will his decision be. Or maybe a friend steps in and says to him: “Fancy yourself in his place; should you have suffered from being treated by him as he has been treated by you? And this is enough.

Thus we only appeal to the principle of equality in moments of hesitation, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred act morally from habit. It must have been obvious that in all we have hitherto said, we have not attempted to enjoin anything, we have only set forth the manner in which things happen in the animal world and amongst mankind.

Formerly the church threatened men with hell to moralize them, and she succeeded in demoralizing them instead. The judge threatens with imprisonment, flogging, the gallows, in the name of those social principles he has filched from society; and he demoralizes them. And yet the very idea that the judge may disappear from the earth at the same time as the priest causes authoritarians of every shade to cry out about peril to society.

But we are not afraid to forego judges and their sentences. We forego sanctions of all kinds, even obligations to morality. We are not afraid to say: "Do what you will; act as you will"; because we are persuaded that the great majority of mankind, in proportion to their degree of enlightenment and the completeness with which they free themselves from existing fetters will behave and act always in a direction useful to society just as we are persuaded beforehand that a child will one day walk on its two feet and not on all fours simply because it is born of parents belonging to the genus Homo.

All we can do is to give advice. And again while giving it we add: "This advice will be valueless if your own experience and observation do not lead you to recognize that it is worth following." When we see a youth stooping and so contracting his chest and lungs we advise him to straighten himself, hold up his head and open his chest. We advise him to fill his lungs and take long breaths, because this will be his best safeguard against consumption. But at the same time we teach him physiology that he may understand the functions of his lungs, and himself choose the posture he knows to be the best.

And this is all we can do in the case of morals. And this is all we can do in the case of morals. We have only a right to give advice, to which we add: "Follow it if it seems good to you."

But while leaving to each the right to act as he thinks best; while utterly denying the right of society to punish one in any way for any anti-social act he may have committed, we do not forego our own capacity to love what seems to us good and to hate what seems to us bad. Love and hate; for only those who know how to hate know how to love. We keep this capacity; and as this alone serves to maintain and develop the moral sentiments in every animal society, so much the more will it be enough for the human race.

We only ask one thing, to eliminate all that impedes the free development of these two feelings in the present society, all that perverts our judgment: — the State, the church, exploitation; judges, priests, governments, exploiters.

Today when we see a Jack the Ripper murder one after another some of the poorest and most miserable of women, our first feeling is one of hatred.

If we had met him the day when he murdered that woman who asked him to pay her for her slum lodging, we should have put a bullet through his head, without reflecting that the bullet might have been better bestowed in the brain of the owner of that wretched den.

But when we recall to mind all the infamies which have brought him to this; when we think of the darkness in which he prowls haunted by images drawn from indecent books or thoughts suggested by stupid books, our feeling is divided. And if some day we hear that Jack is in the hands of some judge who has slain in cold blood a far greater number of men, women and children than all the Jacks

together; if we see him in the hands of one of those deliberate maniacs then all our hatred of Jack the Ripper will vanish. It will be transformed into hatred of a cowardly and hypocritical society and its recognized representatives. All the infamies of a Ripper disappear before that long series of infamies committed in the name of law. It is these we hate.

At the present day our feelings are continually thus divided. We feel that all of us are more or less, voluntarily or involuntarily, abettors of this society. We do not dare to hate. Do we even dare to love? In a society based on exploitation and servitude human nature is degraded.

But as servitude disappears we shall regain our rights. We shall feel within ourselves strength to hate and to love, even in such complicated cases as that we have just cited.

In our daily life we do already give free scope to our feelings of sympathy or antipathy; we are doing so every moment. We all love moral strength we all despise moral weakness and cowardice. Every moment our words, looks, smiles express our joy in seeing actions useful to the human race, those which we think good. Every moment our looks and words show the repugnance we feel towards cowardice, deceit, intrigue, want of moral courage. We betray our disgust, even when under the influence of a worldly education we try to hide our contempt beneath those lying appearances which will vanish as equal relations are established among us.

This alone is enough to keep the conception of good and ill at a certain level and to communicate it one to another.

It will be still more efficient when there is no longer judge or priest in society, when moral principles have lost their obligatory character and are considered merely as relations between equals.

Moreover, in proportion to the establishment of these relations, a loftier moral conception will arise in society. It is this conception which we are about to analyze.

## VIII

Thus far our analysis has only set forth the simple principles of equality. We have revolted and invited others to revolt against those who assume the right to treat their fellows otherwise than they would be treated themselves; against those who, not themselves wishing to be deceived, exploited, prostituted or ill-used, yet behave thus to others. Lying, and brutality are repulsive, we have said, not because they are disapproved by codes of morality, but because such conduct revolts the sense of equality in everyone to whom equality is not an empty word.

And above all does it revolt him who is a true anarchist in his way of thinking and acting.

If nothing but this simple, natural, obvious principle were generally applied in life, a very lofty morality would be the result; a morality comprising all that moralists have taught.

The principle of equality sums up the teachings of moralists. But it also contains something more. This something more is respect for the individual. By proclaiming our morality of equality, or anarchism, we refuse to assume a right which moralists have always taken upon themselves to claim, that of mutilating the individual in the name of some ideal. We do not recognize this right at all, for ourselves or anyone else.

We recognize the full and complete liberty of the individual; we desire for him plentitude of existence, the free development of all his faculties. We wish to impose nothing upon him; thus returning to the principle which Fourier placed in opposition to religious morality when he said:

“Leave men absolutely free. Do not mutilate them as religions have done enough and to spare. Do not fear even their passions. In a free society these are not dangerous.”

Provided that you yourself do not abdicate your freedom, provided that you yourself do not allow others to enslave you; and provided that to the violent and anti-social passions of this or that person you oppose your equally vigorous social passions, you have nothing to fear from liberty.

We renounce the idea of mutilating the individual in the name of any ideal whatsoever. All we reserve to ourselves is the frank expression of our sympathies and antipathies towards what seems to us good or bad. A man deceives his friends. It is his bent, his character to do so. Very well, it is our character, our bent to despise liars. And as this is our character, let us be frank. Do not let us rush and press him to our bosom or cordially shake hands with him, as is sometimes done today. Let us vigorously oppose our active passion to his.

This is all we have the right to do, this is all the duty we have to perform to keep up the principle of equality in society. It is the principle of equality in practice. But what of the murderer, the man who debauches children? The murderer who kills from sheer thirst for blood is excessively rare. He is a madman to be cured or avoided. As for the debauchee, let us first of all look to it that society does not pervert our children's feelings, then we shall have little to fear from rakes. All this it must be understood is not completely applicable until the great sources of moral depravity — capitalism, religion, justice, government — shall have ceased to exist. But the greater part of it may be put in practice from this day forth. It is in practice already.

And yet if societies knew only this principle of equality; if each man practiced merely the equity of a trader, taking care all day long not to give others anything more than he was receiving from them, society would die of it. The very principle of equality itself would disappear from our relations. For, if it is to be maintained, something grander, more lovely, more vigorous than mere equity must perpetually find a place in life.

And this greater than justice is here.

Until now humanity has never been without large natures overflowing with tenderness, with intelligence, with goodwill, and using their feeling, their intellect, their active force in the service of the human race without asking anything in return.

This fertility of mind, of feeling or of goodwill takes all possible forms. It is in the passionate seeker after truth, who renounces all other pleasures to throw his energy into the search for what he believes true and right contrary to the affirmations of the ignoramuses around him. It is in the inventor who lives from day to day forgetting even his food, scarcely touching the bread with which perhaps some woman devoted to him feeds him like a child, while he follows out the intention he thinks destined to change the face of the world. It is in the ardent revolutionist to whom the joys of art, of science, even of family life, seem bitter, so long as they cannot be shared by all, and who works despite misery and persecution for the regeneration of the world. It is in the youth who, hearing of the atrocities of invasion, and taking literally the heroic legends of patriotism, inscribes himself in a volunteer corps and marches bravely through snow and hunger until he falls beneath the bullets. It was in the Paris street arab, with his quick intelligence and bright choice of aversions and sympathies, who ran to the ramparts with his little brother, stood steady amid the rain of shells, and died murmuring: "Long live the Commune!" It is in the man who is revolted at the sight of a wrong without waiting to ask what will be its result to himself, and when all backs are bent stands up to unmask the iniquity and brand the exploiter, the petty despot of a factory or great tyrant of an empire. Finally it is in all those numberless acts of devotion less striking and therefore unknown and almost always misprized, which may be continually observed, especially among women, if we will take the trouble to open our eyes and notice what lies at the very foundation of human life, and enables it to unfold itself one way or another in spite of the exploitation and oppression it undergoes.

Such men and women as these, some in obscurity, some within a larger arena, creates the progress of mankind. And mankind is aware of it. This is why it encompasses such lives with reverence, with myths. It adorns them, makes them the subject of its stories, songs, romances. It adores in them the courage, goodness, love and devotion which are lacking in most of us. It transmits their memory to

the young. It recalls even those who have acted only in the narrow circle of home and friends, and reveres their memory in family tradition.

Such men and women as these make true morality, the only morality worthy the name. All the rest is merely equality in relations. Without their courage, their devotion, humanity would remain besotted in the mire of petty calculations. It is such men and women as these who prepare the morality of the future, that which will come when our children have ceased to reckon, and have grown up to the idea that the best use for all energy, courage and love is to expend it where the need of such a force is most strongly felt.

Such courage, such devotion has existed in every age. It is to be met with among sociable animals. It is to be found among men, even during the most degraded epochs.

And religions have always sought to appropriate it, to turn it into current coin for their own benefit. In fact if religions are still alive, it is because — ignorance apart— they have always appealed to this very devotion and courage. And it is to this that revolutionists appeal.

The moral sentiment of duty which each man has felt in his life, and which it has been attempted to explain by every sort of mysticism, the unconsciously anarchist Guyau says, “is nothing but a superabundance of life, which demands to be exercised, to give itself; at the same time, it is the consciousness of a power.”

All accumulated force creates a pressure upon the obstacles placed before it. Power to act is duty to act. And moral “obligation” of which so much has been said or written is reduced to the conception: the condition of the maintenance of life is its expansion.

“The plant cannot prevent itself from flowering. Sometimes to flower means to die. Never mind, the sap mounts the same,” concludes the young anarchist philosopher.

It is the same with the human being when he is full of force and energy. Force accumulates in him. He expands his life. He gives without calculation, otherwise he could not live. If he must die like the flower when it blooms, never mind. The sap rises, if sap there be.

Be strong. Overflow with emotional and intellectual energy, and you will spread your intelligence, your love, your energy of action broadcast among others! This is what all moral teaching comes to.



## IX

That which mankind admires in a truly moral man is his energy, the exuberance of life which urges him to give his intelligence, his feeling, his action, asking nothing in return.

The strong thinker, the man overflowing with intellectual life, naturally seeks to diffuse his ideas. There is no pleasure in thinking unless the thought is communicated to others. It is only the mentally poverty-stricken man, who after he has painfully hunted up some idea, carefully hides it that later on he may label it with his own name. The man of powerful intellect runs over with ideas; he scatters them by the handful. He is wretched if he cannot share them with others, cannot scatter them to the four winds, for in this is his life.

The same with regard to feeling. "We are not enough for ourselves: we have more tears than our own sufferings claim, more capacity for joy than our own existence can justify," says Guyau, thus summing up the whole question of morality in a few admirable lines, caught from nature. The solitary being is wretched, restless, because he cannot share his thoughts and feelings with others. When we feel some great pleasure, we wish to let others know that we exist, we feel, we love, we live, we struggle, we fight.

At the same time, we feel the need to exercise our will, our active energy. To act, to work has become a need for the vast majority of mankind. So much so that when absurd conditions divorce a man or woman from useful work, they invent something to do, some futile and senseless obligations whereby to open out a field for their active energy. They invent a theory, a religion, a "social duty"—to persuade themselves that they are doing something useful. When they dance, it is for a charity. When they ruin themselves with expensive dresses, it is to keep up the position of the aristocracy. When they do nothing, it is on principle.

"We need to help our fellows, to lend a hand to the coach laboriously dragged along by humanity; in any case, we buzz round it," says Guyau. This need of lending a hand is so great that it is found among all sociable animals, however low in the scale. What is all the enormous amount of activity spent uselessly in politics every day but an expression of the need to lend a hand to the coach of humanity, or at least to buzz around it.

Of course this "fecundity of will," this thirst for action, when accompanied by poverty of feeling and an intellect incapable of creation, will produce nothing but a Napoleon I or a Bismarck, wiseacres who try to force the world to progress backwards. While on the other hand, mental fertility destitute of well developed sensibility will bring forth such barren fruits as literary and scientific pedants who only hinder the advance of knowledge. Finally, sensibility unguided by large

intelligence will produce such persons as the woman ready to sacrifice everything for some brute of a man, upon whom she pours forth all her love.

If life to be really fruitful, it must be so at once in intelligence, in feeling and in will. This fertility in every direction is life; the only thing worthy the name. For one moment of this life, those who have obtained a glimpse of it give years of vegetative existence. Without this overflowing life, a man is old before his time, an impotent being, a plant that withers before it has ever flowered.

“Let us leave to latter-day corruption this life that is no life,” cries youth, the true youth full of sap that longs to live and scatter life around. Every time a society falls into decay, a thrust from such youth as this shatters ancient economic, and political and moral forms to make room for the upspringing of a new life. What matter if one or another fall in the struggle! Still the sap rises. For youth to live is to blossom whatever the consequences! It does not regret them.

But without speaking of the heroic periods of mankind, taking everyday existence, is it life to live in disagreement with one’s ideal?

Now-a-days it is often said that men scoff at the ideal. And it is easy to understand why. The word has so often been used to cheat the simple-hearted that a reaction is inevitable and healthy. We too should like to replace the word “ideal,” so often blotted and stained, by a new word more in conformity with new ideas. But whatever the word, the fact remains; every human being has his ideal. Bismarck had his — however strange — government of blood and iron. Even every philistine has his ideal, however low. But besides these, there is the human being who has conceived a loftier ideal. The life of a beast cannot satisfy him. Servility, lying, bad faith, intrigue, inequality in human relations fill him with loathing. How can he in his turn become servile, be a liar, and intriguer, lord it over others? He catches a glimpse of how lovely life might be if better relations existed among men; he feels in himself the power to succeed in establishing these better relations with those he may meet on his way. He conceives what is called an ideal. Whence comes this ideal? How is it fashioned by heredity on one side and the impressions of life on the other? We know not. At most we could tell the story of it more or less truly in our own biographies. But it is an actual fact — variable, progressive, open to outside influences but always living. It is a largely unconscious feeling of what would give the greatest amount of vitality, of the joy of life.

Life is vigorous, fertile. rich in sensation only on condition of answering to this feeling of the ideal. Act against this feeling, and you feel your life bent back on itself. It is no longer at one, it loses its vigor. Be untrue often to your ideal and you will end by paralyzing your will, your active energy. Soon you will no longer regain the vigor, the spontaneity of decision you formerly knew. You are a broken man.

Nothing mysterious in all this, once you look upon a human being as a compound of nervous and cerebral centers acting independently. Waver between the various feelings striving within you, and you will soon end by breaking the harmony of the organism; you will be a sick person without will. The intensity of your life will decrease. In vain will you seek for compromises. Never more will you be the complete, strong, vigorous being you were when your acts were in accordance with the ideal conceptions of your brain.

There are epochs in which the moral conception changes entirely. A man perceives that what he had considered moral is the deepest immorality. In some instances it is a custom, a venerated tradition, that is fundamentally immoral. In others we find a moral system framed in the interests of a single class. We cast them overboard and raise the cry "Down with morality!" It becomes a duty to act "immorally."

Let us welcome such epochs for they are epochs of criticism. They are an infallible sign that thought is working in society. A higher morality has begun to be wrought out.

What this morality will be we have sought to formulate, taking as our basis the study of man and animal.

We have seen the kind of morality which is even now shaping itself in the ideas of the masses and of the thinkers. This morality will issue no commands. It will refuse once and for all to model individuals according to an abstract idea, as it will refuse to mutilate them by religion, law or government. It will leave to the individual man full and perfect liberty. It will be but a simple record of facts, a science. And this science will say to man: "If you are not conscious of strength within you, if your energies are only just sufficient to maintain a colorless, monotonous life, without strong impressions, without deep joys, but also without deep sorrows, well then, keep to the simple principles of a just equality. In relations of equality you will find probably the maximum of happiness possible to your feeble energies.

"But if you feel within you the strength of youth, if you wish to live, if you wish to enjoy a perfect, full and overflowing life — that is, know the highest pleasure which a living being can desire — be strong, be great, be vigorous in all you do.

"Sow life around you. Take heed that if you deceive, lie, intrigue, cheat, you thereby demean yourself. belittle yourself, confess your own weakness beforehand, play the part of the slave of the harem who feels himself the inferior of his master. Do this if it so pleases you, but know that humanity will regard you as petty, contemptible and feeble, and treat you as such. Having no evidence of your strength, it will act towards you as one worthy of pity — and pity only. Do not blame humanity if of your own accord you thus paralyze your energies. Be strong on the other hand, and once you have seen unrighteousness and recognized it as

such — inequity in life, a lie in science, or suffering inflicted by another — rise in revolt against the iniquity, the lie or the injustice.

“Struggle! To struggle is to live, and the fiercer the struggle the intenser the life. Then you will have lived; and a few hours of such life are worth years spent vegetating.

“Struggle so that all may live this rich, overflowing life. And be sure that in this struggle you will find a joy greater than anything else can give.”

This is all that the science of morality can tell you. Yours is the choice.

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Pëtr Kropotkin  
Anarchist Morality  
1897

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