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THE PRESENT CRISIS IN ETHICS*

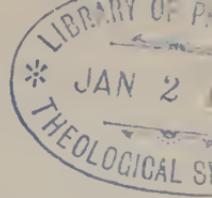
"It is a fact worth weighing," says one of the most learned and judicial of our present day writers on Christian ethics,—
"it is a fact worth weighing that for some two hundred years or more after the Reformation and the rise of modern philosophy no one ever questioned the supremacy of the Christian ethic, though from every other quarter inroads were being made upon the received traditions."¹

So recently, indeed, as 1873 Mr. John Stuart Mill, the ablest as well as the fairest of modern unbelievers, wrote as follows: "About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this preëminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion can not be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity."² Nor are such testimonies exceptional. Unbelievers in dogmatic Christianity from widely different standpoints have united in exalting its ethics. When the charge was brought by Christians that the bitter attacks on Christian dogma must issue in the overthrow of Christian morality, it was hotly resisted by scientists and by litera-

* An Address delivered in Miller Chapel on September 26, 1918, at the Opening of the One Hundred and Seventh Session of the Seminary.

¹ Thornton, *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 3.

² *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 253.



teurs like Huxley and Matthew Arnold. Whatever some may have thought, they did not dare even to hint that by undermining faith in the supernatural they were condemning morality itself. When Tennyson did say this, in "The Promise of May" the late Lord Queensbury protested on the first night and made a scene at the Globe Theatre in London. This means that the opponents of supernatural revelation have agreed with the believers in such revelation in holding "the supremacy of the Christian ethic," in teaching that the true rule of life is, to quote again Mr. Mill, "so to live that Christ would approve our life."³ Thus in ethics the demand of our age has been "Back to Christ."

Within twenty-five years all this has changed. There has been a revival of paganism. Our Lord has been denied as "the ideal man" as he had been rejected as "the mighty God." Formerly Christians were charged with hypocrisy because, though professing to follow Christ, they were not Christlike. Now they are maligned because they would be Christlike. The accusation is not that we do not come up to our ideal, but that we have an ideal so unworthy. Our Lord himself is scorned, not because he is not the revealer of love, but because he is.

Nay, it is not so much the unworthiness of our ideal that is against us: it is that we have an ideal at all. From this point of view, we have not to find out what is right, but rather to make sure what we want and then to make ourselves masters of it. The standard has not been altered, all standards have been abolished. The true man is "the superman," and "the superman" is "beyond good and evil." Thus the cry of to-day has come to be, Go back on Christ and return to nature.

No one has voiced this demand more boldly and even shamelessly than he who is credited with having first made it. Let, then, Frederick Nietzsche speak for himself. These are his words: "No one hitherto has felt Christian morality beneath him; to that end there were needed light and remote-

³ *Theism*, p. 235.

ness of vision, and an abysmal psychological depth not believed to be possible hitherto. Up to the present Christian morality has been the Circe of all thinkers—they stood at her service. What man before my time had descended into the underground cavern from out of which the poisonous fumes of the ideal—of this slandering of the world burst forth!”⁴

“That which defies me, that which makes me stand apart from the whole of the rest of humanity, is the fact that I have unmasked Christian morality. Christian morality is the most malignant form of all falsehood, the actual Circe of humanity, that which has corrupted mankind.”⁵

In the face of such a contrast as this can it be doubted that we are in the midst of an ethical revolution; and that this is the most appalling revolution that the world has known? Christ or nature? That is the issue. Get it clearly before you, and keep it ever before you. Shall we continue to regard Christ as “God manifest in the flesh,” as the One, consequently, whose nature and character both constitute and determine obligation; as the One, that is, because of whose holiness we ought to be holy, and in whose earthly life we see as nowhere else what holiness is and so what we ought to do and to be: or shall we deny that there is any ideal; and affirm that nature, or what we want, has taken the place of oughtness or obligation? This is the question.

I. Let us examine this substitute for the ideal, the ethical, in the light of its origin. Concerning men we may often learn much from a study of their ancestry. It is even more so in the case of moral and spiritual movements. They are not likely to rise higher than their source, and they are sure to be colored by their source. The contributory causes, then, of this reactionary movement in morals may be set forth as follows:

(1) Rationalism. As another has said, “we are still suf-

⁴ *Ecce Homo*, p. 138.

⁵ *Ecce Homo*, p. 139.

fering from the long supremacy of reason which swayed the 18th century." It is generally taken for granted, not only that the ordinary man can of himself discern and reject what, because it contradicts reason, must be untrue, which is the case; but also that there is no sphere which is "above reason," so that any one can come by the light of his own unaided intellect to safe and healthy opinions about the deepest and most mysterious things in personal experience. In this way at the impulse of rationalism supernatural revelation has given place to natural inclination. "Thus saith the Lord" has been supplanted by, I want; and the categorical imperative has simply lapsed. It could not have been otherwise. When any finite, not to say sinful, being assumes that he is self-sufficient, we have the beginning of the end.

(2) Naturalism, or the theory of evolution. In itself this might not have produced a revolution in ideas concerning morality. But it did not stand alone. Rationalism at once saw in it an ally. Evolution claimed to explain everything. It made the principle of life one—the same for man as for the protoplasm and for all that lies between them. It follows that man's complex nature is no longer wrapt in mystery. His moral consciousness is not a divine enigma sent down from heaven into an animal organism from which it is entirely distinct and different. It is itself a thing evolved; perhaps a mass of evolved instincts, each and all stretching their roots down and back into the lower realms of nature.

Now this "clearing up things hitherto thought mysterious and baffling to the reason was," as Thornton has said in his remarkable book "Conduct and the Supernatural," "a signal proof, so it seemed, of the rationalistic contention that the human intellect will unaided solve infallibly all mysteries and unlock all doors."⁶ "This new impetus is seen at work even as early as David Strauss, and later in Professor Karl Pearson as well as in Nietzsche. The easy-going fashion in which Strauss picked the historic creed to pieces in his

⁶ Page 6.

last work by a process of shallow logic reaches its climax in the few pages toward the end of the book, in which he dismisses the ethical teaching of our Lord. Here we find the rationalist's blind faith in the intellect; and this unwholesome temper, wielding the newly forged weapon of naturalism, relies upon nature to supply a basis for morality, without respect to existing moral standards or to the sanctions from which their authority has hitherto been derived."⁷

(3) The Idealistic Philosophy. We may not pause to trace the development of this from its seed in Kant's negative teaching to its fruit in Hegel's absolutism. Suffice it to say that Descartes' healthy tendency to emphasize the Individual, the result of all that was best in the Reformation movement, gave place to Hegel's elevation of the Universal Reason as the centre of interest. But note the consequences of this change. As Thornton says, "when once men lose faith in the objective value of their own personality as a separate independent reasoning power and seek to form a philosophical system which deals primarily in universals, the result always seems to be fatal; the individual ceases to be of interest, and the vision is filled with a great cosmic power which moves through the ages, fulfilling its inscrutable destiny regardless of pigmy man and his little struggles. This is the course which things have taken during the past century."⁸

But this is not the worst. As rationalism and naturalism or evolution combined, so these two streams are swollen by a third. Idealism, especially in its pantheistic form, has appropriated the doctrine of evolution as the latter had been embraced by rationalism; and the great cosmic movement with which this most composite philosophy now presents us, not only disregards, but overshadows and must destroy, the significance of all the different elements of personality. The rationalist despises all emotion, while he assumes that the will is ever ready to follow a clear track when reason has

⁷ *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 6.

⁸ *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 7.

provided one. The naturalist regards conscience as only the aggregate of a number of prejudices and interests which have been evolved from the humblest beginnings, and which cannot, therefore, be placed in the seat of authority. The idealist doubts the validity of the individual reason; but as he has usually imbibed rationalistic suppositions to a greater or less degree, he proceeds by means of reason, to build up a system in which there is no place for the freedom of the will. Thus heart, conscience and will are perverted or destroyed. How, then, can morality continue? We find ourselves at once in a sphere which is "beyond good and evil."

(4) The repudiation of Christian dogma. Of all the causes of the revolution in ethics this is the most important. It is so, both because it is that on which the three causes just considered concentrate, and also because it is that which, in the nature of the case, must itself alone destroy the Christian ethic. Rationalism, naturalism, idealism,—the *bête noir* of these is the Supernatural. They and it are mutually exclusive. Either they or it must go. Hence, it is that they all unite in attacking the Supernatural. Their life depends on so doing.

Now Christian dogma, that is, supernatural revelation systematized, is both the foundation and the root of Christian ethics. It is that on which it is based; it is that out of which it grows. Thus the two things, dogma and ethics, are indissolubly bound together; they are parts of one whole as the roots and the fruit are both alike parts of one tree, organically connected. Consequently, the Christian way of life is impossible apart from the Christian doctrine of life. Belief must determine practice. The repudiation of Christian dogma must, then, mean the destruction of Christian ethics. He who denies the cross of Christ cannot live the life of Christ.

Thus it comes to pass that the repudiation of Christian dogma is the supreme cause of "the Revolution in Ethics." Were Christian dogma maintained in its integrity, rationalism, naturalism and idealism could not affect Christian life.

Repudiate this dogma, however, and you both cut the root of Christian life, and, as we have seen, introduce an atmosphere necessarily fatal to it. Such, then, is the "Revolution in ethics" considered in the light of its sources. Whatever the world may think, the Christian may not favor any movement with such an origin.

II. Let us look at the revolutionary ethics from the standpoint of its results. What the old system which finds both its ground and its standard in God manifest in Christ—what this system has been and done, we all know. Nor did we have to ask Christianity to tell us. Mr. Lecky, the great historian of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, himself an avowed rationalist, has told us in words which for clearness and force leave nothing to be desired. "It was reserved," says he, "for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love and has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, realms, temperaments and conditions; has not only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice; and has exerted so deep an influence that it may truly be said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and all the exhortations of moralists. This has, indeed, been the well-spring of all that is best and purest in the Christian life. Amid all the sins and failings, amid all the priestcraft and persecution and fanaticism, that have disgraced the church, it has preserved in the character of its Founder an enduring principle of regeneration."⁹ Ought we not, then, to go back to Christ? Where but in him do we find an "enduring principle of regeneration"?

Certainly not in nature. What we find in her is an enduring principle of destruction. We have but to look at the condition of Europe, and, indeed, of the world, to see the most terrific illustration of this. Of course, no one cause

⁹ *Hist. of European Morals*, vol. II, p. 9.

will explain the war. A movement so wide and so complex must have many roots. Influences, dynastic, economic, scientific, ecclesiastical, philosophical and religious, as well as moral, to cite Prof. W. Hallock Johnson, D.D., must all have contributed to bring about the war, and to make it the unprecedentedly awful struggle that it is. It would be the height of presumption, too, for any one, at least at this stage, to assume to discriminate between these causes and say, This one has done this, and, This one has done that.

But while this is true, it is also clear that there is a close, a vital, connection between the war and the ethics of nature. Of whatever else the war may be a result, it certainly is the appropriate and even the necessary fruit of the "revolutionary morality." That morality could not have been sincerely embraced by Germany, as it was, and she not have acted as she has. Do you question this? Then ask yourselves what would issue, were "the will to power," that is, the will to self-gratification, the will to do what one wants and all that one wants and only what one wants—were this will to be substituted for "the will to freedom," that is, the will to self-realization, the will to be and to do what one ought to be and to do, whether one so wishes or not. Ask yourselves further what would it mean were might put in the place of right; and instead of men who were trying to be good because it was godlike to be so, we were to have, or to strive to have, only men who, because in their own estimation they were supermen and so beyond good and evil, boasted in such titles as immoralist and atheist. Yet this is precisely what the revolutionary ethics would introduce, nay, has introduced. How could it, then, be other than an agent of destruction? Is it not the most natural thing in the world that every atrocity committed in Belgium or Poland or Serbia or Armenia should find its justification in Nietzsche's writings?

Such, then, is the situation and such the contrast. To go back to Christ is to go forward to regeneration. To go back to nature is to go down to destruction. Pragmatists,—

and all men are pragmatists up to a certain point—which will work, which has worked—Christ or nature?

But pragmatism, as most of us will admit, is not the final philosophy, nor the pragmatic test the absolute one. What is not true often seems to work, and what is true often seems not to work. Our Lord said, "By their fruits ye shall know them"; but the question at once arises, What is and what is not, good fruit? And so we are forced to study the revolutionary ethics from a third standpoint, even that of

III. Reason or consistency. Is it true to itself, and thus rational and in so far right? or, Does it contradict and so destroy itself? Such is the inquiry. This question may be approached from two widely differing positions.

(1) Individualism. This is Nietzsche's position. At the outset it should be observed that he makes no claim to consistency. On the contrary, he starts by denying reason and by annihilating truth. He holds that reason is always the servant of will, each man's want being his ought; and that even truth is only what each man wills to believe. Nay, he goes further and teaches that truth is just "that body of convenient lies that helps us to live more powerfully."¹⁰ That is, he repudiates all rational basis for his standpoint.

It should not surprise us, then, to find his conduct as irrational as his presupposition. Such is the case. He proceeds in the development of his way of life on a principle that he himself does not trust but despises. He goes back to a nature that he doubts and abhors. As Thornton says, "his poor opinion of human nature is writ large upon almost every page of his writings."¹¹ We see this specially in his "Genealogy of Morals." Man, we are told, first appears as a good Nietzschean. He does just what he wants; his wants are hard and unrestrained. He is powerful in cruelty, but he soon deteriorates. His reverence for his ancestors degenerates into a belief in a spiritual world and in God. Worse yet, he invents that useless piece of lumber now

¹⁰ *Werke*, XIII, 102, 239.

¹¹ *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 29.

called conscience. Worst of all, he crowns this story of ever-darkening superstition by letting himself fall a prey to the "Christian disease," the quintessence of folly and stupidity. And yet he continues to trust himself and himself only. It is such a nature as this that he would put in the place of him who is "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Verily, his repudiation of reason is more thorough than even he announced that it would be. He has not only set himself on the throne of God, but he has done so with the conviction and the admission that he himself is an imbecile.

But this is not all. Having made nature the ground and the standard of his way of life, having, that is, assumed to find his reason and rule for conduct in his own wants, Nietzsche proceeds to deny, reject and crush at least half of these wants. Nothing, if not an individualist, he ignores, when he does not repudiate, his social instincts. He would have each man live for himself; he would have the strong develop themselves at the expense of the weak. He would have even the mighty sacrificed to the production of the mightiest. Supermen, the superman is the trend of all things; and to make him, all things, even supermen, must give way. In a word, the revolutionary ethics is just absolute egoism.

But absolute egoism is not natural. Man is an individual, but he is a social individual. He loves himself, but he loves others, too. His very self-love causes him to love others; for it is in and through them that he realizes himself. Their development often comes to be more to him than his own. Indeed, not rarely will he give even his life for their lives. And such unselfishness is not, as many would have us think, the fruit of the Christian religion alone. It is natural. Adopted and sanctified and glorified by Christianity, it may be discovered among savages who never heard of Christ, and even among savants who regard him as but a myth. Now to all this great sweet side of human nature the new ethics, at least in its individualistic form, gives the lie.

It does more and worse. Inconsistent, as we have been seeing, it becomes absolutely self-contradictory and so self-destructive. It denies and destroys its own individualism. This should be clear. It follows from Nietzsche's conception of the world. "This world," says he, "is the will to power—and nothing else! And even ye yourselves are this will to power—and nothing besides!"¹² That is, the will to power is everything; the goal and development of spirit no less than of matter. "The world is not an organism, it is a chaos." It looks back to no beginning, it looks forward to no end. It has no history. After passing through every possible combination, it must ultimately repeat itself, and this it must do forever and forever. Such, and such only, is the universe. Individuality, therefore, can be no more than one appearance of the universe. Individuals cannot in any real sense exist—any more than they do in the system of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche lays stress on personality. His object is to secure strong individuals. Yet, as Figgis says in this connection, "I do not see how in his system they have any reality; they are the mere soap bubbles blown for the nonce by the will to power; the superman is only the largest and most highly colored soap-bubble."¹³ Thus the ethics of nature develops itself from the standpoint of individualism, to commit suicide at last. And this it must do. Make force everything and even and specially egoism becomes impossible. A finite ego is conceivable only in contrast with, if not in opposition to, the world force.

(2) Nor is it otherwise, if we study the revolutionary ethics from the standpoint of socialism. This position may well be represented by Mr Bernard Shaw. Unlike Nietzsche and the individualists, he would make his objective, not the development of a few supermen and finally of the superman, but the happiness of all the individuals who compose society. "The race is to be consummated in a social order, not in an individual who has absorbed all goodness in himself."

¹² *Will to Power*, vol. II, 431, 2.

¹³ *The Will to Freedom*, p. 79.

Yet though thus opposite in end, the two schemes are alike in method. There is the same repudiation of reason at the outset. Mr. Shaw's deliberate advice, because his fundamental principle, is, "Be what you want to be." That is, he would do away with reasoned ideals; he would have us make it the rule of our lives simply to follow the instincts of human nature. Thus it is that he would introduce the social order in which the greatest happiness of the greatest number shall be attained. Nor, again like Nietzsche, is his procedure any more rational than his principle. He has no confidence in the human nature that he avowedly takes as his norm. On the contrary, he distrusts it utterly. He has no hope that it will secure or even initiate the social progress at which he aims. "Man," says he, "will return to his idols and to his cupidities, in spite of all movement and all revolution, until his nature is changed. . . . Whilst man remains what he is, there can be no progress beyond the point already attained and fallen headlong from at every attempt at civilization; and since even that point is but a pinnacle to which a few people cling in giddy terror above an abyss of squalor, mere progress should no longer charm us."¹⁴ In short, our Lord himself does not affirm more positively the necessity of the new birth than does this champion of the adequacy of human nature. What could be more irrational? He persists in pinning his faith to a principle which he declares to be, and which with rare skill he shows to be powerless. Still further, like Nietzsche, he misinterprets the human nature on which he would build his Utopia. He denies it on its individualistic side as Nietzsche does on its social side. In his plays which deal directly with the question of individual responsibility in its relation to society the importance of the individual is reduced to its smallest possible dimensions. In "Mrs. Warren's Profession," for example, the purpose of which is to show up the horrors of the "White Slave Traffic," he labors to prove that the woman responsible for the evil was forced

¹⁴ *Man and Superman*, pp. 206, 207.

into her position by circumstances, and that from first to last she was quite as much victimized as her victims; and that, not by any other person, but by the state of society and the conditions of her early life.

This, however, is not the fact. Environment is not omnipotent: though all are affected by it, many rise superior to it. Abraham Lincoln was not the product of circumstances so much as the moulder of them. Society, in shaping character and determining destiny, is powerful. It does often look—and never so much so as in this awful war,—as if social forces were all-powerful, as if individuals counted for nothing. And yet to-day as never before the individual has come to his own. When was personal bravery so quickly recognized and rewarded as now on the battlefields of France and Italy? Did greater responsibility ever rest on any one than on the President of our Nation? And when we consider our highest because religious life, is not all this emphasized even more impressively? Of course, religion has its social side; for man is a social being, and there is a “divine order of human society”: but is it not as individuals, one by one, that we are elected and regenerated and justified and adopted and sanctified and glorified? In denying all this, therefore, Mr. Shaw outrages the human nature that he would magnify. He not only, as we have seen, distrusts it; he ignores that which is most fundamental in it.

Finally, again like Nietzsche, Mr. Shaw, this champion of social progress, of progress by society and through society, in his depreciation of the individual, renders social progress impossible. For the progress of society depends on its individual members. It can grow only as they grow. They are the cells which make up the body politic and according to whose health and vigor are the health and vigor of the body politic.

Specially does this appear in Mr. Shaw's conception of the way in which the new social start needed, the social regeneration demanded, is to be effected. A new race, he

holds, must be brought into existence; and "since," as Thornton says, "for all his education and art, religion and morality, politics and social propaganda, man is not one jot further advanced, there remains only one line of possible progress not yet systematically tried, namely, that of breeding."¹⁵ The race of supermen which is to be must be bred by careful selection. In a word, the hope of the world lies not in moral effort, but in scientific mating; not in ethics, but in eugenics; not in the Holy Spirit, but in natural human instinct.

There could not be a greater mistake. The society of supermen to be developed is the presupposition of the development. In order to scientific mating, there must be a high degree of moral restraint; in order to eugenics, there must be ethics; in order to the truly natural development of human nature, there must be the Holy Spirit. Hence, we do not get anywhere. We can do nothing but contradict ourselves. Mr. Shaw virtually concedes as much. If the following of instinct should destroy 90 per cent of the human race, it were better, so he thinks, to bear with the loss, in the hope that the remaining 10 per cent should prove to be supermen. But this is not socialism. It is its rejection. It is the sacrifice of society for the sake of a few of its individual members. It is the flat denial of Mr. Shaw's whole contention. Thus the ethics of nature breaks down from the socialistic as from the individualistic standpoint. Could we have more convincing evidence of the failure of the natural man as the ground and norm of conduct? Yet we do. It appears when we consider

IV. The essential inadequacy of human nature as the foundation and rule of life. The failure of Nietzsche and of Mr. Shaw is due, not only to their contempt of logic and their misinterpretation of nature, but to the necessity of the case. An ethic of nature must fail, and this for at least two reasons:

(1) Nature cannot supply a true ideal. What we want

¹⁵ *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 83.

may not be what we ought to want, it may not be even what we need. It often is not. It naturally is not. Made in God's "image and after his likeness," we ought to seek and we need to seek "his favor which is life and his loving kindness which is better than life." That is the only end which is worthy of us and it is the only one which is fitted to us. But it is not the ideal which we now find or which we can now find in ourselves. It is not that which our wants or instincts, our nature, suggests or can suggest. Left to ourselves, we desire the "pleasures of sin"; and that, too, though we know that we can enjoy these only for a season, and that they work spiritual as well as physical death. The fact is that sin has so perverted and distorted our whole being that we do not and cannot see things as they are. We call evil good and good evil. In this respect we are not only animal; we are below the animals. They can ordinarily trust their appetites safely: who of us can? Doubtless, "the instinct of the creature is the intelligence of the Creator"; but who now can distinguish between what is original and truly instinctive and what we have come to regard so through habitual indulgence in sin?

Nor is it otherwise if we take the word ideal in its strictest and highest sense, as meaning a special type of character that ought to be realized. Christ is the object of the adoration of the heavenly host. Yet who of us by nature sees in him "the chief among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely"? On the contrary, do we not by nature regard him as having "no form nor comeliness," "no beauty that we should desire him"?

Were, however, this blinding and perverting effect of sin a negligible quantity, that would not affect our contention. A merely natural ethic would still be inadequate because of our finiteness. In a word, the finite cannot be bound by itself. That is, it cannot find the ground or reason of obligation in itself. As Kant has taught us, the authority of conscience must be absolute. Absoluteness is of its essence. Absoluteness is what distinguishes it from all

else and makes it superior to all else. It is not a craving for pleasure; it is not the dictate of personal expediency; it is not the demand of the self for self-realization; it may include any or all of these; it should issue in them all: but it has its peculiar quality of absoluteness, that is, of binding us whether it does or does not issue as just stated, because it insists on a law which has its origin and binding force in a source above all these, even in the nature of him who is "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Ourselves, though finite, "the offspring" of such a supernatural being, we can be bound only by such a supernatural law. To be truly natural, we must obey the Supernatural. Nature cannot supply our ideal.

(2) If the ideal be given, nature cannot enable us to realize it. Nature is as deficient in power as in light. Human nature is "dead through trespasses and sins," and in the death of human nature all nature has become more or less corrupt. Nor is this the teaching of Scripture only. It is, as we must have seen, the undertone of the ethics of nature. Both Nietzsche and Mr. Shaw distrust the nature to which they would appeal. Often beautiful to look upon, there is always about it the odor of corruption. Hence, we cannot be what we ought to be. Neither in human nature, nor in surrounding nature can we connect with the power needed.

Nor is this grim fact recognized by orthodox theology merely. It is the testimony of general literature also. "I know the better course, I follow the worse," sadly wrote the Roman poet Horace, and in so saying he voiced a common sentiment. The theory of evolution itself explains and necessitates this judgment. Indeed, it is precisely when we take counsel of naturalism that we are most impressed by the demand for supernaturalism. A corpse cannot evolve life; a corpse can evolve only further corruption; if human nature be dead morally, this is its only possibility: and, therefore, if there is to be any hope for it, it must be in a

new start through the entering into it of what was not in it before; the Supernatural must come down into the natural; that is, the Supernatural must not only himself give the Word of the law, but the Word must himself "become flesh and dwell among us." For, as Thornton says, "Christianity is the manifestation in the world of a life which draws all its power from a supernatural religious experience which in its turn is based upon a supernatural creed."¹⁶

V. This conclusion suggests three observations, with the bare statement of which this address shall close:

(1) We must insist on the historical character of our religion. As Christian conduct draws all its power from a supernatural religious experience which in its turn is based upon a supernatural creed, so this creed must be a summary of supernatural facts. It is not, as so many hold, a matter of indifference whether these are facts. On the contrary, this is what is of supreme importance. "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain." This would seem to be self-evident. It is only as we have been raised with Christ by "the power of his resurrection" that we can share his life; and it is only as we share his life that we can know it and realize it. But how can we share his life and know and realize it, if he himself is lying dead in a Syrian grave? That cannot be shared which does not exist.

(2) Equally with the Christian facts must we emphasize the Christian doctrines. These give meaning and so worth to the facts. Why should the crucifixion of Jesus be of unique importance and preciousness? There have been crucifixions in France, and that, too, during the present war; not to speak of the frequency with which this punishment was inflicted in ancient times. Do we not, however, regard the crucifixion on Calvary as the centre of history because God has himself taught us that in it He offered up His only-begotten and well beloved Son as the eternal and infinite

¹⁶ *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 317.

sacrifice for the sin of the world? Thus it is the supernatural doctrine of the atonement that gives, and that alone it that could give, its supernatural worth to the supernatural fact of the cross. Only the Supernatural can interpret the supernatural. Were it not for Christian doctrine, the Christian facts would be but prodigies; and prodigies, though real, could never become either a ground or a norm or a power for conduct in the case of rational beings.

(3) We must live the "life hid with Christ in God." It is only as we come thus into vital union with him that we can feel the supernatural reality of the Christian facts and appreciate the supernatural meaning and importance of the Christian doctrines; and, as we have just seen, it is only as we do both of these that Christian conduct can have either its ground or its norm or its realization.

Such, then, are the chief lessons of the present crisis in ethics. Its cry, "Back to nature," is the death warrant of even the bare and cold ethics that it would command: for it is only the Supernatural, it is only God, who can give either the ground and the substance of duty or the power to do it; and according to naturalism, as Nietzsche himself boasts in Zarathustra, "God is dead."

Princeton.

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