TRUTH

INTRODUCTION

The longer, and I may perhaps hope, the more enduring part of my book Aristodemocracy¹ is occupied with the attempted reconstruction of our ethical system. The essential and differentiating feature of this ethical system consists in the supreme demand which it puts forward for each period in the history of humanity—whether counted by decades or by centuries—to formulate anew and clearly, without bias and without being determined by existing religious dogmas and current social conventions, not only its own ethical codes, but also the summary ideal of man, the Ideal of the Gentleman. This is to ensure progress for humanity, i.e. normal moral, social and political evolution. But this evolution is not to be "fatalistic," i.e. entirely dependent upon forces of nature acting through the organism or the environment and leading to the survival of the fittest; but it is to be Conscious Evolution, i.e. guided by man’s reason, his sense of truth and justice, his charity, even his sense of beauty—all these forces of the human mind permeating imagination, which is the motive, creative and progressive power in the human soul. This conscious ethical evolution is to be applied, not only to individual man, but also to social groups and to political organisations.

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If a definite name is to be given to this system of philosophy it had best be termed Practical Idealism, guided by Conscious Evolution and subordinated to the Philosophy of Harmonism. Its essence and importance, as a guide to human conduct, consist above all in the correct formulation and application of the right ultimate ideals. We are convinced that if these ultimate ideals (the final goal and beacon-light in man’s wandering through life) are wrong, the whole journey loses its correct bearing and direction. Our ultimate ideals are thus of supreme practical importance even in individual and immediate action. But the recognition of this importance does not in any way lead us at once and prematurely to insist upon, or to expect, the realization of what is ultimate. Having determined the true nature and clear recognisability of his ideals, and fixed them as guiding stars for the distant future, man must concentrate his attention and his effort on the proximate ideals.

I might be allowed here to quote a passage from a previous work¹ where this same question is dealt with.

If it be thought, by some who pride themselves upon possessing a sober and practical mind, that these Expansionist ideals are rather vague and remote as forces which directly move the interested action of a nation, and have no power to check its aggressive action when passionate interest strongly urges it on in the wrong direction; if they doubt whether these ideals are sufficiently proximate and tangible to enter into the conscious life of the individual and to affect his actions, I will sin against the dictates of good taste and will make a personal confession, confident as I am that there are thousands who feel as I do.

So far from being remote and ineffectual, I solemnly declare

¹ The Expansion of Western Ideals and the World’s Peace, London and New York, 1899, pp. 101 seq.
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that these ideals with regard to the aims of Western civilisation form the foundation of my conscious existence even in the most practical aspects of my life. That, if I were not aware of their existence at the base of my consciousness, I could not pursue the vocation of life to which I have hitherto devoted myself, and by means of which I gain my subsistence. If I did not believe that ultimately all individual efforts culminate in the increase and strengthening, as well as in the diffusion, of Western civilisation and its highest and most subtle attainments, the best that man’s intelligent effort has yet devised,—I should wish to spend my life in lotus-eating, if not to seek peace in Nirvana.

As I have arrived at this lofty sphere of aspiration, I will draw one last conclusion in the direction of ideals from the policy of Expansion as it ought to be followed by the United States; and I do this at the risk of being considered a “mere dreamer.” But there are different kinds of dreamers; there are rational and irrational dreamers. Those who have succeeded in attaining the highest achievements in the world’s history might all be called, and generally were called, dreamers. No man—and for that matter no nation—can do great things unless his imagination can produce, and hold up both before the intense discriminating power of his intellect, and before the untiring and unflinching energy of his will, some great ultimate goal to lofty endeavour. In so far all great men are idealists. But the difference between these idealists and the mere dreamers is that the latter spend their lives in the contemplation of their ideals, whereas to the former the ideals illuminate their lives. The dreamer gazes upon the brilliant sun until his vision is dimmed, and his whole brain lapses into an hypnotic state. The world outside the immediate radius of this brilliant sun is one great darkness, and he expends the weakened energy which is left to his somnolent nature in railing at this darkness and despising it. He is even unable to detect the lighter shades and half-tones, the infinite gradations which lie between the brilliancy of his distant sun and the darkness before and behind his feet. The idealist, on the other hand, having raised high aloft on the pinnacles of existence his brilliant beacon-light,
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does not spend his time in gazing immediately at it; but allows it to shed a lustre of illumination upon the whole roadway of life over which it shines; and instead of casting what is immediately at his feet into greater darkness, this distant light searches out every nook and cranny of existence, and enables him to pursue his path unfalteringly, to recognise the size and dimensions of each object in his path, its power of facilitating or impeding progress, of yielding or resisting; and, finally, it gives him a clear notion of distance itself. And thus he is patient, and not petulant, as regards what lies immediately before him, knowing that he has beyond a clear, lofty goal which lights and warms.

We must therefore insist upon the real and practical importance of establishing these correct ultimate ideals. Were we to attempt to express this in the old familiar terms in which humanity has embodied its highest general concepts we should say that Duty, including Justice, is the fundamental guide for human conduct in man’s relation to himself, to humanity and to nature. It must be tempered by love or Caritas in his relation to his fellow-man, as well as for the good of his own soul, in order to give emotional initiative and direction leading to passion and enthusiasm. Above these, reigns Truth, which is the foundation of thought and action, in his social relationships as well as in his dealings with the world of things and nature; while Beauty gives him the sense of proportion, tempers and modifies all his thoughts and activities into a harmonious whole and leads his imagination on to a world of ideal perfection.

What we felt in insisting upon the need of the codification of modern morals has been put in the following terms1:

1 Aristodemocracy, From the Great War back to Moses, Christ and Plato, London and New York, 1916 and 1917, pp. 200 seq.
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What modern man and modern society require above all things is a clear and distinct codification of the moral consciousness of civilised man, not merely in a theoretical disquisition or in vague and general terms, which evade immediate application to the more complex or subtle needs of our daily life; but one which, arising out of the clear and unbiased study of the actual problems of life, is fitted to meet every definite difficulty and to direct all moral effort towards one great and universally accepted end. It is the absence of such an ethical code, truly expressive of the best in us and accepted by all, and the means of bringing such a code to the knowledge of men, penetrating our educative system in its most elementary form as it applies even to the youngest children and is continuously impressed upon all people in every age of their life—it is the absence of such an effective system of moral education which lies at the root of all that is bad and irrational, not only in individual life, but in national life, and that has made this great war—at once barbarous, pedantically cruel, and un-speakably stupid—possible in modern times.

The reason why such an adequate expression of moral consciousness has not existed among us, in spite of the eminently practical and urgent need, is that the constitution and the teaching of ethics have been relegated to the sphere of theoretical study of principles, historical or speculative, and have not directly been concerned with establishing a practical guide to conduct. No real attempt has been made to draw up a code of ethics to meet the actual problems of daily life. Or, when thus considered in its immediate and practical bearings, this task has been relegated to the churches and the priests.

I there endeavoured to show, while insisting upon the necessity of religion, that though religion and ethics should never be divorced from each other, they envisage quite different spheres and can never replace each other.

I maintained that ethics with its immediately practical aims requires for its codification to be directly in touch
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with the needs of actual daily life, and has to be expressed with the greatest clearness, tested by correct observation, accurate as well as comprehensive, and by strict logic. I then endeavoured to present an outlined scheme for such a codification, summarising the several aspects under which ethical questions are to be treated under the following heads¹:

1. Duty to the family;
2. Duty to the immediate community in which we live, and Social Duties;
3. Duty to the State;
4. Duty to Humanity;
5. Duty to self;
6. Duty to things and actions; and
7. Duty to God.

Broad and schematic as this outlined plan necessarily has been, it nevertheless aimed at covering the whole sphere of human duties.

But in revising the constructively ethical part of Aristodemocracy it has been strongly impressed upon me that two separate groups of duties, of the utmost importance in the regulation of human conduct, have not been dealt with adequately, or, at least, have not in the general proportion of the scheme received the prominence which is due to them. The first concerns the duty to Truth; the other, what might be called, Sex Morality. Though in several passages (notably on p. 222), the insufficiency of previous ethical systems dealing with Truth has been pointed out, and its importance implied, the crying need for a precise adaptation of the most general commandments against untruth to the modern requirements of a modern code of ethics, and the far greater

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refinement of the sense of Truth, which our modern civilisation calls for, have not received adequate treatment, and have not had assigned to them the place which, in the proportion of a general scheme of duties, they ought to command. It is the object of this essay to remedy this defect.

As regards Sex Morality, although I have already written the essay on that subject, I have, for cogent reasons, decided to defer publication. I may however be allowed to summarise its leading character and purpose in a few words.

Most of the duties which come under the head of Sex Morality can be, and ought to be, regulated by the several duties as enumerated on p. 259 of Aristodemocracy and as developed in the "Outline of the Principles of Contemporary Ethics," Part IV, of that book. The regulation of Sex Morality would specially refer to man's social duties and, still more specially, to the duties of man to woman and woman to man, as well as to man's duty to self. Their consideration would also bear upon his duty to the State and to Humanity.

Furthermore I am strongly convinced that, whatever innovations in the existing ethical laws, as regards sex—both in the married and the unmarried state—may have to be introduced (and these may be numerous and far-reaching), the family, including the home as well as the institution of marriage, will have to be preserved and even strengthened in its hold on society. For I maintain that the family and the home are social units of essential importance to the maintenance of civilised and progressive society. Marriage, the Family and the Home are the irreducible units of organised society. However much in the future the evolution and progression of the social and political organisation of social units may remove the conventional barriers of the
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past and widen out and intensify the relationships of man independently of consanguinity, the family will still remain of the utmost importance and value, and the home can never be dispensed with, in spite of the trend of modern life to overcome all limitations imposed by geographical, local and physical conditions.

To the same degree, I am convinced, must and will the institution of marriage remain in its essential features, though modified, as it will also be strengthened by these modifications. Voltaire's words, "that if God did not exist we should have to invent Him," most fully apply to the institution of marriage. The destructive wave of criticism, which, from the middle of the nineteenth century to our own days, has battered against this stronghold of organised society, has not been able to weaken its foundations or to destroy the essential benefit which it confers upon civilisation. It has shaken, and may carry away, some of the more antiquated conventional outbuildings which have obscured the artistic beauty of the main edifice as well as its capacity for affording security and comfort to men and women; but it has left the central building all the stronger and more beautiful.

No doubt still greater and more radical innovations in our ethical system will have to be introduced for the regulation of Sex Morality of men and women in the unmarried state. Here the problems are as numerous and as complicated as they are pressing in their demands for solution.

Many who in the past have dealt with marriage and the sex relation among the unmarried and many who are dealing with these vital problems now are men and women of un-doubted moral and intellectual sincerity, while some of them are to no small degree representative of higher philosophic
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thought. But, in most, if not in all, these “revolutionary” writers, I find two blots upon the escutcheon of veracity, or at least two methods of attack which rob their warfare of lasting victory and effectiveness. The first is a danger, to which unconsciously so many of these writers succumb, springing from the ever pervasive personal equation to which even the most thoughtful and self-detached are prone. The peculiar form it takes is that of finding justification or condonation for the satisfaction of their own personal desires in the form of philosophic generalisation, which claims to be—and on the face of it appears to be—emphatically impersonal. Even a Tolstoy regarded these fundamental factors of life very differently in the days of his ebullient and passionate youth when he wrote Anna Karenina, Katia and other masterpieces, and in the days when vitality was diminished by age and when he wrote The Kreutzer Sonata and his religiously moral essays.

A further disqualification which, rightly or wrongly, I can trace in most of these “revolutionary” writers, even—and perhaps especially—in the pure philosophers, is the patent absence of any claim to the widest and most searching experience of life itself in all stratifications of human society and groupings of individuals. I mean the kind of experience such as, for instance, a practising physician, who at the same time is an acute philosopher and a versatile and sympathetic man of the world, might possess—one who has not only received the most complete and intimate confidence from his young and unmarried patients, besides being fully familiar with the social irregularities and misfortunes of the lower strata of society and its outcasts, but who has also had opportunities, within all the unfavourable outcrops of married life, to familiarise himself with all that marriage
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really means in the normal life of the home or in the minis-
trations by the sick-bed and the awful solemnity of the hour
of death. Were most of the writers, who would lightly
sweep aside all the traditions that have grouped round the
Sex Morality of the past, possessed of such experience, I ven-
ture to doubt whether they would cast out upon the world
the crude theories with which their writings abound.