

## Our Tainted Ethics

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In Boris Sidis' *Philistine and Genius* you will come upon this memorable sentence: "The very men who looked down with delight when the sand of the arena reddened with human blood, made the theatre ring with applause when Terence in his famous line proclaimed the brotherhood of men...."

We are all incorrigibly moral. The worst of it is that we are proud of our incorrigibility. The wickedest man will stoutly maintain that his conduct has some higher purpose than self-satisfaction. (Vilely immoral persons have a most rigid justification of their code.) As far as he is concerned, there is no logic on earth, no controverting fact, that will shake his conviction. If it were not so, how could we explain man's inhumanity to man, and to woman, that makes countless thousands mourn? The stagey part he plays in life depends for its theatric success upon the conviction of an impersonal integrity, an impersonality by the side of which the affairs of his conventional and familiar self are trivial indeed. Pretence is the key to man's conduct in a so-called civilized society. That instinct for make-believe I shall call his the-atricalism. You can't rob man of his theatricalism. He knows that all the world's a stage and that playing a conspicuous role elicits applause and admiration. The one indispensable requirement is good acting. Even if one plays the villain's part, the listening world will applaud if only the acting—the dramaturgy of pretence—is absorbing. The instinctive need of approval—no man is sufficient unto himself, though some deluded souls are cynically joyous in the belief that they are—adequately accounts for man's habit of self-justification. *The primal essence of all morality is the need of approval.* Morality may be defined as the Art of Self-Approval.

Morality is a tyrannous code of agreements the open violation of which provokes such fierce and concentrated hostility that only very exceptional persons (occupying strategic positions in society) dare be out-and-out "immoral," while mediocre creatures must hide behind closed doors, so to speak, to assert their private anarchisms.

Why this fixity of the moral code, this harsh pronouncement against trespassers?

In a treacherous world, security is the goal of all unconscious striving. Security is at best a passionate assumption; it is never a certified reality. Security emerges from the possession of useful advantages. For everyday mortals, conventional morality is the most useful of those advantages. It simplifies life by standardizing conduct. It builds approvals and shields men from the painful consequences of self-analysis. It lubricates the machinery of intercourse between man and his fellows. It lends the appearance of wholeness, of continuity, of significance, to an otherwise chaotic life. It buoys up common men in their turbulent hours of need; to the familiar sanctions they cling lovingly as to life-savers. And most important of all, conventional morality surrounds youth's impulsive experiences with fringes of righteousness, the adornment and consolation of make-believe characters. "Person" etymologically derives from the Latin "persona" signifying mask. Humans play their mock-heroic parts with more verve and gusto and self-distinction when they are masked. Life is (for the generality of mankind) more interesting when viewed through a medium. Is not conventional morality precisely that medium through which ordinary folk like to glimpse the panorama of existence? Masks, like horses' blinkers, shut off impinging sights and sounds and disconcerting views, narrowing the vista to accustomed sign posts and milestones. Conventional morality is the ample mask Homo puts on as soon as he grows old enough to be conscious of his role in society. And so we shuffle through life's common ways "tricked in disguises," our real scheming and plotting selves hidden not only from the quizzical outside world but frequently from ourselves. We shudder to think of ourselves unmasked, as virtuous women shudder to think of themselves unclothed in a public place. The world is not to be trusted. Our discomfiture is the world's delight. Our ample masks cloak that discomfiture. We live by pretence and delusion.

Morality is the hegemony of inherited customs. Inherited customs standardize conduct. Standardized conduct anticipates life's emergencies for the average man. *Conventional morality prepares him by preliminary catechisms for the crises of maturity.* He is taught how to behave in company. A breach of etiquette is the irreparable sin because it makes conformists abruptly aware of

the fragility of their glorified routines. A breach of morality is a heinous offense because it makes all moral folk wonder whether their congenial brand of conformity is the last word in wisdom. Here we trip upon the very crux of the situation. A moral man attains to the “moral” estate by the social processes of imitation and repetition. Before he could even know the meaning of the bond, he had already been taught to act thus and so. He becomes moral by fiat of external authority. His morality has in literal truth been imposed upon him unawares. Suddenly, one fine analytic day, a passionate voice challenges him: “How do you know?” “Why?” And his toy-house of right and wrong topples over and with it his heavy accumulation of make-believe. The dumb is stunned into a poignant realization of inadequacy. He honestly admits to himself (whisperingly) that he doesn't really know why he believes as he does. The simple truth is that he does not believe as *he* does; he has believed parasitically as others in his immediate environ have wilfully made him to believe. The plight of credulity was never more touchingly expressed than in the following confession of Mrs. Knox in Shaw's *Fanny's First Play*:

“*Mrs. Knox*—No, Jo; you know I'm not. What better were my people than yours, for all their pride? But I've noticed it all my life: we're ignorant. We don't really know what's right and what's wrong. We're all right as long as things go the way they always did. We bring our children up just as we were brought up; and we go to church or chapel just as our parents did; and we say what everybody says; and it goes on all right until something out of the way happens; there's a family quarrel, or one of the children goes wrong, or a father takes to drink, or an aunt goes mad, or one of us finds ourselves doing something we never thought we'd want to do. And then you know what happens; complaints and quarrels and huff and offence and bad language and bad temper and regular bewilderment as if Satan possessed us all. We find out that with all our respectability and piety, we have no real religion and no way of telling right from wrong. We've nothing but our habits; and when they're upset, where are we? Just like Peter in the storm trying to walk on the water and finding he couldn't.”

What an unforgettable commentary on the dumb morality of habit!  
At the luminous moment when a mortal asks himself the why

of his faiths, he has pulled loose from the placenta of otherism and has become (however gropingly) an individuality. The familiar approvals are no longer tenable. The accustomed certitude is fractured. Accepted loyalties are distraught. Selfhood has arisen, challenging and challenged. Think of a person as having taken his conduct for granted—what surprise that he fights tigerishly for moral-survival when pounced upon by a whys-man who asks the rationale of that conduct. The besieged fellow doesn't know what defenses to erect. Hitherto he has not felt the need of analysis. His inevitable first attitude is one of hostility, the hostility that is a variant of self-preservation. He draws his mask tighter. He pretends that his beliefs are *just naturally* right by inherent force. He defends what he does not clearly understand. If his vanity is not too incrustated with delusion, he will retire, apparently victorious, unmoved, self-justified, but in reality, inwardly dismayed, a heavy-hearted uncertainty tugging at his conscience. Self-analysis has broken the heart of loyalty. He must begin anew the unsweet task of reaffirming his faith in his ancient faiths, lying bleeding now on a battlefield of doubt.

Morality resists criticism for the same reason that human beings shun disapproval. Disapproval disorders one's neatly appointed world. Disapproval is the jarring discord in the mind's quondam harmony. To banish the discord, to reinstate the harmony, is the serious business of the Will. Man cannot live energetically nor achieve whole-heartedly with divided will. An unquestioned and unquestioning unity seems necessary to that high confidence which finds fulfillment in life's manifold duties. Morality is the unwritten bond of approval between bungling humans. It is the mask that screens uncertainty. Those brutal intellectuals whose mission it is to tear off mediocrity's masks meet the fate of all the ungodly. For their excessive inquisitiveness they are persecuted and cast out. (It is interesting to note how inquisitorial is our affectionate concern for other human beings.) Our image-breakers and mask-deriders ask too much of man. They would have him ingloriously exposed to the biting winds of disillusion. A tonic exposure indeed for those who can survive it, unbroken in spirit, unembittered in heart! The Spartan fibre has not been bred into the whole human race. With pathetic cheerfulness will men confess their discordant weaknesses, if only the confessor will promise absolution. But suppose a human is exhorted

for truth's sake to peer into his unmasked mind, to probe the vainglorious depths of his affrighted soul, for truth's sake, the gift of absolution no longer dangling hopefully before his awakened eyes, would confession be the welcome thing it conventionally is reputed to be? Men must justify their conduct to themselves, for the mind cannot long endure the strain of inner conflict. Men must justify their conduct to the world because, preoccupied with schemes and hopes and tasks never-ending, they have not available enough ethical energy for disputing every difference with a hostile jury. Sweet accord, inwardly and outwardly, the soul of doubt-haunted man doth crave.

It is good to ask ourselves now and then such disconcerting queries as: Why do we need morality at all? What is conscience? Can men (as we know them in war and in peace) be moral? Can lofty minds do without the restraints and solaces of morality? Why do creative thinkers war upon conventional codes? Who is equipped to define morality for all of us? Why does an excess of self-righteous zeal tend to be persecutive? ... For clarity's sake let us analyze four significant phases of morality: the ethics of conventionality; the ethics of persecution; the ethics of loyal-ism; the ethics of humanism. In these four types of self-realization we may discover what is good and what evil in human morality (as practised in civilized communities). Only a simpleton will be amazed to unearth a shocking amount of evil in the familiar practices of virtuous folk. The pride of virtue, like the hard disdain of vice, is inherent in the melodramatic poses and pretences that conjointly constitute the theatricalism so dear to unimaginative minds to whom, on the plane of melodrama, life is perennially absorbing. Virtuous ones little understand their virtues. Vile ones as little understand their vices. We know that long before humans have attained the age of reason-and-reflection, their codes of conduct have been ready-made for them. The compulsions of instinct and of habitualism have grooved out in the non-resistant clay of memory tenacious patterns of approval and even more tenacious patterns of disapproval. And life during its distracted period of reason and reflection is tragically spent in conflicting justifications, recriminations, back-slidings, resurgences, floppings and standings erect, painful combatings with instinct's vagaries and reason's treacherous whimsicalities.... Ethics is the disheartening attempt to straighten out a crooked world.

The mischievous experiment of the precedent generations, the splitting humanity into two hemispheres, labeled respectively The Good and The Bad, The Good manifesting their native superiority by mercilessly ostracising The Bad, by wielding the torture instruments of a studied persecution, by creating a hell on earth for the outcaste; The Bad parading their superiority by bitter retaliations, malign perversities, and excessive indulgence in the tactics of hate of The Good,—the Age of Melodrama still triumphs. The majority of humans drain their most effervescent delights from the vivid antagonisms of Virtue and Vice. That melodrama seems exhaustless in its human appeal. And yet, here we are, good and bad, virtuous and vicious, hating, scandalmongering, accusing, envying, distorting, paining, torturing one another. We are experts in vivisection. We tear life to shreds with about as much concern as a drunken driver who runs down a passer-by, manifests. The fellow was in the way. Life (as the other person sees fit to live it) is in our way. So, we run it down. Butchers by instinct, we delight in brandishing the blade. “As I reflected upon the intensive application of man to war in cold, rain, and mud; in rivers, canals, and lakes; underground, in the air, and under the sea; infected with vermin, covered with scabs, adding the stench of his own filthy body to that of his decomposing comrades; hairy, begrimed, bedraggled, yet with unflagging zeal striving eagerly to kill his fellows; and as I felt within myself the mystical urge of the sound of great cannon I realized that war is a normal state of man.” Thus writes Dr. Crile in his unforgettable *A Mechanistic View of War and Peace*.

Our lovely instincts make existence less than a paradise but more than a boredom. Perhaps we ought not to lament. At any rate, here we are and for flickering periods diurnally we must somehow contrive to get along. And we do. How? Essentially, by fixed and memorable conventionalisms. When Oscar Wilde wrote, “Manners before Morals, my dear,” he immortalized more than a flippant epigram. He gave us the key to conventional morality. For a certified code of salutations is a harmonizing force of incalculable importance in a society whose underpinnings are pretence and make-believe. “Gaucherie”—an embarrassing left-handedness—is the badge in a conventionalized society of the uncouth. To be uncouth in polite society is more fraught with menace than being downright immoral. For splendid reasons. Immorality

is (to moral persons) a source of clandestine joy and of hushed speculation; hence it bears its recompense in human interest. Half the intense delight of conventionally good people is illegitimate, snatched as it roughly is from the unruly deeds of the dare-devils. Then, too, the very knowledge that you (or I), undiscovered, may fluently discuss the immorality of a caught offender is quite a delightful superiority. Vanity is too self-conscious to neglect that histrionic opportunity. The mind loves to wallow in its own hysterical purities. Scandal-mongering is the spice of life. That's what conventional humans half-wittedly have in mind when they say that a perfectly good world would be a bore! Immorality "pays" the race by keying its interest up to the pitch of a thrilling dime novel. But uncouthness—a violation of manners—is really intolerable. For you afford others no pleasure, only the uneasiness of suppressed surprise. In defence of their own rigid etiquette, well-mannered persons must pretend not to have noticed the slip. If they laughed, they would be violating their own impeccable standards (which the lord of hosts forbid!). Good manners in "society" are not unlike Japanese diplomats; when the whole world is moved to laughter, they remain rigid. The etiquettical pretence is the salt of the body-moral: it affects the systole and diastole of the heart instantly. "Manners before Morals" is the shibboleth of a people who, distrustful of one another's motives, must humorously pretend to the enjoyment of one another's society. Manners are the most elemental of the conventionalisms. *They prescribe the mode of behavior prerequisite to membership in a stratified society.* Manners standardize "right" behavior. Formalism garlands commonplace transactions with so dignified a wreath, informality looks like rank incivility. People will insist upon their hero-worshippings, their obeisance-makings, their stereotyped flatteries and insincerities, their hierarchic tweedle-dums-and-dees, because that inveterate habit of make-believe, that histrionic talent for masking and showing-off and playing one's part is so deeply imbedded in the stuff of irrational human nature. The most ancient of all moralities is this code of conventionalisms. The code is simply the embodiment of (good) manners as defined by the strategically situated members of a stratified society. Social agreeableness is publicly fostered even among antipathetic souls. We learn to behave better than we wish to. The formalities coerce politeness ("good

breeding”). Conventionalism has so high an ethical value because it builds the pretences of good fellowship and, like the mediaeval truce of God, established with the beautiful intention of affording enemies adequate breathing space for recuperation, and the renewal of hostilities, fosters camaraderie in avocational spare time. Of course even unconventional persons (“unconventional” is largely a misnomer) are guided by codes of routine behavior, the violation of which is a menace to their charmed hierarchy and treated as such. Very rarely do you find a person so genuinely wise as not to centralize the insignificant manners and mannerisms of life as the all-important meaning and content thereof. Why, for example, are first impressions so tenacious—and unreliable? Because at best they reveal personality; at worst, eccentricity; in neither case, that more human thing, individuality. And yet, the whole conventional confraternity of critics are in a proud conspiracy to judge a mortal by the initial “impression” he makes. Hence the tyranny of conventionalism.

The petty intrigues and insolences and repressions of conventionality are mild and humane compared with the incredible tactics of dogmatically moral persons. Serious moral natures are hunters-by-instinct. Forever on the hunt for game, they develop an abnormal olfactory nerve which helps them to pecksniff wrongdoers even at a psychically remote distance. To the hunter-after-righteousness this savage delight is more demoralizing than salvation is moralizing to the hunted. The delight (“Schadenfreude”) in detecting, hunting down, hounding, trapping, and stoning a wrongdoer is a self-indulgence we must not permit our good people to enjoy (in the guise of righteous indignation). The ethic of persecution tells a sadder tale of the masked malice of morality than some holy brethren would care to listen to. To understand the malice of good people and the wanton folly of bad, one must never lose sight of the momentous fact that conduct is not a matter of premeditated choice. Long before the mind is awake to the reflective need of justifying its code of behaviors, its conduct has been predetermined by a hundred insistent and persuasive influences of heredity and environment, personal and social. The compulsions of instinct and of imitation set the pattern for our specific behavior; if that pattern comes into sharp juxtaposition with a different (*i.e.*, unfamiliar) pattern, we instinctively and habitually prefer our own. A moral person may be defined as one who cannot

help “preferring” his own accustomed infirmities to those of any other mores-bound human. The salient distinction between a conventionally moral and heretically moral person is usually a difference in petted imperfections. Morality is like the weather: its behavior is moody, whimsical, indifferently good, playfully bad, provocative and wholly irrational. The fundamental truth, underlying every morality is a simple one: Every human believes in himself. He must. To that extent every person is (in his own view) moral. For, basically, morality is self-approval. All the moral mischief-making arises from the *too rigid evaluation of particular acts*. Conventionally moral persons are strong prohibitionists in public. They are not such nice teetotalers in private. A sanctified and corrupting duplicity mars their loveliest pretences. Morality immortalizes the congenial folly of ignoring the beam in our own eye and attending (how passionately) to the mote in our neighbor's.

Morality, in a stratified society, is hard and intolerant and self-righteous. If it were tolerant and magnanimous and sage, it would not afford its enthusiastic devotees the exaltation they now derive from their prides and prejudices and prepossessions. And the only moral reason why morality is so popular is because it bolsters up self-importance. Morality is built upon a Jesuitical and unverifiable distinction between me and thee. Hence its inevitable duplicity and the sanctimonious aroma that envelops its mock-heroic poses and pretences. Common sense reminds us that if we only dared to meditate upon the carnage of dreams violated, and of trusts lying betrayed in our own venal souls, we should be so preoccupied indemnifying life for our own flagrant trespasses, our neighbor's sins would by contrast appear venial. But no! To sit in judgment—that is the tantalizing reward of virtue. Even the disillusioned ones, whom it shames to thrive on the chagrins and pains of a frustrated and trapped fellowman, are frequently pressed into the mob of judges. We who know better must pretend to be shocked, outraged, surprised, offended, when one of our inherited superstitions (conventionally called a virtue) is infringed. If we ask why it is seemly and virtuous to be shocked, the only reply at all adequate seems to be that the unruffled serenity of a dissentient embarrasses and perplexes the conventional hunters-after-righteousness; they will not endure dispassionateness; they fear its tonic effect upon their overwrought self-righteousness.

Calm is not a sufficiently moral pose! Morality, as we know it, would collapse like a toy balloon if men and women acquired the habit of cultivating intellectual poise. Moral people are full of venom. That venom they humorlessly refer to as righteous indignation. Oh conceited moralist, why seest thou the hypocrisy in thy brother's eye and seest not the duplicity in thine own? Conventional morality has its deepest roots in the morbid desire for self-approval and self-aggrandizement, not in the love of virtue. So much is plain.

Fool or degenerate may conform externally to every prescribed canon of sanctified conduct; the fool or brute within him has not therefore been redeemed by the eucharistic pretence. Since behavior is not a reasoned-out procedure but only a sheepish posture, why is it so highly appraised, why does it affect to be so outraged when it is challenged, why is it so quick to bespeak for its devotees the sanctity of the ages? To begin with, the vast majority of people are in the conspiracy to moralize the world according to their fixed patterns. Conspirators cannot be expected to turn "State's evidence" against themselves. More important still, old sanctions like old wines, old oaks, old friends, old bric-a-brac, old prejudices, old follies, old anything, come of themselves to be sacred and incredibly precious. And most significant of all is the pragmatic reason; to be moral as this world goes is to profit enormously in the cherished things of the flesh, if not always in the things of the spirit. The profit is manifold and cumulative. You may walk with head erect among all manner of men (nobody knows what is in your heart). You may enjoy the inappeasable advantage of talking like a messiah: the preacher in you will wax fat,—is there any joy more alluring to man than preaching? The wisest of us do far too much of it. The mischievous art, morally sanctioned, of tyrannizing over others who cannot escape our domination begins with childhood and ends only with cremation. (Vide: Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*.) To dictate to others: do you know of any business for which the race's experience has better fitted man, the incorrigible moralist? Another profit accrues from the affectation of moral superiority. By roguishly playing hide-and-seek with the perilous facts of life you may "set a good example" to children. Children will mistake your acting for actions, and, hugely edified, will set to building houses of make-believe upon the sands of pretence—until, one fateful day, to their

horror, they perceive the rottenness of the whole drainage system. That's a sad day in the career of credulous youth. Who but our foolish moral folk are to blame for the suppression of the commonplace and graphically obvious facts about life's intimacies? Who but our wickedly moral folk are to blame for the morbid, almost rabid opposition to profound dramas dealing with the familiar-momentous experiences of maturing men and women? Morality is so uncertain of its fragile virtues, it honestly knows not what to approve nor what to condemn, nor why nor wherefore! Morality is a gadfly tormenting a perplexed world with its malicious stings. External conformity holds out so many profitable advantages! You have the whole world on your side. Mere numbers count amazingly when they are all repeating the selfsame catechism. Precisely in the realm of morals is majority rule most obnoxious. For the routineers understand neither the origin, function nor varied development of codes of morality. Of one thing we may be infallibly certain: if your average moralist could not find melodramatic excitement in persecuting non-conformists, he would abandon his particular code as stale and unprofitable. Who can doubt that conventional morality has been *the* unfathomable source of man's malicious fun in a dull world? Morality's inner corruption consists in this: it sucks its pleasure from another's pain.

Watch the face of a teacher when she has caught a pupil lying. Observe the expression on a detective's face as he cuff-links a culprit. Behold the equivocating lawyer as he disconcerts an unnerved witness. See the priest glow with self-righteousness as he sips his brew tapped from the bursting heart of a wretched penitent. Witness the brute delight of the patriot as he leads the miserable spy to the tower. Study the young woman's self-conscious joy as she lures a fool from the promised land. And the school boy's rascally pleasure as he sticks pins into a weaker neighbor. Notice the humming knots of gossips enjoying their "sightseeing" through misery's dark alleys. Nice people take a day off to visit a prison, inspect the inmates like so many prize dogs at a show, and come away whispering innocently, "So interesting." Scrutinize your virgin social worker in the slums peeping and straining to enjoy forbidden things. And let us not fail to look at our own faces when we have gained an advantage over an adversary. Oh so moral, so moral!—what shall we do with these

ubiquitous moral folk? Some of us feel choked in a world made hideously moral by unconsciously-depraved joy-seekers. The Black Hole of Calcutta was a dancing playground compared with these blacker holes—the souls of self-righteous folk. “In The South Sea Islands they have for contagious diseases a horror as great as your horror of crime. A man or woman stricken with a loathsome disease, such as smallpox, is seized, isolated, and the individual sores of the smallpox patient are earnestly scraped with sea-shells—until the patient dies. It hurts the patient a good deal—without ever curing, of course—but it relieves the feelings of the outraged good ones who wield the sea shells.” These penetrating words were written by Mr. Arthur Brisbane in his remarkable editorial entitled The “Criminal” Class. He concludes his brilliant satire with this caustic utterance: “Rich good men, nice bishops, comfortable, benevolent ladies—every man and woman on Blackwell's Island, every wretched creature living near a ‘red light,’ would gladly change places with any of you.... Scrape away with your sea shells, but try also to give a few more and a few better chances in youth to those whom you now hunt as criminals in their mature years....”

It is interesting to try to explain why all moral natures have in common the pernicious habit of being eager to condemn what they have not taken the *pains* to understand. Understanding is a dangerous habit of mind; through the uncontaminated eyes of reflection one learns to sympathise with almost every conceivable behavior. He who understands is perilously near to condoning. To forgive calmly and dispassionately as wise men do is equivalent to depriving oneself of the ecstasies of self-righteousness. Mr. Average Man cannot so easily be weaned from that voluptuous breast. The delights of preaching and of judging will not be so lightly yielded up in behalf of the colorless duty of understanding. We cling to morality, not because we know what it is all about; not because we have philosophic theories of right and wrong; not because we are solicitous for our neighbor's immortal soul;—no, a thousand times, no!—but only because this tedious life would be infinitely less exciting if we were less moral (and more humane). Isn't it a noteworthy fact that those who best understand life's trammled ways; who sympathize unstintingly with all the children of men; who with disillusioned eye glimpse the tragedy of broken wills; who catch the meaning of our baffled strivings; that these

seers, the only honorable moral members of our community, who can most afford to condemn, tyrannize over, and moralize a decrepit mankind, are the greatest humanitarians of all? And those pestilent small souls whose conduct is so utterly irrational, whimsical, aimless, and bungling; who, therefore, are constantly committing the most outrageous follies and trespasses and sins;—is it not significant that the most corrupt in our midst are the first to point the finger of scorn, and to wield the weapons of persecution, against a fellow-weakling? Perhaps, after all, such topsy-turvey-dom is not strange. Not, if we remember that experience of and by itself cannot make us either wiser or better (it makes us sadder or sillier). Only calm reflection upon our experiences can avail to make us wiser and more humane. Small moral souls are persecutors because they contrive to learn little or nothing from their recurrent experience. They don't understand. They condemn in another a fault rampant in their own hearts because condemnation yields the critic the tingling sensation of superiority. Magnanimous persons can afford to forego common delights. Only such exceptional souls are possessed of the genuinely moral nature.

A world swamped by conventional morality would be a madhouse. To the extent that our civilization is swamped by the poses and pretences and prepossessions of conventional morality, it is a madhouse!

## **Part Two**

A world swamped by conventional morality would be a madhouse. To the extent that our civilization is swamped by conventional morality, it is a madhouse. That was our conclusion in Part One.

Think of conduct's obscure and tangled origins. Let a fellow sit down and make a list of his likes and dislikes, predilections and aversions, approvals and disapprovals, in short, let him try to analyze his behaviorist code. A significant truth will emerge. The more passionate his aversion, the more irrational. The more intense his approval, the more irrational. The more passionless and analytic his predilection or antipathy, the more rational. Our deepest feelings, the mainsprings of behavior are “deepest” precisely because they are disassociated from our reflective powers. A probing analyst (a disillusioned thinker) discovers no startling contrasts of vice and virtue in our all-too-human world because he has reasoned out the bases of conduct. He has found that good and evil are indissolubly linked, enmeshed in origins and

tendencies and dispositions, hardly controllable, and intensely emotional. He has learned—what the inflexible-minded call cynicism—that the specific precipitates labeled good and evil are merely the trivial by-products of that experiment in self-realization called Living, and that these products are unpremeditated by man. Virtuous folk, that is, lovers of pretence, become intensely enamored of their few familiar virtues (unanalyzed habits long sanctioned). Thus the nascent good is tainted at its source by an excess of emotionalism. And goodness is thus ever in danger of becoming fanaticism. Fanaticism is the irrational assumption that one all-embracing “good” is preëssential to the salvation of an erring and unheeding mankind. These prophets of sublime folly are the romantic men of blood-and-iron (sometimes pacifists at heart): the messiahs, inquisition-experts, war-lords, millennial-promoters, salvationists-by-profession. Beware the man with one wonderful idea for saving the race. I have never known of a salvation that was not to be purchased at the cost of everything men of flesh-and-blood hold dear here below. Let us beware the hot-blooded sincerities of men.

There is a passage in Prof. William Ellery Leonard's little classic, *Socrates, Master of Life*, which is well worth quoting here; “Kant founded the moral life in the good will; Socrates in right thinking. Yet each implies the factor made paramount by the other: Kant says act so that the maxim of thy conduct is fit to become universal law and implies the rationalizing, generalizing, judging, knowing mind; Socrates says a man without self-control is little better than the beasts, and implies that energy of soul to which modern psychology gives the name will. A worthy moral life is impossible without both, but the romantic ethical tendencies of to-day need the propædeutic of Socrates more than of Kant. *The good will we have always with us, giving often enough, with ghastly best wishes, unwittingly a serpent for a fish and a stone for bread; but the intelligence to see the practical bearings of conduct and to discriminate between higher and lower ideals is too often lacking—to the dwarfing of the individual and to the confusion of society. The fool in Sill's poem (which goes deep) prayed not for the good will, but for wisdom; and therefore the less fool he*” (my italics).

In their “off” moments of lucid insight, men are poignantly aware of the need of tolerance, as between humans whose changeful

conduct is not a premeditated selection but an impulsive realization. When “good fellows” foregather on festal occasions to reminisce, they unbuckle their hard-and-fast intolerances, loosen their make-believe moralities, unstiffen their formalities, and gladly unbind the suffocating mask of pretence (worn for the world's sake). Then they feel *at home*. On such rare occasions, the natural man steps forth from his plaster-of-paris cast and runs free for a few unholy hours. Nothing can be more interesting than to watch this faun at play! And what does one observe? Each participant, brimful of triumphal experiences, rehearses his valorous exploits as shrewd bargainer, clever antagonist, wily adventurer, subtle victor. Always the revelation of smartness—of wrongdoing and double-dealing—seems to delight the audience hugely. There's a zest and a gusto and a thrill in the dramatic recital of wrongdoing successfully consummated. Not the most moral heart is altogether unresponsive to that surreptitious thrill! When they cluster in informal gatherings, men are sensible enough to make large human allowance for their “weaknesses.” Perhaps because no one has the courage to moralize across the wine cups. The risk is too great, the gain too small. What is exasperating is the callous insincerity of these bourgeois folk. They will not be as tolerant toward a culprit at the moment of detection. Never. They can't afford to let a golden opportunity for mock-heroics go drifting by. Not they. The inhuman desire to suck pleasure out of another's pain is too deep-rooted and insistent. Hence, when the joy of wielding a persecutor's power is placed in their hands by law or accident, our conventionally moral folk are intensely in earnest about honesty and virtue and fair-dealing. What more convincing evidence that formal morality derives its validity from a profit-and-loss psychology of ethics, grossly tainted with self-regarding cunning? A juror (in informal moods very human) is often a potential hangman. A judge is too often a judicial murderer. A mob, aristocratic or democratic, is always villainous. Scalp-hunting (in its Protean guises) is still a favorite sport. It is instructive to observe a curious trait in human nature. Wrongdoing, viewed in perspective, through the subdued light of memory with its soft-toned, wistful reminiscence, is no longer wrongdoing. It is simply an excusable, a forgivable mistake: a mere foolish error or stray lapse. Hence it comes about that we forgive our ancestors, but we hound our brethren! The irrationality

of it all! The same person, be he teacher or judge or priest, who gleefully recites his sins of yesteryear without a blush of compunction or self-rebuke, will persecute a subordinate for a similar offense because, strange to say, the misdeed should have been perpetrated years ago! Crime, reminiscently viewed, is no longer crime: it is only regrettable folly. And the paradoxical conclusion seems to be that detection, not wrongdoing, is the real offense. The inference is clear: Let the offender who commits a transgression at twelve o'clock set the moral alarm for seven; by noon, he will have been amply forgiven! Only by some such device of evasion and concealment can the hapless fellow expect to escape the humiliation and punishment sure to be visited upon his victimized head by the moral ones. Let bygones be bygones is usually uttered too late. Men are very sympathetic—in retrospect. Why not? Vindictiveness has been appeased, a culprit has been punished, a straying fellow-human has been made a proper example of. What is more soul-satisfying than to crown one's moral conduct with the shining assurances: "I'm so sorry. Poor fellow. He wasn't really to blame, you know. Perhaps he couldn't help it. Who knows?" In reminiscence we are all so humane, so considerate. When it is too late. For we are all incorrigibly moral, that is, self-approving and self-regarding, for our botched behavior giving highfalutin reasons to our callous consciences. What shall we say of our undetected duplicities? What justification shall we offer of our lust-for-vengeance? How shall we ever explain away the terrible truth that another's torture moves us not—until it is too late? Perhaps we ought to condemn less and reminisce more. We might learn thereby to build us a more humane perspective. Strange, strange fact that crime viewed reminiscently is no longer crime, but only understandable (and forgivable?) folly. Can't we learn to crystallize into an immediately useful ethic the wisdom of reminiscence? Why not judge crime as folly? Suppose we did judge crime, major and minor, as types of folly? What kind of punishment would we mete out? Surely not the justice we now know as vindictiveness. Our object would be psycho-therapeutic rather than punitive. We would honestly (and courageously) realize that a man's a man for a' that even when the beast within him has broken loose. We would view him as anthropologists do various unlike-minded human types. We would not survey the culprit as an alien species to be denominated,

The Criminal Class, a procedure that has the double demerit of being scientifically untenable and humanly unworthy. It is matter of common knowledge at least among the sophisticated that every society's Criminal Class is not in prison but rampantly and successfully out of it. Why obscure facts by spurious nomenclatures? Must society continue the primitive ceremonial of wreaking its long suppressed wickedness upon a few scapegoats, immolated periodically as blood atonements for collective bad temper? The transmitted desire of men to make an "example" of someone is a brutal indulgence for which our ethics pay too high a price. The criminal is society's sacrificial offering to a god of wrath: that god of wrath is the personification of man's vindictive impulses. The English anthropologist, Frazer, supplies a wealth of evidence, lurid and illuminating, for this hypothesis.

Every detected wrongdoer ought to be brought before an informal court composed of humane anthropologists, educators, psycho-analysts, economists. Frank questionings asked in a sympathetic manner would surely reveal insights into human nature for the lack of which (thanks to our vindictively moral folk) so-called justice remains the hideous travesty it is to-day. As Judge Edward Parry says (in his remarkable book, *The Law and the Poor*): "To me it appears strange that, whilst in every other science the professors of it are making earnest efforts to place the results of their studies to the credit of mankind, the law seems more incapable than theology of the march of time." The Law is the most perfect reflex of the conventionally-moral attitudes of a people! Word-juggling, advantage-taking, persecution-by-cleverness, judging by scarlet-lettering, disquieting formalism of procedure,—these are not the ways of the humanely civilized. When a wrongdoer feels that you are anxious to get his point of view, to share his difficulties, to visualize his temptations, to fathom his chaotic inner life (which is a hot-bed of instinct and impulse—and no fault of his), when he feels that you are capable of sympathetic pain—to borrow a deep phrase of Bertrand Russell's—he will utter himself truly, significantly, and speak startling truths. A true morality would begin by being unaffected and humane toward "wrongdoers." The souls that suffer most intensely on this implacable earth are those elemental creatures without guile or influence who cannot evade the law's spiteful punishments, sanctioned by our vindictively moral guardians of "law and order."

The instinct-driven creatures, whose blundering and hot and untutored impulses have made a sad mess of life, suffer for the rest of us. Vicarious atonement is an old, old dirge, the threnody intoned by broken souls in broken bodies behind walls of grey where moral men entomb their fellows as an object-lesson to a Janus-faced world to learn to evade detection. But the greater criminals, at large in society's high places, why do they move about so complaisantly, crafty preachers of good doctrine? Why do they in their trespasses feel so secure? What special divinity shapes their ends? And always, in our make-believe society, a society in which pretence and duplicity rule the moral life, the still small voice of reason admonishes us: 'Tis not wrongdoing the moral folk object to. 'Tis not lawlessness the moral folk condemn. 'Tis not cunning's iniquities these censors despise. Nay, not these familiar practices do the censors outlaw! Only bungling is hateful to their world at large. Do your duplicitous business skillfully: the world will applaud you. Do whatever you please—only don't botch it. And the moral ones will shout, Well done. Conventional morality is inherently disingenuous. As Freud powerfully asserts: "We can prove to society mathematically that its code of ethics has exacted more sacrifices than is its worth, and that its procedure rests neither on veracity nor wisdom." A magnificent utterance—if only the right people will listen to it!

The most fruitful test of the expansion of morality is its attitude toward the numerous classes who have been looked down upon historically, as beneath contempt. What is our latter-day attitude toward the drunkard, the prostitute, the convict, the defective, the insane, the eccentric, the congenitally incompetent? When we reflect upon history's inquisitor treatment of these classes, poignantly we realize the inadequacy of our ancient moralities, still regnant in our day. Whatever humane progress has been made in the understanding of these groups has been markedly away from Judgment-Day (theologic) morality to Suspended-Judgment-Day (humanist) morality.

We know that individuals are victims of inherited passions so rapacious that will-power—or the power of expending one's energy in equally passionate but less dangerous modes—has been impotent to interpose its vetoes. We know that instincts and impulses and habits are coercive forces of the first magnitude. We know that will-power is at best an inefficient instrument. We now realize

that the mind's conscious power is small; its unconscious tendencies all-powerful. We understand in a new and deeper sense (thanks to psycho-analytic research) that the process of inhibition is fraught with peril to the human incalculably beyond what he had ever imagined possible. We are beginning to understand how far the tragedy of human existence is remediable, how far irremediable. We are beginning to understand man, more especially that baffled variant, moral man. If there were no other utility in psycho-analysis, there would be one surviving social utility of inestimable good to mankind. Psycho-analysis is the only branch of social science which makes a continuing and exhaustive appeal to (conventional) man's intellectual honesty. Intellectualist psychology with its mock-austere array of generalizations and its unapplied, sterile formulae is pitiable, almost contemptible, in juxtaposition with the gripping, personally-oriented, probing theories of this latter-day medical psychology. Those who aspire to psychoanalytic insight must forswear their darling prejudices and poetized shames. To see one's self as one is, constitutes a fine achievement for self-deluding Homo—particularity if the unwelcome knowledge makes one neither a pessimist nor a cynic nor yet a Salvationist. Unless—and not until—he abandons all his fixed attitudes, a man can not hope to become intellectually emancipated from his obsessive notions about himself and society and life-in-general. He must watch his conduct. He must study his motives. He should be willing never to give himself the benefit of the doubt (as his self-approving conventional-moral nature now teaches him falsely to do). Toward himself he should be merciless, as analyst, as auto-biographer. Broad-mindedness means resourcefulness; a fund of fruitful alternatives. Intellectual honesty is a method of approach to reality. It is not a predetermined pose. Hence religious dogmas, philosophic finalities, sexual traditions, educational doctrinairism, personal bias, all become loosened and rearranged and informalized, so to speak, by the solvent of intellectual honesty. In this sense, psycho-analysis is a fresh experiment in thinking honestly, about “sacred” and “forbidden” things. Prepossessions are lightly held; insights are the new guides; insights derived from ample first-hand observation of human material. Dr. Ernest Jones expresses it sagely when he declares: “But a psycho-analytic conscience tends to be more unsparing in the criticism of its owner, as it is more sparing in that of others.” An admirable mating of science and humaneness.

We know now that the whole tragedy of human existence is largely beyond individual control. How shall a being know (there are no infallible signs) when to curb his ego and when to impose, that is, realize it? He must experiment. If he experiments, he will make mistakes. His mistakes will be called lapses from the moral standard. Whose moral standard? Certainly not his own. He is still developing his code of behavior. We are learning to look upon a person of rigid morality as spiritually dead. Why punish or ostracise a youth whose splendid vitality impels him at many hazards to discover for himself life's buried significance? What other inducement is there for continuing to live richly, deeply, except the knowledge that life becomes pregnant with purpose only as one experiments with its amazing potentialities? The beginning of intelligent conduct is the desire to violate superimposed codes. To be as moral as our ancestors (and no more) is to be as blind and bungling and uncreative. *Morality evolves by denying the validity of antecedent moralities.* Hence the inevitable tendency of rationalist ethics to push the mind out of its old moorings into the wide profounds of what may be significantly called supermorality. Supermorality is primarily interested in the expansion of human personality. Three types of thinkers represent the super-moral attitude to life. Psycho-analysts, playwrights, anthropologists. Will an analyst turn a syphilitic from his door because the latter has sinned? Will a dramatist hate his villain and dote on his hero? Will an anthropologist throw a moral fit because the human types he investigates (like the Chuckchees or Kwakiutls or Negritoes) happen to support standards of conduct strikingly unlike his own? The psycho-analytic doctor is superhuman—in his capacity as doctor. He probes causes calmly. He diagnoses impartially. He spends his talent on suggestion and analytic therapy: on counsels of wisdom. Suppose he turned priest and puritanic persecutor. What an incredible attitude for the experimenter with life! So too the dramatist. He is a lover of life (philosophically). His interest is boundless. He penetrates the depths of passion and without spite or malice (or personal moralist bias) reveals what he there sympathetically discovers. His business is in a real sense psycho-analytical. He too probes and diagnoses the ills that afflict man and he succeeds by compassionate appeal to our fund of common sense in making us, however reluctantly, realize the common ties that underlie our common humanity.

Suppose the dramatist turned priest and rigid moralist? What would the consequences be—for good or evil? We should never behold anything profounder than melodrama! Melodrama is popular to the extent that it distorts the realistic truths concerning good and evil by a fake (that is, romantic) presentation of their white-and-black role in life. For melodrama neither uplifts nor enlightens nor diagnoses nor deeply probes the maladies that molest the human soul. And the anthropology that is properly conjoined with psycho-analysis became an honest science only a few years ago when capable, disillusioned minds set to work to eradicate our vainglorious pride in our self-complacent (and mythically-grounded) superiorities. The hyperbolic tales mischievously retold by curious travelers to far countries, most of them thickly prejudiced priests—all morbidly moral men—were reëxamined skeptically and critically. The result was a rejection of the stiffly moral attitude toward other groups and the adoption of the super-moral attitude (the humanist attitude, if you please). “Superiority” and “inferiority” as moral epithets were wisely cast out as utterly misleading differentia. The larger view was substituted: the conduct of a group was to be judged, evaluated sympathetically, by ascertaining the group's system of values. The American school of Franz Boas deserves a high credit for this scientific and humane conception of research among different-minded types. When we seek to understand folk in terms of their own familiar social psychology, we are behaving not only scientifically but also humanistically. Psycho-analysis happily reaffirms the wisdom and soundness of this approach to psychologic realities. We come not to judge haughtily, but only to appreciate wisely. Such an attitude is vastly different in its psychological (and therefore in its ethical) bearings from the conventionally snobbish “moral” view; from its acceptance there emerges a whole code of new and liberating values. This new code I term supermorality. Its differentia are a love of wisdom, an honest desire to understand humans as they are, a scientific spirit of fellowship, sympathy with pain, an experimental attitude toward life. A psycho-analytic philosophy of behavior.

It is necessary to include a footnote on the ethics of loyalty before summarizing more adequately the nature and value of our unconventional code of ethics, alluded to as super-morality. Super-morality can't afford to endorse the narrow loyalties of men.

That concession would devitalize it. It is not difficult to understand why exclusivism is a very human need. Man is not at home in the world-at-large. He is tormentedly ill at ease. Only by losing himself in a herd does he contrive to enjoy life. That is, the hours filled with clamorous delights are the hours when he "lives." Marooned on the sullen shores of solitude, he experiences the pains of aloneness: his nerve fails him, his brain sags, his outlook grows bitter. Solitude affrights man. For in solitude the mind is face to face with vastness; a vastness that is inscrutable and awe-inspiring. In the presence of such overwhelming forces, man does not feel quite at home! Loyalism is the human discovery that togetherness is the first law of life. That necessitous law of social life is loaded with mischief. Not content with the easy co-minglings of workaday life, man strengthens his grip on existence by building special loyalties which he proceeds to characterize as exclusive, unique, superior, different. For the integrity of these allegiances he will fight hard and passionately. Loyalties afford that expansion of self-importance which delights the envious heart of man. All intense loyalties are caste-tainted, inevitably hostile to candor and truth; All intense loyalties are brazenly snobbish. People feel distinguished only when they are distinctive. Loyalty yields the thrill of self-importance; and is therefore indispensable to human development. The problem is one of intelligent limits. How much loyalty is good for character? How badly will an excess of loyalty blight character? Perhaps we can arrive at a reasonable delimitation. Common wisdom will ratify the following discriminations: Loyalty is demoralizing when symbol is more dear than thought. Loyalty is beneficial when the symbol is the changing emblem of thought. If a man finds that loyalty to an institution—fraternity, church, school, state, family—? is so spontaneously passionate that any condemnation or criticism of its tenets evokes his impulsive opposition, he may as well recognize the fact that his loyalty is a superstition, immeasurably dangerous to freedom of thought (and that expansion of the human personality which all significant life should favor). From a rationalist standpoint, our test is perfectly fair. That's why it may sound foolish to the zealous loyalists who, for the sweet recompense of surety, will volunteer their whole-hearted, unquestioning allegiance. But the terrible penalty of partisanship is intellectual inadequacy and spiritual blindness. Loyalties thus fortified

by privileged security remain impervious to reason's entreaties. Hence the duty of rationalists to oppose the tyrannies of partial-allegiances. Any loyalty that denies the utility of skepticism is bad. Loyalism approves and sanctifies the latent snobbishness in the human race, its struggle to achieve caste-consciousness. How shall we tame the passion-for-exclusiveness? None of the types of ethics we have thus far discussed is equal to the task of humanizing and rationalizing man's conduct. There remains the ethics of humanism as a fruitful alternative.

That society is most excellent which can boast the greatest number of critical thinkers. Paradoxical as it may appear at first blush, critical thinkers are the true humanists. Let the reader recall the greatest critical thinkers from Socrates to Freud and he will note the common denominator of *sensitiveness* to life, more especially the life of understanding. And without the unflinching pursuit of wisdom, there can be no hope of amelioration. It is the critical thinkers, who in behalf of greater freedom and fuller life, courageously uncover the suffocating insincerities of the home, the clap-trap, rah-rah, enthusiasms of the school, the fife-and-drum chauvinisms of the state, the misleading make-believe of the special camaraderie, the smug and sleek delusions of the church, the absurd pretences of the ego. By deriding, analyzing, and wisely undermining self-complacency, critical thinkers do effect an expansion in human sympathies. Such broadening of the sympathies (purchased at the cost of a few flimsy fool's-paradises lost) is the first requisite of humanist conduct. Humanism is the essence of that super-morality already alluded to. When, through the process of disillusion, a thinker arrives at the conviction that what humans above all other things need is an insight into their buried inner life—the life of sacred faiths, passionate prejudices, moral confusion, instinct's vagaries, intellect's illusions—and accompanying that conviction is the desire to pursue truth whither it may lead—such a thinker is ready to take the vow of the humanist. The humanist will know that his primary task is the analysis of conventional morality in all its forms, the revelation of its life-denying elements, the illumination of its contradictions, its primitive origins, the futility of its taboos and inhibitions and pretences, the need of a creative morality promising liberation and expansion to the too long-suppressed human personality.

Brow-beating ethics inherited from theologic days must be banished

from the pulpit and the home and the state. If virtue be in truth superior to vice, it must establish its claim by the scientific method of demonstration and verification in human affairs, not by the brute method of persecution. To the conventionally moral folk we may somewhat sharply say: How dare you foist your sham superiorities upon those whose unlike behavior you have willfully and ignorantly disqualified yourselves from judging sympathetically? By your original sin of ostracism and exclusion, have you not, in malice, cut them off from your sympathies? Is there not an amazing impudence in the conduct of persons who believe they can succor and “redeem” those very humans whom they have in the moral premises condemned and outlawed as inferiors? Who can doubt it longer: is there not in all stereotyped morality a certain inherent duplicity? Maximum glorification for oneself (Heaven); maximum damnification for the other fellow—the *out-caste* (Hell)?

The humanist humbly assumes that the behavior of “wrongdoers” is on the whole neither better nor worse than the behavior of the generality of mankind. Thus, sincerely dedicated to truth, he must renounce the whole pernicious code of conventionalized morality as essentially theatrical and melodramatic and duplicitous, the arch-foe of man's true felicity. The humanist will not perpetrate the inhumanity of sitting in superior judgment upon his erring fellow-men. Like the anthropologist he will study various codes of conduct under varying traditional environments. Like the psycho-analyst he will probe the inner life of man patiently and sympathetically. He will understand what Prof. Boris Sidis means when he says: “The true education of life is the recognition of evil wherever it is met.” In behaving thus humanely and analytically, the humanist will have accepted the philosophy of supermorality. For humanists are lovers of wisdom, friends of mankind, diagnosticians of disease, healers of broken souls. But especially lovers of wisdom. “I cannot understand why Wisdom, which is, so to speak, the sediment of everyday experiences, should be denied admission among the acquisitions of knowledge” (Freud).

Supermorality is the honest ethic of honest analysts. Under its inspiration, to paraphrase a subtle sentence of Bergson's, the good life is transmuted into a piece of high Art.

In his interesting book, *The Freudian Wish*, Prof. Holt concludes

his analysis of human behavior with the dictum: “Ethics is solely a question, as Epictetus so long ago said, of ‘dealing wisely with the phenomena of existence.’” Wisely! In that one momentous word is summed up the futility of conventional morality and the liberating promise of psycho-analytic morality.

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