

THE FIRST BOOK  
OF THE AUTHORS CLUB



# Liber Scriptorum

Though they write contemptu gloriae, yet they  
will put their names to their books.

*Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy.*



NEW YORK

Published by The Authors Club

M DCCC XCIII

Copyright, 1893, by THE AUTHORS CLUB.

THE ONLY EDITION.

TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY-ONE COPIES PRINTED.

No. 82.



## TOLSTOI AND THE UNSEEN MORAL ORDER.

BY JOSIAH ROYCE.

**F**OR the most part, the leading ethical teachers of our generation belong to the class of thinkers who may be called, for want of a better name, ethical realists. What this name implies may best be indicated by contrast. In a former generation things were not so. Kant, for instance, was, in his moral doctrine, essentially an idealist. This means that, for him, the moral law was to be defined, not by appealing to the facts of our life or of outer nature as one finds them, but by consulting what Kant called the "Practical Reason," a faculty which revealed in general terms a moral law such as must be valid for all rational beings, and in all possible worlds. In the same fashion one may also call Schopenhauer, much as his ethical creed differed from that of Kant, an ethical idealist. For he found, as the one moral element in human nature, the essentially miraculous fact of Pity. Pity, in Schopenhauer's opinion, is the source from which the virtues are all derived; yet, as he says, pity is no natural fact at all, but an essentially inexplicable insight,—comparable to the insight of genius. Pity, so Schopenhauer holds, runs counter to our whole original human nature, which is from the outset blindly selfish, hopelessly egoistic. A good man merely chances to have, from time to time, a wondrous revelation of the oneness of all sentient life; and this revelation miraculously frees him, in his pitiful moments, from the chains and the blindness of his selfish nature.



He sees all life as one, sorrows with the sorrows of others, longs to help all beings and to harm none, says to himself, in the presence of a sufferer, *This life is my life*, and so escapes from egoism precisely as a great poet escapes from the commonplaces and the bondage of life when, through the inspiration of genius, he gives birth to a poem. A great picture or tragedy or lyric, a sincerely good deed—all of these are alike the product of a knowledge that lifts one above the facts of daily experience, and into the realm of the ideal. Saint and artist equally depend on a direct awareness of the deeper unity of the world. Their truth is not physical, but metaphysical. A study of the bare outer facts of the world of daily experience may make a man prudent, may lead him to simulate public spirit and kindness for selfish ends, may thus make him a trustworthy and useful citizen and an agreeable neighbor, but will never make him moral. The moral man has escaped from our natural illusions, and sees the truth as bare experience can never show it. Such is Schopenhauer's ethical theory.

From such ethical idealism the more cheerful of our modern teachers, full of interest in the world of science, in the physical truths of the doctrine of evolution, in the study of our actual human nature, have generally turned away. For Herbert Spencer the moral law is a matter of the verifiable facts of human nature, to be made out by scientific methods. Whoever examines our world as it is, and considers man as one of the world's products in the light of scientific methods, will find that man is a product of evolution, with an organization and an office determined by the whole process of which he is an outcome. The conflicting claims of "egoism" and "altruism" must be decided on scientific grounds. Ethical doctrine is an outcome of reasonable inductive research, for what man ought to be is determined by his place in the chain of evolution.

Nor is Herbert Spencer alone in this way of thinking. Representative ethical writers of our day, men like Wundt and Von Thering and Paulsen, while differing in many respects from Spencer and from one another, agree, on the whole, in regarding morality as an outcome of a scientific study of the facts of human nature as they are. Man, so they all agree, is a product of evolution. And this evolution has fitted him to live in society. Outside of a social order any man would be both miserable and

insignificant. In consequence, he gets his ideals by means of a study of his social relations, and of the origin and history of these relations. It is the natural law of his healthy being to be loyal to social ties. It is the real world, and not the speculations of an ideal philosophy, or the law of some supernatural lawgiver, or the revelation of a miraculous power of insight (such as was Schopenhauer's *Pity*), that shows him his life's moral business. As for the nature of his duty as a social being, one may best define it, in the spirit common to all the just-mentioned writers, by the one word, *Loyalty*. For loyalty is, to most of our representative ethical realists in recent literature, either expressly or implicitly treated as the highest virtue. Be loyal to all your social ties—to your friends, to your family, to your nation, to your age, to humanity, to the truth of science, to the course of evolution,—in brief, to the great facts of your actual existence. You have not to legislate, like Kant, for all possible rational beings. You have not to find out your business as a man, and to do it. You have not to deny your nature, like Schopenhauer, before becoming righteous. On the contrary, righteousness is a strictly biological principle. It favors the survival of healthy men, of their healthy ties, and of a sound public order. Loyalty is thus definable as the virtue of the enlightened and hopeful lover of mankind; of the reasonable being who has not to create the world of reason, but to move in a real world where reason is already embodied. Loyalty undertakes to include in itself all that is practical in the virtues of Schopenhauer's pitiful saint. For the loyalty of the modern lover of the social order suffers long and is kind; but it also watches long, and is unwearied in searching for the facts of life. It undertakes to make spirituality a matter of science. It fears to let its moral law remain something remote and airy. Its counsel in the end runs thus: So act that as the result of your deeds the existing social order shall become better organized, with more ties in it, and closer knit ones, with more coöperation and less discord, with more companionship and less estrangement.

Now Count Tolstoi, in his later period, is notoriously out of sympathy with this whole prevailing tendency of recent ethics. It may be instructive to follow out at some length the contrast between the famous Russian and his realistic contemporaries.



For every such contrast appears to me of service in indicating to us the real constitution of the moral world; and this particular contrast is an especially enlightening one. Tolstoi, in his latest period, is, like Kant or Schopenhauer, an ethical idealist. Meanwhile, for his own part, he professes to despise science. He turns his back on the existing social order. His moral law makes absolute demands upon us, and is indifferent to their immediate practicability. He wanders as a stranger and a pilgrim on earth. And yet—all this ethical idealism is not the fancifulness of an ignorant man, but the deliberate decision of one who has been a man of the world, who is an omnivorous reader of modern literature, and who has had every opportunity to learn both the facts of life as they are, and the reasons which ethical realists give for the faith that is in them. The secret of such a revolt against realism is surely worthy of study. Even one who, like the present writer, has only such knowledge of Russian affairs as one can get from the pretty well-known sources accessible to all general readers of English, French, and German books, has still a desire to clear his mind as to the probable significance of our great author's eccentricities of ethical opinion.

The explanation of the contrast in question is of course partly a personal and private one, to be looked for in Tolstoi's inner experience. In part, however, the significance of the matter is to be found in considerations which are valid for all time, and which in every age will give a sort of relative justification for the existence of men of Tolstoi's type amongst ethical teachers.

The creed of the ethical realist is, after all, when too one-sidedly insisted upon, a creed for just the times and the nations that enjoy general prosperity and progress, and for them only in so far as nearly all things go well with them. Hence ethical realism has never been the creed of the world's prophets and martyrs. A Paul has to live in the knowledge that the social order of the empire of his day is through and through corrupt, and is such as is fit to be swept away. To his eyes the fashion of this world is not only changing, but essentially unhealthy. Just so, again, an Amos is a despiser of the social order in which his countrymen trust. He does not say, knit this order closer, build it up, perfect it. He too hopes indeed for an earthly order that shall be good. His ideals are essentially social. His virtue also is one of loyalty;



but it is a loyalty to a still unseen social order. He looks forward to the happy day when the Lord shall "raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen," and shall "build it as in the days of old." But first the visible social order, as it now is, must be swept away. "Woe to those that are at ease in Zion," as she is at present constituted. It is the Zion of the future, the far-off and perfect city, for which the prophet toils, and to which he is loyal. As for the men of his own time, Amos tells them that they "afflict the just" and "take a bribe," and "turn aside the poor in the gate," and "abhor him that speaketh uprightly," so that the Lord hates and despises their solemn feasts, the emblems of their actual loyalty to their existing order, and "will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts," and "the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord." To the optimists and ethical realists of his own time,—men like the priest of Bethel,—Amos therefore appears as a Nihilist. Into the kingdom of Israel he comes from the land of Judah, an agitator, a speaker of evil words, an accuser, a pessimist—but also a prophet.

The well-known examples of Paul and Amos may serve to bring to mind a tendency which in all ages has been characteristic of some of the world's noblest men. The issues of their various times have passed away, but the spirit of their prophecy remains, as does that of the prophecy of Amos—a treasure of divine courage for all future time. The quality and spirit which are common to such men may be defined as their loyalty to the Invisible Moral Order. They are sensitive—often unfairly sensitive—to the defects of the Visible Moral Order. They believe, as our own Abolitionists used to believe, in a higher law. They appeal, as Antigone appealed, to their sacred insight into a truth superior to the authority of the constituted powers of the human State. They trust, as Socrates trusted, in a morality superior to the current traditions of their people. They appear therefore to their contemporaries as more or less in revolt. They are one-sided persons, agitators, pessimists—impracticable in their plans. They generally fail in their own age, but they often live for all ages. They lack not their own sort of loyalty. But loyalty to the unseen is a thanklessly noble task. The social office of such men, meanwhile, is to keep us alive to the absolute ideals. Without

them we should become sluggish, should forget that the very spirit of progress involves the endlessness of the human moral task, and, in our confident superiority over the past, should feel indifferent to the business of all life, which is to "regard naught as done while aught remains undone."

In vain then, in the eyes of the lover of the Unseen Moral Order, do you plead that society as it is embodies the result of ages of progress. He points out that it also shows too plainly the traces of ages of disease and corruption. His wakeful soul is sensitive to its wounds and its horrors. He remembers the poor and the oppressed, who are suffering through all these things. He finds no time to rejoice over our past evolution. He also may be, and generally is, in his way, an evolutionist. But it is the future evolution in which he longs to take part. The true social order, in his eyes, is that which is yet to come, here or in some other world, where love between men of all estates shall be no mere name, where judgment shall run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. For that order toil,—so he bids us. To that city out of sight, not to this visible society, be loyal. You are indeed citizens of no mean city. But to-day no man beholds the walls of it. It is still in the skies, that Jerusalem the golden. Look for it not with your outward eyes. Hope for it; pray for it with all the fervor of your heart; conceive it with all the strength of your reason; believe in it with all the sacredness of your faith; but in the city that now is, be as a stranger and a pilgrim.

In indicating so large a background for our picture, I have had in mind the thought that unless one first considers the general office of the servant of the Invisible Moral Order, one does not easily see in Tolstoi himself what gives him his true significance. It is easy to find defects in the servant of the unseen. He is almost always a lover of paradoxes, and from the point of view of his natural opponents is easily to be refuted by an appeal to the facts. Amos in Israel was obviously out of place. But then it was his desire to be out of place. The Lord had taken him away from his flocks, and had sent him on an ideal mission. The facts were against him, but then it was his office to prophesy against the facts. If you want to understand such teachers as this, you must view them not in the narrow context of their blunders, but



in their relation to the historical life of humanity. This service of the invisible is a moment in all the higher spirituality. Its words, even when literally mistaken, often conceal, therefore, a deep spiritual truth. The Israel of to-day may reject and then outlive the prophet. The Israel of the ages gathers inspiration from his one-sidedness.

Well, it is not necessary to call Tolstoi a prophet to feel his kinship with men of the genuinely prophetic type. Consider for a moment the facts. A man of extraordinary literary power, the author of great romances wherein, as in "Anna Karénina," a form of the creed of modern ethical realism has received a fairly classic expression, is led, through the circumstances of which Tolstoi has given some account in his "Confession," to an entire revolution in his views of life. Of the partially pathological character of Tolstoi's dark spiritual experience, no psychologist upon reading the "Confession" can feel any serious doubt. But when one perceives this fact, one has only begun to consider the significance of the matter. Not every morbid experience is ultimately misleading. Nerves are sometimes very enlightening things. When we hear, as we so often do nowadays, of the psychological relations of genius and insanity, we should always reply that there is indeed such a thing in the world as the higher nervousness,—and would God that some people might through his mercy be afflicted with it a little more frequently! There might indeed be a few more inner pangs of soul in the world then; but there would be less obtuseness. Tolstoi's nervousness was, with all its unmistakably morbid tang, of the higher, the enlightening sort.

Its first stage was, to be sure, one of gloomy and insistent self-questionings, of an ominously melancholic type. From this stage the sufferer slowly passed to one of greater calm and self-possession. What he seemed to himself to have learned by the way, was the vanity of the interests which up to that time had guided his life. We need not longer dwell on what this vanity meant for him. Enough he found, as many others in times of darkness have found, that unless there is something deeper in the business of living than common sense perceives, then life is indeed without lasting foundation. Our interest here lies in noting what this deeper element turned out for Tolstoi to be.

Recovering a little from his first despair, Tolstoi turned from

his own social world to the peasants and to their view of life for guidance. The peasants live confident of an abiding good, because they are sure that God, of whom indeed they know very little, has sent them here for his own eternal ends. Well then, may there not be here some sort of light? May not the solution of all doubts lie in the insight that life has to be mysterious to us mortals, because we are finite, while, on the other hand, there surely is an infinite plan expressed in our world,—a remote, an unsearchable, but yet a moral plan—a plan that will justify even our imperfections and sufferings, if only we serve it righteously and with a pure heart?

This thought having occurred to our thinker, he set himself to the task of testing this solution with all the energy of his obstinate character, and with all that trust in intuitions which characterizes the man who by nature and nerves combined has now become more than half a mystic. Henceforth there rapidly grew upon him the sense that in the idea of a benevolent Infinite, whose order is perfection, but whose plan is too high for us mortals to know, lies the true solution of the problem of the worth of life. All is indeed vanity, except the service of this plan. But how, in our ignorance, shall we hope to serve? Tolstoi seeks an answer, first of all, in the teachings of the church of his childhood. But here he soon finds himself dissatisfied. Your mystic, in case he has any dialectical ability, is usually very skeptical and keenly critical in the presence of traditional faith, especially if it be complex and formal. What he desires is a doctrine of absolute dignity, and still of perfect simplicity. In the end, as everybody knows, Tolstoi read his Gospels, and found the longed-for guidance in the Sermon on the Mount. He accepted the new faith without reserve, and interpreted it with utter unworldliness of resolution. During his long period of depression he had broken once for all with the visible world. He is in no wise surprised now to find the law of the invisible City of God an unworldly law. Why should the mysterious and infinite plan be accommodated to the seeming needs of this vain life of the flesh? Tolstoi's interpretation of the Gospels is quite free from any need to accommodate their teachings to the ways of the flesh. He gets from them his own picture of a supreme order. He asks not, however, that they should teach him an easy road to the good things of the world of the senses.



A contrast between that natural world, which Tolstoi in his melancholy had forsaken, and this new world, where he finds peace, will serve to make his insight a little clearer. In the world of the natural man, that is good for each individual which helps either himself or his chosen social order. But each man, as Tolstoi tells us in his book on "Life," can get his private good, in the natural world, only by the defeat of his rivals; whilst the actual social order lives by oppressing its weaker members, and by warfare with foreign foes. Such a life is essentially vain. "Live for myself!" exclaims our author, in his book on "Life." "Live for myself! But my individual life is evil and senseless. Live for my family? for my society? for my country? or even for mankind? But if the life of one person is miserable and senseless, then the life of every other human person is miserable and senseless also. . . . The time will come when a rational consciousness will outgrow the false doctrines, and man will come to a halt in the midst of life, and demand explanation."

No natural order as such, then, be it a selfish or a social order, can answer the demands of a thoroughgoing doubter. And so then, of two things one, either life has no sense, or its sense is given to it by its place in some infinite and all-embracing plan. Contrast now, with the foregoing plans of the natural world, the view of our life which the awakened man learns, according to our author, to hold. The first word of the new Gospel is indeed, to the awakened man, a hard one; but our author, in his sorrow, has long since learned it. That word is, Renounce. For "the renunciation of personal happiness and life is," says Tolstoi, "for a rational being (*i. e.*, for one who has passed through our author's sorrow, and obtained his new light) as natural a property of his life as flying on its wings instead of running on its feet is for a bird." But next after this renunciation follows the positive side of the new doctrine,—namely, love for all beings, with the consequences as to non-resistance and the rest, which have been such a stumbling-block to Tolstoi's critics. The spirit in which this gospel of non-resistance is propounded by our author has, however, been ill-understood by those who persist in judging it in the light of its obvious consequences in the world of common sense. For the servant of the invisible, present consequences are at best evil; for this our natural human life is full of illusion and mischief.



Such a man, having renounced all natural joys, fears nothing. The visible consequences of true virtue are for him of no importance. He is thinking solely of his relation to the Eternal. The citizens of the everlasting city love all living beings, trust the plan of God, and cease to ask questions. Their maxim is this noble and fearless one: *So act as you would find yourself acting in case the Kingdom of Heaven had already come on earth.* Or again: *Do already what, in the perfect order, everybody would do.* Relatively good conduct is thus in general to be disregarded. You do not try to adjust here or there some little imperfection of the hopelessly irrational social order of to-day. You see that this social order, as it is, is diseased. You find that its law is but a rotten garment. Why mend and patch unceasingly? Cast aside the worn-out fabric. Put on the robe of the absolute righteousness. Then you will have no further anxiety. You will indeed be careless of consequences. God is to see to them. You are just his servant. What other office is worthy of you? What reward need you hope, except God's peace?

If the foregoing words have indicated something of the true spirit and context of Tolstoi's thought, we who read his books are not likely to be wholly converted, nor to lose sight of the significance of ethical realism; but perhaps we shall learn better how to get inspiration from such an author if we remember what this fragmentary discussion has tried to point out—his place in the comparative history of ethical doctrine. For my part, I thank and honor such a teacher much more than I follow him. His waywardness is of to-day. His love indeed endures for eternity. In the complexity of our moral life there is needed some one to keep us alive to the absolute moral ideals. Who has done so better than Tolstoi? Those who teach the service of the Invisible Order remind us, that unless there is something eternal beneath and beyond all this phenomenal life of ours in the world of space and of time, our labor is indeed in vain, however honestly we serve the social order which can be seen with the outward eye. If a prophet and pessimist is needed to remind our realistic age of this, the central truth of all ideal religion, then for my part I welcome the pessimist, if so be he has some degree of kinship with the prophets.

*Josiah Royce.*