

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN ETHICS¹

I

THE SECULARISM OF THE RENAISSANCE

THREE or four centuries of modern thought, applying scientific knowledge to the mastery and exploitation of nature, have expanded almost beyond belief man's range of physical activity and control and have transformed the entire stage-setting of our human drama. During the same comparatively brief period a corresponding reorientation in the inner life of the Western nations, translating new ideals and conceptions of value into social institutions, has transfigured the very spirit of our civilization. A sense of self-reliance and even complacency has accompanied this tremendous achievement. Other epochs before ours were retrospective and leaned on tradition, but our age lives in the present and looks to the future, its future. It may profess admiration for the culture of classical antiquity, but this admiration is apt to be little more than an aesthetic gesture. Not for all the world would our typical modern man return to the golden age of Pericles, and he expresses his real estimate of antiquity when he speaks of its dead languages. As to the thousand years of mediaeval tradition, we dismiss them with the one phrase, Dark Ages. Ours is the age of

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light and power, of real civilization and progress. Thus the man whom we may call the hundred per cent modern!

But to many, and not all of them reactionary spirits, this modern civilization has seemed misdirected or rather chaotic. Knowledge it may have, learning and technical skill, but it lacks wisdom; power it has, but not the sense to use it for the real strengthening and enrichment of human life; immensely expanded external resources, but an impoverishment of the inner man; incredible material growth, but a stunted spirit. Our boasted civilization, is it not but a thin veneer, ready to crack and peel under the blast of flaming passion, disclosing the unredeemed savage in our inmost souls? How many days of war were enough to brush aside all our professed modern civilization and humanitarianism and return to tolerated and even to vaunted brutality? On these scales modern humanity is weighed and found wanting. Perhaps it has understood and mastered physical nature, but itself it has neither mastered nor understood.

The settling of this great dispute in our time regarding the worth of the claims of modern civilization exceeds the province of this brief course of lectures. It is rather to the understanding of the dominant interests and values of the modern spirit that I should like to invite your attention. "Where a man's heart is, there will his treasure be also." Modern civilization is what it is and where it is because of our modern choice of values. What men actually espouse, achieve, neglect, reject depends upon what they expect of themselves and approve or disapprove in others: upon what they consider as of supreme worth and importance, what only of incidental concern, and what of no value at all: in a word, depends on their moral outlook on life.

This, then, is our theme: the modern moral-spiritual re-orientation of Europe which, turning the eyes and faces of

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men in a new direction, set their feet on new paths in search of new worlds to conquer and gave us a new civilization. We can survey only the early stages of this journey of the modern spirit, but enough, I trust, to perceive its drift and to suggest its course of development.

The Greek was a native-born citizen of this world and this life. A native, he was at home in his cosmic environment; even when he criticized it, he criticized it as a native; it was nothing radically alien to him: with his reason he could grasp and master it. Virtue is knowledge, Socrates declared, but this knowledge is not beyond men; it is to be had, and the beginning of it is knowledge of oneself. Moral excellence is one aspect of a life of understanding and a full realization of a man's nature; quite as natural to men as the blossoming and full fruition of a plant: quite as natural and quite as accessible to objective study. How is human life to be lived to the full, most appropriately and most characteristically? This is essentially the Greek conception of the moral problem. It is implied in Aristotle's very definition of the good in general; it is manifest in the Epicurean pursuit of contentment as truly as in the Stoic's serene cosmic acquiescence, and if one catches the nostalgic note in Plato, it is for a recovery by man of his pristine perfection of character. Virtue, like knowledge, is within man's reach: it is active attainment or recollection, not passive receptivity or grace or revelation: failure or achievement, not damnation or redemption.

The Christian gospel produced a spiritual reorientation of ancient ways and ideals. For the rigidity of law it substituted the life of the spirit; it scorned the cautious wisdom of the sage to bless the trusting faith of a child; from the beauty of the flesh it turned to the beauty of holiness; man it regarded as a prodigal son and a lost sheep, lost but for the

loving grace of the Divine Shepherd. This life and this world were to it but the threshold and doormat to the mansions of the hereafter. This startling gospel gripped the downtrodden Jew and stirred to new life the Hellenic world which had sickened of speculation and wearied of worldliness. Christianity offered salvation and peace to the heavy-laden; it guaranteed the certainties of faith to the disenchanting pagan intellect.

In claiming the entire spirituality of its converts and in directing all mental interests towards the life of grace and the kingdom of heaven, Christianity transformed the moral problem into a religious problem. The ethical search for the highest good it replaced by the humble submission to the will of God, indubitable and requiring, indeed admitting of no investigation. Moral philosophy became ancillary to theology; the cardinal virtues of pagan antiquity were pronounced at best splendid vices; man's true glory was in his abasement; his redemption was from himself, requiring a new birth. Not in active mastery and full fruition of his characteristic excellence was man's true destiny to be sought; his hope was rather for a wholly undeserved gift of grace. The understanding of it was not the main thing: far better to feel compunction than to comprehend it, as Thomas à Kempis put it.

Despite the dogmatic, authoritarian direction of Christian thinking, mediaeval scholasticism with strange irony was proceeding to its own overcoming. Thirteenth century Aristotelianism added a new version of orthodoxy, but it also introduced a new leaven of rationality, of confidence in reason, to be championed or combated, and as a result to rouse new interests and new issues and prepare the way for the new, the modern world.

The Renaissance was the reawakening of the human mind

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to the need, the right, the opportunities of unhampered, undogmatic thinking, after the long centuries of ecclesiastic authoritarianism. It was also the reawakening of the human heart to a zest for living here and now, to a new interest in man's immediate environment, a frank and avid worldliness. The passion for all things Greek which took possession of the early Renaissance roused the mind to old Greek ways of thought, objective, critical, worldly, and in the end led it beyond a merely Greek revival to attack its own problems in its own way. For the great world of nature and its unvanquished mysteries, which odd mediaeval minds had been clandestinely exploring, a consuming enthusiasm now swept over Europe, an adolescent ardor of speculation, which revived the early days of Greek thought. A Pre-Socratic array of new doctrines resulted, new and bold interpretations of Aristotle, revivals of Plato and Neoplatonism, of every school of Greek thought, Stoic, Epicurean, as well as professedly new philosophies of nature. Even if Telesio's treatise *On the Nature of Things* does share more than its title with Lucretius and more than occasional ideas with Roman Stoicism, yet it is meant to be new, Telesian.

The Renaissance and the Reformation represent a twofold revolt against ecclesiastic authority. Different motives and different aims control the development of these two movements, and their destiny in the life of modern civilization. The Renaissance represents the revolt of the critical intellect. The revival of Hellenism was but the manifestation of a revived secularism, a zest for the here and now: a new lease of vigorous thought, self-reliant, bold in experiment and speculation. In place of self-neglect and self-disdain, we now have the liveliest self-observation, a lyrical quality of mind. "I study myself more than anything else," Montaigne writes in his *Essays*; "it is my metaphysics and my natural phi-

losophy. I am myself the subject of my book." Interest in oneself deepens interest in one's immediate environment: humanism leads to naturalism. Man studies the physical world, not as the threshold to the heavenly, but as his real home and dwelling place; studies to understand its laws for the sake of the understanding, but also for the sake of the power which understanding yields. Not through magic but through science is nature to be mastered; both Bacon and Hobbes declare that Power is in knowledge. This knowledge is brought down to earth; it may be expressed in the universal language of Latin, or of mathematics, but thinkers and writers are in direct contact with their social milieu; they think and write increasingly in the vernacular. European thought comes to reflect the variety of national temperament, and it also seeps down as it were and enters the spiritual life of the large masses. On the one hand is an inner change in Western culture, and on the other hand it is externally refashioned by the application of science to the exploitation of the resources of nature: an inner and an outer worldliness.

If the spirit of the Renaissance is secular individualism, the revolt of the critical intelligence, the Protestant Reformation is spiritual-religious individualism, the protest of the alert conscience. The individual soul which for centuries had hoped to reach the ear of God only by ecclesiastic intermediaries, now appeals from the institution directly to God's throne. Martin Luther's declaration, "My cause is God's cause," is characteristic, and typical of the modern conscience. Even within the fold of Roman Catholicism, we find echoes of the same spirit. So Pascal protests: "If my letters are condemned in Rome, what I condemn in them is condemned in Heaven . . . Lord Jesus, I appeal to your tribunal!"

Protestant secularism is very real, but we should not mis-

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take its inner motive. The reformers were even less worldly than Rome. To be assured of this, one has only to compare Luther and Calvin with the Bembos, the Medicis, the Borgias, and Pope Leo the Tenth. In fact, it is for the sake of a more thorough deliverance from worldliness that the Protestant reformer turns secular. He would free the religious conscience from formal authority and from the institution; he would bring the soul of man directly to God. Each man is himself to read God's holy word, and it is for this purpose, to enable the people to read the Bible themselves, that public education systems were organized, the first ones in Germany, at the special demand of Luther. Salvation is individualized; the traditional ideal of a double-level sanctity, lay and clerical, is abandoned, and along with it the monastic ideal and the celibacy of the clergy. The new protestant conscience is not to flee the world; it is to be in the world, but not of it, in it participating in all the activities of domestic, social, economic, and political life, but transforming and spiritualizing these very activities. It is to be secular, but not worldly. Protestantism is thus an effort to reconcile and fuse secularism and spirituality.

It is needless to point out that this ideal undergoes modifications. A new type of authoritarianism arises: the authority of a Book; rigid Bibliolatry replaces the more flexible Catholic basis of the living Church. Protestantism, whose merit presumably was to be its vigilant openminded unorthodoxy, develops its own tradition, unyielding and often bigoted. But modern thought presses on, critical of the new orthodoxy as of the old. The intelligence of modern man, his scientific integrity, and his religious conscience find ever new prospects, and likewise new problems. The progress of science, with the conquest of nature and the wide spread of knowledge, leads to a new civilization, to a new social

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order, to a radically new order of thought. To deal with his new issues man needs a critical standard. Authoritarianism gone, what are we to respect, to what can we appeal? What secular standard is to replace the standard of theological tradition? So we see our problem squarely before us.

We may perceive more clearly, then, the motivation and also the tremendous cultural significance of the Renaissance. The Renaissance mind is a free mind, prizing new instances above old citations, fertile, self-reliant even when inclined to scepticism; indefatigable it is, but also fantastic. For all its disdain of superstition, it is still credulous, with a penchant for the occult and marvelous. It is uncontrolled, inchoate and intemperate. Renaissance Europe stands as it were with its mouth open, aching to speak out but not quite knowing what to say. But one thing it seeks: a test, a standard other than dogmatic authority and divine fiat. The modern knowledge is to be man's knowledge, lived, tested, and proved by man, and the modern virtues are to be man's virtues and his life a man's life, a life of search after achieved, not revealed truth, and a striving after attained, not vouchsafed perfection.

This distinctive note of Renaissance philosophy, the note of humanism and naturalism, cosmological and ethical, and this defiant nonconformity and pioneering zeal may be studied in a dozen various men, but in no one better than in Giordano Bruno.

Bruno's character is an epitome of the strains and strivings of the Renaissance. Poetic longing and speculative ecstasy gave a religious cast to his science and philosophy, but rebellious chafing and scorn for dogmatic authority, ardent partisanship and a keen eye for the repulsive and hateful lent his writings both the virtues and the vices of manifestoes. An intense and defiant protagonist, his mind

required a cause and a challenge in order to yield its utmost. Had he not entered the Dominican cloister, there seeking refuge from the lures of a too fiery adolescence and the transports and peace of the studious life, posterity might never have had occasion to remember him; and no doubt by arousing his resistance, Dominican rigor served to stimulate him intellectually. But he could not abide in his cell, and out of it was condemned to lifelong wandering, and in the end to persecution and martyrdom. Forced to flee from the Neapolitan cloister which three centuries before had nourished St. Thomas Aquinas, he marched to Rome, but found there Thomas' Aristotelianism without the Thomistic spirit of inquiry. Replying to repression with defiance, he proceeded north, casting off his monastic garb and again resuming it, trying to believe himself a good Catholic but consistently refusing to reënter his cell or to bow down to ecclesiastic discipline, be it Catholic or Calvinist or Lutheran. From Geneva to Toulouse, to Paris, to London and Oxford, back to Paris, to Wittenberg, Helmstaedt, and to Frankfurt, he won the support of secular minds, princes and nobles and courtiers, and of the young, but the robed and surpliced intelligence suspected and resisted his ways and his teachings. Lured back to his Italy by the invitation of Giovanni Mocenigo, he came to Venice and fell into the trap of the Inquisition. Through eight years of imprisonment he grew in firmness of resistance. The man who, when first arraigned, had sought escape by the double truth doctrine, met his death verdict with the words: "You who sentence me are in greater fear than I who am condemned." He was burned on the Campo dei Fiori in Rome in 1600, exactly twenty centuries after the martyr-death of Socrates, the father of moral philosophy.

Against the Thomistic Aristotelianism of the Church,

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Bruno advocated the new view of the world and a new outlook and new ideals for mankind. His spirit is one of stalwart independence. Opposed though he is to Aristotle's geocentric cosmology, it is the servile adherence to Aristotle rather than the Aristotelian doctrine itself that he attacks. But he will not merely turn from the Stagirite to a newer authority, to Telesio or Nicolas of Cusa. He stakes his fate on the Copernican astronomy, but stakes it as a champion and not as a mere disciple. He perceives and develops the cosmic-philosophical implications of the heliocentric theory: against the Rome-centered meagre universe of church tradition, Bruno conceives an infinite system of systems, without center or periphery, a universe manifesting and permeated by Deity. In his conception of God, he recalls Plotinus and foreshadows Spinoza and Leibniz, but he is inconclusive because the Infinite, while it dominates, also baffles his thought and imagination. Atomism and mysticism blend and clash in his cosmology: the mechanics of planets and their orbits, and the pervasive activity of the World-Soul, pantheistically or monadistically conceived. In Lucretian letter matter is described as the heart and soul of nature, but in a Platonic spirit the soul of man is revealed as athirst for the infinite and intelligible world, its true homeland and its destiny.

The construction of a system of moral philosophy was one of Bruno's cherished projects, but he could not carry it out. A likely forecast of its fundamental principles is supplied in his two ethical prolegomena written during his stay in England, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* and the Dialogues *On the Heroic Enthusiasms*. These two works reflect characteristic features of his philosophy: his attack on dogmatism and superstition and dull conventional conformity, his intrepid championship of the single-minded pur-

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suit of truth, his poetic sense of the tragedy of moral aspiration, of mortal man ever consumed with the thirst for the ideal that ever eludes his grasp.

The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast is a thinly veiled allegory. Zeus, eloquently repentant, is portrayed as taking counsel with the gods about the renaming of the heavenly bodies. To stars and constellations, he says, we have given names recalling vile memories; we have written the stories of our scandals all over the sky; "our shame and nakedness are laid open, and made manifest to the eyes of mortals"; the whole world is despising us for it. It is time to change all this: the names of the celestial bodies should no longer tell stories of vice, but should rather proclaim exalted virtues. This proposal stirs a lively discussion: if each star is to be named after some virtue or excellence, it becomes essential to determine what names the brightest stars should bear: what moral excellence is most worthy of the first place in heaven?

By this clever conceit Bruno is enabled to urge his new scale of moral values, in opposition to the vices of coarse sensuality and the alleged virtues of ecclesiastic traditionalism. The objects of his attack are lust and avarice, theft and trickery and low hatred, but even more fundamentally dull conformity and superstition. The triumphant beasts whose expulsion is the theme of his work, the celestial bears, dragons, lions, scorpions and the like, are in reality the bestial forms which sensuality and superstition assume in mentally supine man. In a theological system of morals, faith and submission to dogmatic fiat are exalted virtues; but dogmatism breeds sophistry, cunning, imposture and hard intolerance; the submission to it makes for stupid inertia or else hypocrisy; superstition is cruel, malicious and bestial, and sensuality brutalizes. Against them all Bruno cham-

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pions Truth, Prudence, Wisdom, Law, Judgment, Courage, Culture, Repentance, Simplicity, Solitude, Philanthropy. These are the brightest stars in the life of man. The highest place of all is assigned to Truth: supreme by inherent right, it determines the place and the proper rôle of the other virtues. Amid all changes it abides, even though men's visions of it should alter. It provides the light and the goal, and devotion to it is the dynamic for any thorough and just reformation of human life. It is both compass and beacon-light.

Bruno's castigation of servile conformity and his apotheosis of Truth and of the spirit of integrity and critical inquiry are typical of the early modern reconstruction of man's cosmic outlook and self-estimate. And it is no coldly resolute spirit of investigation that we meet in Bruno, but ardent poetic worship of his Lady Truth who is to him, as Beatrice to Dante, a symbol and a guerdon of all that makes life worthy. In this respect also Bruno, protagonist of Copernican cosmology but likewise mystic poet, is an epitome of the many-sided Renaissance.

The *Expulsion* is satirical but also stalwart and sanguine in its optimism. Through the expulsion of dark superstition and the pursuit of truth human life is certain to be refashioned and exalted. But a darker and tragic sense is revealed in the work *On the Heroic Enthusiasms*. The pursuit of the ideal that alone ennobles human life is a pursuit without end or final consummation. The true life of the spirit is a life of unremitting struggle, exalting but inconclusive and ever tragic. Only a beast can live supinely in the present, and uniform contentment is a mark of dull animality in a man. The mother of sensual bliss is ignorance, but "heroic love is a torment, . . . it feels ambition, emulation, suspicion and dread." So Bruno inscribes himself on the title-page of his

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Candelaio: In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis: Gay in his sadness and in his gaiety sad.

Through the infinite capacity which it possesses, our finite mind is eternal: finite in itself, it is yet infinite in its ever-outreaching aspiration. So the heroic soul ever outstrips itself, but in so doing is overwhelmed and tragically humiliated: so exalted in endeavor, in achievement so meagre. Bruno sings of a boy in a boat, venturing too far on the treacherous waves that threaten to engulf him and his inquisitive temerity: so is the heroic soul "engulfed in the abyss of incomprehensible excellence." So again in the great sonnet (his or Tansillo's) on the soaring zeal of man:

Now that these wings to speed my wish ascend,
The more I feel vast air beneath my feet,
The more towards boundless air on pinions fleet,
Spurning the earth, soaring to Heaven, I tend:
Nor makes them stoop their flight the direful end
Of Daedal's son; but upward still they beat:—
What life the while with my life can compete,
Though dead to earth at last I shall descend?
My own heart's voice in the void air I hear:
"Where wilt thou bear me, O rash man? Recall
Thy daring will! This boldness waits on fear!"
"Dread not," I answer, "that tremendous fall!
Strike through the clouds, and smile when death is near,
If death so glorious be our doom at all."

Bruno's ethics is thus seen clearly to touch hands with his cosmology. To him the Ptolemaic world seemed encased and meagre, and his mind was ravished by the thought of a limitless universe, an infinite system of systems: so in the world of values he visions man as a pilgrim on an endless quest, ever-perfectible and never perfect, thus ever-ennobled and never content, and through it all ever dragged down by the coarse one that is also himself. This vision, tragic and exalted, is characteristically modern. It expressed itself in sixteenth century folklore, in the Faust saga. The conflict of animal and heroic love, the inexhaustible and never-con-

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tented spirit of men of which Bruno discourses in the *Heroic Enthusiasms*: are they not akin to the two souls that struggle in the breast of Goethe's insatiate modern hero?

Two souls, alas! reside within my breast,
And each withdraws from, and repels, its brother:
One with tenacious organs holds in love
And clinging lust the world in its embraces;
The other strongly sweeps, this dust above,
Into the high ancestral spaces.

Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome in the year 1600. But by a strange irony, the very official who had demanded Bruno's transfer from the Venetian to the Roman Inquisition also arranged for Galileo to lecture at the University of Padua! When Galileo in turn faced the Inquisition, charged with teaching heretical doctrines, he stated that he was not competent to decide whether his doctrines were in strict accord with the Word of God, but he felt certain that, the Word of God being true, his surest way of conforming to it was by establishing the truth of his doctrines. In spite of this wisdom pious or ironical, however, Galileo had to abjure his heretical teaching that the earth revolved around the sun, and spent his last years in imprisonment. But in more than one sense time proved his words: *E pur se muove!* It moves just the same, in spite of ecclesiastic anathemas: the earth in its orbit around the sun, and likewise the critical mind of man towards the truth. The very next year after Bruno's martyrdom, in 1601, a work appeared in France in which the principles of a critical secular ethics were clearly outlined. This work is Pierre Charron's *De la sagesse, On Wisdom*. Its aim is to prove the naturalness of virtue; moral excellence is conceived as the normal fruition of human nature.

Charron calls virtue *Prudhommie*, which has been translated Integrity, the normal direction of man's will towards

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the good in all departments of life. Why should we regard man as a lost creature, as utterly corrupt and requiring supernatural recasting and a new birth to attain any good? Is it not rather a fact that our normal healthy sense is bent on attaining positive worth? Charron's is a virile virtue, productive and self-reliant, the native and generous expression of the soul. It needs no impulse from without to generate and nourish it, nor does it require supernatural sanction to justify or impose it on man's will. Unless we can thus realize the naturalness of virtue, by freeing it from external sanction and especially from theological vassalage, we are short of attaining the truly moral level. This conviction leads Charron to firm utterance. Morality is bedeviled if it is made to spring from theological motives. "I desire and demand of my sage a true integrity and a true piety, joined and wedded together, but each subsisting and self-sustaining, not dependent on the other but self-active. I should like man to be good even though there were no heaven or hell. These words are horrible and abominable: 'If I were not a Christian, if I did not fear God or damnation, I should do or should not do thus and so.' O miserable wretch, what avails it to know all that you do? You are not wicked, simply because you dare not be, because you fear being flogged: I would have you dare to be wicked, but not will it, even though you were sure of never being rebuked. You act the good man so as to get your reward and your gramercy. I would have you good, even though no one should ever know it: I would have you a good man because nature and your reason (that is God) demand it: because the order and the general regime of the world, of which you are a part, thus require it, because you cannot consent to be different, to go against your own self, your being, your good, your destiny: and then happen what may! . . . Religion follows after integrity . . . integrity

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. . . is first, more ancient and more natural. . . . Those who make probity follow and serve religion, therefore, pervert all order."

This passage is striking; the Church made Charron strike it out in his second edition, and substitute a toned-down statement in its place. But that he had been able to write it at all, shows the temper and the stature of the man.

In Bruno we found two of the characteristic moral notes of Renaissance secularism: the heroic and the tragic; in Charron, the note of healthy reasonable self-reliance. But there is another note in Renaissance ethics: an easy-going or else a sardonic view of man as primarily a creature of desire and a tissue of passions. Boccaccio's *Decameron* is a vivid portrayal of an age which glorified lewd appetite and, even when it ascribed the excess of it to human frailty, either shrugged its shoulders significantly or else smacked its lips in deliberate contemplation. This attitude was bound to express itself in doctrine. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, two Italians expounded this view of greedy, pleasure-seeking humanity. Lorenzo Valla championed an unashamed Epicureanism, a frank and avid sensuality. Against the advocates of a stern Stoical and dismal devotion to virtue, Valla would listen to the smiling counsel of the voluptuary. Only a perverse view of human life and of nature leads us to distrust pleasure in our idolatry of virtue. The real worth of life is nowhere but right here and now; it is precisely in the immediate satisfaction which we get from experience. All the advantages of power, fortune and condition, health, beauty, keenness and luxuriance of sense, wealth and comforts individual and social, are valued only because of the varied and lasting satisfaction which they yield. So pleasure is not a "mistress among good matrons, but rather a mistress among serving maids, the mistress of

the other virtues." Virtue itself has its warrant ultimately in terms of the pleasure that it yields. Justice and laws find their final appeal and sanction in utility. The contemplative life itself, so highly exalted by the votaries of virtue, is itself a subtle species of pleasure.

This frank view of man as a pursuer of gratification allows of a more sinister spread. Machiavelli's work, *The Prince*, a manual for tyrants, contained the counsel of Mephistophiles. How is one so to exploit the greed and fears and other passions of men as to maintain himself in undisputed mastery over them? This is one of the first and most effective of works in which the writer has professed to take off the veil, remove the screen, scratch off the veneer and show us human nature in the raw, man as he really is. The theologian may spin his webs of orthodoxy, and the philosopher his even flimsier gossamer, but meanwhile words and doctrines cannot change actual human nature, and the first thing that a really wise moralist or statesman requires is a direct knowledge of the facts of human character.

Machiavelli's work is an important event in the history of ethics and social philosophy, and we shall return to it in our next discourse. Whether by way of amplification or by way of criticism, this radical account of man stimulated others, and so increased the modern treasury of what we may call descriptive ethics, character-studies individual and social, analyses of human nature and especially treatises of the passions. One of the most eloquent champions of this sort of study was Francis Bacon, in whose ethics are combined the secular and the sardonic spirit.

Bacon's first step in moral as in physical science is a demand for secularism, for emancipation from theological authority. This demand implies no hostility to religion. To

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be sure his professed reverence may be only calculating or cautious lip-service. Diomedes attacked and wounded the goddess Venus, but disaster in the end punished his impious boldness. So Bacon reminds us, himself not caring to cross lances with established religion. At any rate, whether owing to genuine piety or only to politic caution, Bacon does yield the palm to religion. Supreme blessedness is in God alone, and man's highest good is not in this life but in his hope of heaven. Yet surely a relative good is available for man here and now: modestly but with assurance we may pursue and attain it. This is the task of secular ethics. Is moral philosophy *ancilla theologiae*, the handmaid of theology? True enough, "yet no doubt many things are left to the discretion of the handmaid." Thus humbly, or astutely, Bacon would secure a place for a science of morals.

The moral philosophy which he champions is to keep in constant touch with human nature, to perceive its range and its shortcomings. Greek ethics was concerned mainly with portraying the ideal of moral perfection, so to say exhibiting masterpieces of calligraphy, whereas Bacon is intent on actually teaching men penmanship, the plain rudiments of the art of living well. Accordingly he would set aside ultimate principles, be they theological or metaphysical: in morals as in science he would investigate, not anticipate, nature. Before we may presume to prescribe how men ought to act we must learn how they do act.

It is in this explicit proposal of descriptive ethics that Bacon's ethical naturalism finds clear expression. The science of morals is like that of medicine: as the physician's art requires knowledge of the body's constitution, of the diseases affecting it, and of the method of cure, so in medicining mind and character we should learn the temperaments and dispositions of men, the passions to which they are subject, and

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the appropriate remedies or discipline. In both medicine and morals it is futile to deplore, just as it is fatal to ignore, the first two. Bodily constitution and disease, character and the passions affecting it, we simply have to recognize, and only by understanding them may we hope to cope with them. Thus in morals as in physical science, nature to be mastered must be followed.

What interests Bacon primarily is therefore not the formulation of the moral ideal but the inquiry into the foundations of character and the motive forces in human conduct: the varieties of moral experience. The moralist should approach human nature without illusions, welcoming good but not averting his glance from evil: on the contrary, centering his attention on the frailties and corruptions of men, spying on humankind to understand in order to withstand. "The Basilisk, . . . if he see you first you die for it, but if you see him first he dieth; so it is with deceits and evil arts." This is the art of Machiavelli in which Bacon was no doubt well trained at court and which he valued, if his references to the Florentine are to be trusted. He seeks gospel warrant for his method: we should learn the wisdom of the serpent, but this requires knowledge of the serpent and of his ways: "his baseness and going upon his belly, his volubility and lubricity, his envy and sting, and the rest; that is, all forms and natures of evil. For without this, virtue lieth open and unfenced."

For this purpose moral treatises are of slight value in comparison with recorded observation. Bacon would consult the spiers and chroniclers of men, historical and diplomatic memoirs and correspondence: Tacitus, Guicciardini, Machiavelli, but, as Kuno Fischer observes, he neglects the richest treasury, in the dramas of his great contemporary whose Richard III is a connoisseur in the art:

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I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall,
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
And like a Sinon take another Troy.
I can add colours to the Chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murtherous Machiavel to school.

Beginning thus what Bacon calls the "Georgics of the Mind" with "sound and true distributions and descriptions of the several characters and tempers of men's natures and dispositions," we escape both the philosopher's too exalted view of the ideal and the lawyer's too particular and special recording: we have a characteristic view of men as they are. Nature and human nature thus disclose their kinship, for in both we may observe the dominance of the superior magnitude. The part submits to the whole; the larger mass draws the smaller to itself. In spite of magnetic attraction a heavy bar of iron would, even in the presence of the loadstone, "like a good patriot" move to the earth. So man has a double nature of good: one of them individual, and the other in virtue of his membership in society. The second, social or communicative good, is superior to the first, and the recognition of this principle is the beginning of systematic ethics. Accordingly virtue cannot consist in mere self-perfection but is essentially social and philanthropic. Failure to perceive this, in Bacon's view, was a main defect of Greek ethics.

Connected with this emphasis on the social nature of man is Bacon's preference for the active over the contemplative life. "In this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and Angels to be lookers on." Man tends to preserve his being, to grow, and to multiply: the first two are largely individual and passive, but the third actively relates one's life to that of others. Thus arise the duties which man owes his

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fellowmen: some of them general, the common duties of all men; others specialized depending on one's profession, relation or place. The welfare of all is the goal of moral endeavor, and accordingly defines the subordination of individual desire to social interest.

Bacon would find here a parallel to the Christian doctrine of self-denial and brotherly love. Benevolence, upheld by the secular examination of human nature, finds its apogee in Christian charity. But human nature unaided does not attain unto this. "Love your enemies" is divine, but it is scarcely human. Do we have here, despite Bacon's resistance to the Stagirite, a Thomistic-Aristotelian view of man's rise to perfection: unaided human nature proceeding towards a sublime goal but not reaching the pinnacle save by divine grace? But in that case the secularism of his ethics is compromised in consummation. Bacon seems to yield the Christian supreme virtue the reverence which is traditionally its due; but his own inquiry into human nature has not disclosed to him more than desires, affections, and social pressure. One misses the note of genuine benevolence and social feeling in him: communicative good is superior to individual good. Why? Because in the end it is thus that our life extends by being multiplied in the lives of others. This basic rule of self-regard leads Bacon to a view of social ties which anticipates Hobbes: men "readily agree to protect themselves by laws, that the course of injury may not come round to them in turn." This strain of thought in Bacon's ethics is in line with his counsel to keep an eye on the basilisk; it is ramified in his political philosophy; and its implicit cynicism may serve to explain his meagre view of the moral nature of man: his preoccupation with affections and passions and his neglect of conviction and devotion, disinterested loyalty, conscience and duty in the thoroughly moral sense of the word.

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The secularism of Renaissance ethics is thus clearly seen to involve a reëxamination of the moral nature of man, individual and social. The very effort to construct a secular system of moral values, as it deprives the moral laws of their theological source and sanction, raises the problem, where this source and sanction are to be sought. Modern philosophy is thus led to consider the conception of law itself and the grounds of rights and obligations in human life. Thus the naturalistic bent of the modern moralist leads him to investigate the origin and the fundamental structure of society. Ethics and social philosophy touch hands in the secular enterprise. The examination of their relation in early modern thought will be our next topic.