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Ethics: Origin and Development by Prince Kropotkin; Louis Friedland; Joseph R. Piroshnikoff

Review by: George Boas

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own ideal of philosophical thinking than his comments on that logic would suggest. On the other hand, his observation that this logic is essentially abstract would doubtless seem to Mr. Russell a mild understatement of the truth, and anything but damaging.

Fortunately Mr. Hawes' adverse comment on the realists' use of analysis is quite compatible with a very able use of analysis on his own part. The reader of the book will feel indebted to him for the clarity of form and expression to which he has brought a difficult material.

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*Ethics: Origin and Development.* PRINCE KROPOTKIN. Authorized translation from the Russian by Louis Friedland and Joseph R. Piroshnikoff. New York: The Dial Press. 1924.

Kropotkin's *Ethics* is in a way his valedictory. It was written in the little village of Dmitrov away from his library, where he spent his last years in ill health and relative poverty. That it is a system based on mutual aid, justice, and self-sacrifice is no more ironical than that Condorcet's last book, written in hiding from the French Revolutionists, should have been an exposition of the continual progress of the human spirit. It is, of course, a fragment, but a fragment so beautiful and of such noble intent, that one feels a certain reluctance to judge it at all.

As will be expected by readers familiar with *Mutual Aid—a Factor in Evolution*, Kropotkin's ethics is inspired by the theory that in the natural order there is to be found not merely a record of what had to be done to keep mankind on earth, but also what ought to be done to keep it from going to the Devil. The development of man from the simpler animals is for him one of nature's moral achievements.

That we can go to "nature" for a criticism of our manners is an idea as old as the Greeks. That the animals are better than we is an indignant remark that was made even in the sacred books of the East. But it is very strange to find a man who believes that there is moral progress in the passage of events looking backward to a better time.

Like most zoölogists and anthropologists, he is more interested in the species than in the individual. Mutual aid, justice, self-sacrifice are, by definition, of value largely to the race. They may even prove the annihilation of the individual. They operate as a help in the struggle for existence; they are the separate articles of a "law of nature," which advises not civil war—though it permits inter-racial war—but the adaptation of the species to the changing en-

vironment. The struggle, then, is not between an animal and other animals or between an animal and the environment, but between species or between species and the environment.

This notion, Kropotkin points out generously (p. 287 n. and elsewhere), was not original with him. Darwin had formulated it also in *The Descent of Man*. Romanes had agreed and had left unfinished at his death a work on animal morality which would have illustrated the same thesis. He has impressive backing. Darwinian ethics, which seemed so romantically grim and haggard, turns out to be on the whole rather cheerful.

The sense of duty, Kropotkin feels, is rooted in sociality. It is because we have a strong sympathy for other men that we desire their approval or follow their commands. All the social animals seem to have this trait as well as primitive man. It may have greater power over their behavior than even the maternal instinct (p. 38). Its power can be explained naturalistically—*i.e.*, Darwinistically—by the fact that “the less enduring *individual* instinct yields before the more enduring *social* instinct” (p. 40). It aids in the struggle for existence. Its only effective opponent is the feeling of enmity. This feeling is apparently the basis of immorality.

After pointing out the origin of moral ideas in the habits of the social animals, Kropotkin proceeds to trace their development in European philosophy. But a break comes after the chapter on primitive peoples. Whereas that chapter deals with ethics in application, the succeeding deals with ethical theories. There is an obvious difference between the two. This is really unfortunate, for there are plenty of histories of the kind and Kropotkin himself makes liberal use of Jodl's. One regrets that he did not see fit to train his insight upon the development of morals apart from systems of ethics. Merely an anthropological study of historical European man would have shown how strangely detached from his conduct his ethical speculations are. It is too bad that one can not see just how detached.

For Kropotkin the development of moral teaching moves towards a recognition of the ethics of mutual aid. In other words, as ethicists progress, they grow into recognizing what primitive man and the social animals do without reflection. He feels, however, that there are two definite and irreconcilable schools—the naturalistic and the supernaturalistic. “Either the moral conceptions of man are merely the further development of the moral habits of mutual aid, which are so generally inherent in social animals that they may be called a *law* of Nature—and in that event our moral conceptions, in so far as they are the product of reason, are nothing but the con-

clusion arrived at from man's observation of nature, and in so far as they are the product of habit and instinct, they constitute a further development of instincts and habits inherent in social animals. Or our moral conceptions are revelations from above, and all further investigations of morality become merely interpretation of the divine will" (p. 286). But what he seems to overlook is the puzzle of why supernaturalists observing nature and developing the moral habits of mutual aid should think that they are interpreting the divine will. Is it simply because they are stupid? What survival value has their stupidity?

Kropotkin certainly gives us a picture of a pleasanter natural order than many zoological ethicists. They who believe in the savagery of nature, the selfishness and meanness of animals, have their beliefs rudely shaken here. Yet they, too, seem to have some facts on their side. Kropotkin admits that even his primitive Esquimaux occasionally are not quite so mutually helpful as the law of Nature demands. This is a phenomenon not exhibited by other natural events. Falling bodies, litmus paper, electric charges seem to act with exemplary if monotonous regularity. Perhaps that is why they are not concerned with ethics. No one asks as an ethical problem whether a man should walk on his hands or his feet; but some people wonder whether he should have one wife or many. Ethical problems seem to arise, in part at least, from the diversity of manners, from the necessity of choice, not from uniformity of manners and the impossibility of choice.

Zoological and anthropological ethics always leave one with the feeling that though they may show one the origin of our standards, they do not show one their importance. Moreover, they leave untouched those interests of human life which make it so much more complex than the life of animals. All the problems which arise from literary and artistic interests, all the problems which arise from a man's relation to himself, are untouched. No civilized man to speak of worries about the right and wrong of murder, theft, arson, mayhem, and rape. These are things which are taken for granted by everyone but children and their Sunday-school teachers. The problems of a civilized man are rather such things as the standard of workmanship, priority rights to ideas, faithfulness to the economic order, the breaking of contracts, keeping up with the Joneses, and the like. It is difficult to see what light the origin of these problems in simpler tribal adjustments can throw on their solution.

Kropotkin's book is, of course, a vestige of nineteenth-century thinking. It is not a volume in contemporary ethics. It should be judged strictly as an historical event. The nineteenth-century nat-

uralist seemed not only to believe that man was a lower animal, but that he should live like one also. That is a dubious belief to say the least. Yet if these remarks should discourage people from reading this book, it would be a pity. It is important to read it if only to see how it casts in high relief that pathetic faith in human beings and nature which sweetened the lives of our fathers. It seems unbelievable nowadays that anyone could have held Kropotkin's theory and struggled to commit it to writing. We have grown more sophisticated if less sublime.

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*The Collective Mind and Other Philosophical Papers.* HENRY BRADFORD SMITH. Columbus: R. G. Adams & Co. 1924. 84 pp.

Mr. Smith's writings have formerly been in the field of logic. With this little book the author enters the wider field of metaphysic. For good measure he includes an essay dealing with education and another dealing chiefly with social philosophy, though this last is intended as an illustration of his metaphysical definition of mind or spirit.

The book contains six essays: "A Spirit Which Includes the Community"; "The Collective Mind—An Illustration"; "Fact and Choice"; "Liberal Study and the Free Man"; "Mind in the Order of Mechanism"; and "Radical Idealism." These titles are meaty. They arouse anticipations. And while, indeed, Mr. Smith is sometimes suggestive, he is more often obscure and unsatisfactory because his thought, as given to us in this volume, is disconnected and fragmentary. Big ideas demand a big medium for their proper embodiment; not for nothing have great thinkers been systematic thinkers. Yet the author of the foregoing essays, dealing with imposing topics, has tried to finish them up in a book of 84 pages, 60 pages only of the 84 actually being used for the text. This includes part pages and the Prefatory Note!

Mr. Smith's first paper gives us his definition or description of mind: "Wherever there exists a conflict among points of view there is a mind." The further meaning of this ("What it is that constitutes a point of view and when it is that they conflict") is left "for the logician to unravel," the author contenting himself simply with several illustrations, not all of which illustrate. Now, as Mr. Smith says in the Prefatory Note of the whole volume, this definition is Hegelian in temper. And we should welcome a fresh interpretation of Hegel's view of mind, conflict, and other central concepts. But as it is with this discussion of mind, so it is with the rest of the