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Ethics: Origin and Development. By PRINCE KROPOTKIN. Authorised translation by LOUIS S. FRIEDLAND and JOSEPH R. PIROSHNIKOFF. New York, Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press, 1924.—pp. xvi, 349.

The life of Prince Kropotkin shows an interplay of two major interests, the scientific and the moral. He was quite early a student of French philosophy and history; then, ambitious to bring about political reforms he chose for himself a post in Siberia where circumstances seemed to favor such activity; finding his endeavors in that to be futile he devoted himself to science and made significant contributions to it—in the end, however, he could not keep out of politics, so that he identified himself, for the rest of his life, with the revolutionary movement of the past half-century in Russia and Europe. After forty years of exile, the penalty of his faith, he returned at last to his own land and people, to die there in privation and in an unhappy seclusion from the world.

These two great interests are revealed in his books. For instance, *Mutual Aid* was offered to the public as a contribution to biology and anthropology. Kropotkin aimed to establish the reality of social instincts and tendencies, as veritable factors in the evolution of animal life and human civilisation. But he was clearly animated in these studies by his very great concern for the prevalent attitude of his contemporaries toward social and political affairs. He regarded the popularisation of Darwin's thought by Huxley as too one-sided and misleading, especially so when it was applied to the relations of human beings with each other. He was revolted at the view of progress as an affair requiring unrelenting struggle of individuals and groups for supremacy over others, a war of each against all. And it was this that inspired him to gather the evidences of "mutual aid" in Nature and to argue that the social tendencies are not only valuable in themselves but also instrumental to the growth of intelligence, another incalculable power for survival, particularly for that of mankind.

The *Ethics*, which is now published posthumously, continues this argument. Equipped with animal instincts toward sociability and with an intelligence, man comes to cherish moral ideas, and he can live as well as he does only because he has these ideals. Without morality there can be no human survival. Civilisation will destroy mankind unless this ethical interest becomes as dominant in conduct as it is naturally fitted to be. Kropotkin shows that Darwin himself had recognised, in the *Descent of Man*, a natural origin of moral

conscience in the social instincts of animals. He traces, too, the development of this natural morality through the earliest phases of man's society until it takes the higher forms characteristic of human life at present, justice, and what is called "self-sacrifice." Here again he professes simply to be considering this origin and development as a scientific student; but he is no cool and detached scientist. He is an ardent fighter for a moral attitude, for something which he well knows to be only an ideal, something to be achieved by a faithful devotion. The first three chapters of this book are in every way characteristic, because they are filled with this reformer's spirit. They make us feel the urgent need of the day for a new ethics; they hold up for scrutiny the two dominating motives of our civilisation, the powerful sentiments of self-assertion and the less obvious, but more persistent, sentiments of morality; and then they prophesy that the moral sentiments shall come to a finer flowering, by the help of an inspired human will to live, in an order of life far better than the present.

Wherever Kropotkin speaks thus from his own insight and humane convictions he sweeps us along in his argument. But he begins, in the fifth chapter, a long history of ethical doctrines, to show how the various thinkers of the past have approached the point of view which he is now bringing into full definition. For this historical study he does not seem to have been well qualified. Most of his presentation, indeed, is avowedly taken from Wundt's *Ethik* and Jodl's *Geschichte der Ethik als Philosophische Wissenschaft*. Since he shared the realistic views of these authors there is nothing inappropriate in his following of their appreciations and criticisms. It is interesting, too, to see the realism of Aristotle, Grotius, Bacon, Bayle, Rousseau, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Adam Smith, Bentham, Proudhon, Comte, Feuerbach, and Darwin. But to treat these and other philosophers by reference solely to their contribution to this single doctrine is to distort their thoughts. In particular, Kropotkin's observations upon Plato and Kant seem to come from a mind which has not assimilated their ideas, or even understood what they were trying to do. Whenever they provide no answer to the particular questions Kropotkin has in mind they are criticised for ignoring aspects of the moral life which they actually did consider, but in their own way, and according to their own genius. So we read that "though Plato did not realise the importance of justice in the development of morality, he nevertheless presented justice in such a form that one really wonders why subsequent thinkers did not put it at

the basis of Ethics" (p. 94), Kropotkin will not see the meaning of the *Republic* because he is so wedded to the peculiar conception of justice which he wants to put forward in this book. And in like manner he does not let his mind move at all in sympathy with Kant's reflections on the intrinsic authority of the idea of "law" for human reason. He cannot understand the point of view, indeed, of any thinker whose ideals lead him to look beyond "this world." He values only what is strictly relevant to his own impassioned political beliefs. This is not the method of science or philosophy, but of propaganda. The reader who wants to make an historical study of ethics from the realistic position would do well to go back to the acknowledged sources of this portion of the book, to Paulsen, Wundt, and especially to Jodl.

But Kropotkin's own ideas are still important for contemporary thought, and they reappear constantly throughout these historical chapters. They are all organised about a central, governing conception, the idea of "equality." This is a thought that appeals to the revolutionary and the student of French letters and history. He sees in this idea an active force having a genuine rôle in the history of mankind, producing civilisation in the only true sense of the term, and therefore all the morality of human life. Men, like the animals, are drawn naturally into associations with each other, for security and enjoyment alike, and when they find themselves in society they become sensitive in a greater degree to their mutual feelings and doings. Thus sympathy develops. But sympathy is not a mere blind impulse. It is not just the simple tendency to feel as others in our neighborhood happen to be feeling. It requires something like an act of intelligence, for it means putting ourselves into the place of others, which carries with it the discernment that these others are really our "equals." So this most spontaneous of social phenomena is discovered to involve the working of a notion of equality in the minds of men. And then, when they find it necessary, because of their personal strivings for better life and because of their growing social proclivities, to set up special institutions in society for governing themselves in their mutual relations, they form the very definite idea of an equality of all men before the law, the concept of justice. They expect these political institutions to have an equitable care of all persons alike. Again and again in history, some institution is seen to justify itself by performing the function of "reëstablishing" an equality that had been threatened by the aggressiveness of certain individuals or groups of them. This equality is the guiding star of

human progress. But there is a further reach still of moral idealism, when men learn to regard others so completely as the equals of themselves as to be willing to give up something that is considered their own for the sake of others, doing more than what is just or right, being truly magnanimous or "self-sacrificing." Here is the supreme witness of the natural appeal this idea of equality makes to our human intelligence.

Furthermore, even when men fail, on the proper occasions, to achieve such justice or fine generosity, they will still acknowledge in their feelings the authority of this ideal. They may ignore through self-interest what is "right", but they are kept mindful of the existence of other persons by their social sentiments and habits, and consequently they must face, in thought at least, the "inequality" of their conduct or intentions. Thus they are bound to feel qualms and remorse of conscience. They recognise a moral obligation.

This concept of equality is fascinating to Kropotkin. It seems to be as revealing to him as it was to Rousseau. And by holding it so persistently in view he has been able to make a significant addition to the naturalistic ethics that hails from Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Adam Smith, Mill, and Darwin. They had shown the reality of the moral *sentiments*, natural feelings of approval or disapproval over attitudes and acts that affect men for better or worse, feelings which will also have some practical influence upon behavior just because they are so natural or impulsive in character. To this British empiricism Kropotkin brings the French doctrine of a natural equality of men. Whenever the mind makes a judgment of the morality of a person or a deed, it employs an intellectual criterion, the idea of equity. This is what determines the estimate of right, justice or goodness, and not the mere feelings of pleasure or displeasure that accompany the intelligence in its judgment. This idea is implicit even in human sympathy. It becomes clearer and clearer as a factor in the moral judgment as mankind is seen to advance from the fellowship of sympathy to that of justice and magnanimity. Kropotkin has here presented an ethics of some originality and importance.

Yet Kropotkin is closer to the traditional position of idealism than he seems to have realised in the materials of the present book. He plainly conceives the idea of equality to be a *criterion* by which the mind is determined in its forming of moral judgments. The historical fact that this sense of equity developed from a condition of human life wherein only social instincts governed behavior will in no way account for the use of the idea as a principle. Those instincts operated

to bring the individuals into ever closer intimacy with each other and to make them take more frequent cognisance of each other, but this does not reveal to us how the persons know each other as persons, or why they regard each other as equals. The idea of their equality seems to have become a norm for them with an authority all its own, independent of its social origins. It is like the injunction of Christianity that we must hold all souls equal in the eyes of God. It seems to repeat Kant's dictum that every man is an end in himself and never a means to an end; or, in other words, that morality consists in acting from the idea of "law," acting so that we never make an exception in favor of ourselves. In fact, there seems to be no difference whatsoever between this idea of equality and that of law. So it ill becomes Kropotkin to make such short shrift of Kant's confession that he cannot explain why it is the idea of law has such authority for the reason of man. For he cannot do any better himself, with respect to his concept of equality. He has not explained the claim we acknowledge in acting equitably, when he points to the background of social tendencies, for these have only led man into the situation where he takes it into his head to demand an equality. Why is there such a will for equality? The only answer possible is to point to the fact of moral obligation and to the events in the history of human civilisation when men seem to have acted from a determination to have such equality at any cost. For Kropotkin, as for Kant, the explanation is simply that the idea of equity or of law has, for some unknown reason, an intrinsic recommendation to the mature intelligence of human beings.

Whatever tendency toward philosophic idealism there is in this ethics is thwarted, however, by an unhappy animus in Kropotkin against anything that refers to the supernatural. Any trace of theological meanings arouses his opposition and dogmatic condemnation. He refuses to wonder with Plato and Kant at veritable marvels. That man should interest himself in law or equality as such is nothing to warrant dreams of anything beyond our familiar world, and perhaps beyond our reason itself. Kropotkin contents himself with letting his eye range backward over the rise of man from his animal existence; the great idealists had to run forward in thought to a prospect beyond anything on this mere earth in space and time. This consummation of our human life in something which they call the "divine" is the meaning for them of the fact of moral obligation. And it is not without its influence upon the practical conduct of mankind. It gives inspiration to the struggle to be moral. And Kropotkin himself

recognises the need of something like this when he criticises the ethical doctrines of the nineteenth century for their lack of inspiring poesy. He wants people to be profoundly moved to the task of redeeming themselves from the brutality and stupidity of their competitive civilisation today, but he will not let them reflect upon the kind of existence they would enjoy were that perfect equality of mankind ever realised. He seems to fear for men when they begin to dream of eternity. And thus he wantonly cuts off the vision of the divine or supernatural, and banishes from their sight the illuminating disclosures and professions of religion.

It is difficult to believe that so imaginative a thinker as Kropotkin did not leave some words of later wisdom on the import of man's will to have this equality of persons. The translators mention the possibility of another book of essays composed of some material which the author himself had intended to use in publishing the *Ethics*. It is to be hoped that they will be able to produce this work and make it as interesting and readable as the present book.

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