Section Seven

JACOB GOULD SCHURMAN
(1854-1942)
J.G. Schurman’s book *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, is a marvellously lucid account of contemporary events by a man who knew Europe well (he had studied at London, Edinburgh and Heidelberg) and was on the spot as American ambassador to Greece, 1912-13. It begins:

> The expulsion of the Turks from Europe was long ago written in the book of fate. There was nothing uncertain about it except the date and the agency of destiny.¹

Dare we begin an essay on science and religion with a quote from a book about political history? My answer is that this quote is typical of the thought of Jacob Gould Schurman on precisely those two issues. It promises us *science*: it will be empirical and historical science, and it will be careful, observant, detailed and up-to-date. It makes the promise in the language of *religion*: it is language in terms of which Schurman understood himself, too, for he was one of the agents of destiny.

It is true that his views of the Balkan wars were Euro-centric and Christian. he treats the Turkish presence in Eastern Europe (reaching the gates of Vienna in 1526, and still threatening Austria as late as 1763) as “purely military. They did nothing for their subjects, whom they treated with contempt, and they wanted nothing from them but tribute and plunder” (*Wars*, p.6). The expulsion of the Muslims from Christian Europe he regarded as inevitable for reasons of superiority of the European religion and civilization. He is, nonetheless, very careful to distinguish the various threads of national feeling — the racial types, the languages, territorial histories, religions, and political customs — which complicated the Balkan situation². The penultimate sentence of the book perfectly captures Schurman’s sensibilities: “For as an American I sympathize with the aspirations of all struggling nationalities to be free and independent” (*Wars*, p.131).
A reader of the sentence just quoted, however, may find it odd that it is the work of a Prince Edward Islander, educated there and in Nova Scotia (at Acadia, the Baptist university), before he left for study in Britain. Schurman’s sympathies, however, clearly began as Canadian ones.

Schurman returned to the Maritimes to lecture first at Acadia, then at Dalhousie University. The latter made him inaugural holder of the George Munro chair in English in 1882, but he married Barbara Munro in 1884, and soon left for Cornell University in the United States. He was hired there as Sage Professor and Head of the Philosophy Department in 1885, and by 1892 was Cornell’s President.

Shortly after moving to the U.S.A., Schurman wrote an article, “The Manifest Destiny of Canada,” which appeared in 1889 in The Forum (fore-runner of The Canadian Forum). In it he argues that it is with good reason that “Canadians prefer their own political institutions to those of their neighbours” (p. 10). He accuses the United States of treating us like a colony, of visiting “upon Canada the ancient sin of England” (p. 16). His main theme is that the “destiny of Canada will be settled by the people of Canada. For them there is no manifest destiny but what they themselves decree” (p. 2).

This theme is clearly echoed in the citation about the Balkans. Now if this began as a Canadian political perspective, it should not surprise us if it ran into opposition among our southern neighbours. That is just what did happen. During his tenure at Cornell, Schurman was appointed President of the Philippines Commission. (The United States of America had just won the Spanish American War. The battle of Manila Bay, in 1898, left them with some responsibility for the Philippines, and the commission was to advise on what to do.) Schurman fought a losing battle against those Americans who had developed ambitions to have an empire of their own. Armour and Trott tell the story well; essentially, Schurman failed to convince successive American governments (he campaigned on this issue for decades) that the Philippines ought to govern themselves. The irony is fresh, as we have very recently witnessed further convulsions in the saga of American involvement in that nation. It is evident that Schurman’s thought was permanently coloured by his early Canadian conviction that self-determination is important even for smaller national entities.

The Ethical Import of Darwinism

Darwinism... is manifestly consistent with any philosophy, empirical or rational, spiritualistic or materialistic, theistic or atheistic.6

The political principle of national autonomy is deeply characteristic of Schurman’s though. It would not be surprising, then, were it to show up in his
thought about science and religion. It seems to do just that. The scientific work of his age — and Darwin's is just the most interesting of many examples — constitutes a series of new domains, but theology and metaphysics constitute other domains. It would be a kind of imperialism if philosophy were to dictate to scientists whether evolutionary theory could be true or not. Similarly, it would be a kind of imperialism if the establishment of Darwinism in biology were to dictate to theology what its laws were to be.

Schurman's four philosophical books were published between 1881 and 1896, long before The Balkan Wars, but the combination of scientific and religious concerns dominates these two works too. Indeed it was the theme of his doctoral research at the University of Edinburgh. Of all his philosophical works, the most characteristic is The Ethical Import of Darwinism. We shall return to it shortly.

In 1890, Belief in God, his Winkley lectures at Andover Theological Seminary, was published. This may be thought of as the first book which Schurman conceived in and for the United States. It is no mere repetition of the themes of his early works, but extends the consideration of contemporary sciences to new areas. He is au courant with the latest Biblical scholarship, he invokes the new Freudian accounts of religious beliefs and the results of German laboratory experiments in perception. Always, though, his theme remains constant. The new discoveries do not contradict the truths of religion. We may discover, however, that Moses could not have been the author of all five of the “Books of Moses”; the Pentateuch, nonetheless, remains what it always was, the expression of “the ever-deepening religious... insight of the Jews, ...part of a religious development or revelation that found its culminating expression in the benign miracle of history, the truth and life which became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.”

In some circles, such views are still considered radical, secularizing humanism, yet we must acknowledge that Schurman is writing as a Christian. How can this be sustained? The sciences are subject to development and all human knowledge is a product of historical acquisition and testing. Religions evolve and human morality, too, has a history. Must we not suspect that theology has been taken right out from under us? This question is most directly addressed in Schurman’s last philosophical book, Agnosticism and Religion. If knowledge is to be possible at all, he argues, there must be more than facts about the material universe which can be known. The sciences presuppose that there is order in the universe. If there is order, then there is a prius of all knowledge, a principle which is logically prior to any explanation and any understanding. This prius is a unifying principle and an eternal one, for if there are only divergent and temporary principles of order then randomness usurps the ultimate foundations, and knowledge is not really possible at all. It can be seen, then, that in the end Schurman maintains that belief in a divine first principle is justified, in spite of the 19th century pressures to believe that advances in the natural sciences had rendered such belief superfluous or impossible. The chapter which we have selected to represent Schurman’s
work is taken from *The Ethical Import of Darwinism*. This book stands at the threshold of his transition to a figure in American history. It received the praise of William James and at the same time looks back to the preoccupations of Schurman's earliest studies, and looks forward to the later theological writings. Ours is the fourth of six chapters.

Chapter Four is the centre piece of the book, so it requires careful placing. What precedes it is an account of Darwin's theory of biological evolution, together with an assessment of its philosophical implications for science and theology. What follows it are a chapter about Darwin's own ethical speculations, and a chapter about the applications of his work to human morality, by some contemporary anthropologists. Chapter Four, itself, deals with the proper understanding of the relation between ethics and evolutionary theory.

I shall say something about each of these three parts of the book, beginning at the end.

### The Import: Ethical Facts

The man, in order to marry, had to move to the *craal* of his wife, promise constantly to provide the mother-in-law with wood, never undertake service elsewhere without her consent, and, in case of separation, leave all the children as the property of the wife.  

Darwin thought that there were direct implications of his biological results for our understanding of the human species, and particularly for one of the attributes which sets us apart from the other animals, our moral consciousness. He postulated the origins of human conscience in the combination of sociability (which 'lower' animals already exemplify) and intelligence (which humans have received in the normal course of evolution). Our having been selected for these two attributes, Darwin was led to conclude, is sufficient to explain our moral consciences. Schurman argues that evolutionary theory need not, and cannot, provide such an account. It need not, for it offers no similar account of human intelligence. That simply "appeared," and evolutionary theory merely explains why it had been preserved. Schurman is prepared to treat conscience in the same way. It cannot, for reasons which appear shortly, in our discussion of chapter 4.

The impact of evolutionary biology on ethics is indirect. It does not tell us what ought to be — it does not provide us with a conscience to do the job, either — but it does tell us a great deal about how to study human affairs. In his final chapter, Schurman considers contemporary anthropologists who think that the evolution of human affairs proves the completely relative...
nature of human values. Societies had recently been discovered in which chastity was a virtue, and others in which it was not. There were societies in which men headed families, and societies in which women did. There were systems in which monogamy was practised, and others in which sexual relationships were more imaginative. These discoveries were popularly thought to threaten the belief that some things are right and others are wrong. Schurman found these matters fascinating, and thought them of great importance in the public reception of evolution. He claims that these anthropologists are not replacing moral philosophy, but are providing tools which can help moral philosophers to work properly. What moral philosophy ought to do is use the historical method which is so fruitful elsewhere. Ethical facts, as Schurman calls them, should be observed and classified as though they were biological phenomena.

This approach to philosophical issues is sometimes called “naturalizing” them. In moral philosophy, naturalizing the subject consists in setting aside attempts to discover by speculation or analysis what is right and what is wrong, and looking to see what people do in fact consider right and wrong. This scientific work will, he argues, throw light on the fundamental problem of ethics, the nature of moral law.

It will best illustrate what he means if I quote his conclusions at some length:

[Our domestic morality] is despoiled of its absoluteness when the discovery is made that our own form of marriage is but one of several competing types, ...and that chastity and fidelity are so far from universal that many peoples have no conception of them, and when they have appeared they seem to have grown out of rights in women as property — adultery in Madagascar, e.g., having the same punishment as theft — and are consequently never, or seldom, required of savage men. The rights, duties, virtues, and sentiments associated with our idea of the family Cannot, therefore, be considered a part of the content of the moral law universal.

This seems to me a result of considerable importance for moral philosophy. And it is a result that cannot be gainsaid by any school, since it is not a speculation, not even an inference, but an undeniable statement of actual facts. (Darwinism, pp.251-2).

All of this “history of ethical facts” has an important place in our understanding of Schurman’s book. His first chapter makes clear that his general topic is the relation between science and ethics. He argued there that ethics had traditionally been a form of individual or philosophical speculation, an attempt to find eternal moral truths through the application of pure reason; on the other hand there are modern attempts to make ethics a corollary of natural science, and they, too, he finds wanting. His assessment is that human morality is a domain of its own, which deserves objective historical study. This will not preclude philosophizing, nor will it simply be a propaedeutic to it. It will be a part of moral philosophy, throwing light upon the nature of the moral law.
Still, there is the challenge of Darwin. Has not the science of evolutionary biology settled precisely the questions about which Schurman requests patience and historical research? Schurman’s book should be seen as the long answer to this question. He thinks that in Darwin’s own thinking, “historical ethics was forced into the service of a foregone conclusion,” and that the work will not be properly done “as long as scientists are convinced of the finality of the ethical science... of Darwin” (Darwinism, pp.37-8). Accordingly, he must explain what Darwinism is, and how it is incompetent to settle ethical questions.

**Darwinism: Science and Theology**

It is a ‘mean device for philosophers thus to crib causation by hairs’ breadths, to put it out at compound interest through all time, and then disown the debt.”

Evolutionary biology is, of course, a scientific study which is continually being challenged and refined. What we call its ethical import has been re-popularized in recent years by “socio-biologist.” We cannot sketch all of this in a short essay, but we can say something about how it began.

What is evolution? In its simplest form, a belief in evolution is a belief that all things are constantly changing. With typical wisdom, Schurman reminds us that it is a belief with a rich pedigree; he cites the “legends of our Alquonquin Indians” (Darwinism, p.45), as well as pre-Socratic philosophers. The general view that the universe is constantly evolving supports the particular view that the forms of plant and animal life are also undergoing evolution. This is the idea of biological evolution; this idea also preceded Darwin. The French naturalist, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, was already well-known for the view that living things are modified by their circumstances, by their habits and by breeding. Many biologists in the first half of the nineteenth century thought that species, themselves, were susceptible to evolution; simpler species might have given rise to varied and more sophisticated species. But if all of these ideas preceded Darwin, why is he so renowned?

Schurman’s reply is masterful. He begins with well-known examples of selective breeding. Humans, over the generations, have improved the breeds of domesticated animals, have carefully selected the parents so that their offspring will be faster, or smaller, or give more milk, or be hardier in cold climates. This process of artificial selection takes for granted that the characteristics of plants and animals can be modified. What Darwin offered, was a demonstration of the mechanism by which such modifications could take place without human intervention. He called it natural selection.
The mechanism of natural selection is Darwin’s explanation of the origin of species, of how, for instance, “from one ancestral species there could have descended, in the course of thousands upon thousands of generations, four species so distinct as the horse, the ass, the quagga and the zebra” (Darwinism, p. 54). The mechanism depends on several premises. First, there is abundance. Plants and animals produce many more seeds, eggs or offspring than are needed. An appalling amount of death results, and the survivors who live and reproduce are a small selection from among the many who began the struggle to live. Second, there is variation. There are innumerable small but significant differences between the organisms produced. Now if the ones which survived were to be chosen at random, these variations would make no difference in the long run. But there is a third premise, that some variations are advantageous to a being in its struggle to live, while others are disadvantages. Now it is clear how nature “selects.” (“Selects” is, of course, a metaphor; nature does not deliberately make choices.)

Nature selects because those differences which are advantageous help an organism to survive. The result is the famous “survival of the fittest.” There are many sources of evidence which supports a theory of biological evolution. Palaeontology studies fossil records of species which have died out, side by side with remains of species which have survived. This is our best source of information about the ‘history’ of living things on our planet. There is the evidence of embryology: when different species go through very similar stages in their early development it is natural to think that the species are related. Such considerations also arise from the study of comparative anatomy: similarities of structure may suggest that one species is a forerunner of the other, or that they have common ancestry. We have already cited the evidence of artificial selection. Finally, there is much to be concluded from comparisons of species persisting in isolation: the Galapagos Islands provided Darwin with evidence that species differ in different locales, as though they had adapted to local conditions.

From all of these sources the evidence for Darwin’s theory is still much debated. Even in his own day, Malthus had believed that artificial selection could produce sheep with short legs, but could never produce sheep with no legs at all, or which had become goats.14 Darwin, however, maintained that variation was potentially unlimited. More specific disputes arose, especially in genetics. This science was scarcely born in Darwin’s day, and has continued to be a source of objections, as well as support, for his hypothesis. No geneticist will agree, for instance, that variations within species are random; it is the very point of that science to explain what determines the characteristics which are inherited, how the genes of the parents are separated and recombined, for instance, to constitute the genetic inheritance of the offspring. As T.A.Gouge puts it: “There can be no doubt that the major limitation in Darwin’s theory was due to his lack of knowledge concerning the factors and laws of heredity.”15 Schurman was already quite aware of this limitation. “The cause of this evolutionary movement in the history of organisms has not
yet been established; though it is probable Darwin’s natural selection is a part of the cause.” (Darwinism, p.71)

Darwin’s importance, then, stems not from his inventing the whole of evolutionary theory, nor from his definitive solution to the problem of how species change. Rather, his theory of natural selection, that advantageous variations tend to be preserved, brings together the various elements of biological evolution and completes them with a very general, “naturalized” account of the mechanism responsible, and thus sets the agenda for further scientific investigation.

To this admirably told story, Schurman adds Chapter 3. He “assumes for the sake of argument” that Darwin’s theory is the whole truth, and considers the metaphysical implications of it. His view is that the new science’s metaphors ("selection") too often get taken literally, that capital letters ("Nature") personify and give a false sense of permanence. As a result, enthusiasts fail to realize that survival of the fittest “does not explain the arrival of the fittest,” as Schurman epigrammatically puts it. (Darwinism, p.78) Nor does it explain how advantages, once they have arrived, are passed on. The enthusiasts were willing to conclude that Darwin had shown that everything can be accounted for on mechanical and utilitarian principles. But the arrival of new characteristics cannot be totally fortuitous, or they would not be genetically reproducible. Schurman, opposing the metaphysics of design and teleology to the element of fortuitousness in mechanistic metaphysics, says, “there is no scientific warrant for this philosophy of chance” (Darwinism, p.112).

It is worth noting that this is not a simple case of denying that values can be derived from facts. As we showed in an earlier section, Schurman defends the view that certain facts about human societies do have consequences for the moral law. Nonetheless, he insists that a proper understanding of Darwinism as science shows that it does not have the sort of implications about God or about purpose that it was widely taken to have.

**Darwinism and the Foundations of Morals**

No one influenced by the ethics of the school of Hume and Bentham would have ventured to interpret the evolution of life as a continuous realization of utilities.16

We come now to the most ingenious chapter of *The Ethical Import of Darwinism*. It is set in a book which considers the fate of moral philosophy now that it is confronted by a new scientific theory; the theory has been explained, its claim to dictate a metaphysical position has been challenged, and later there will be recommendations about the proper way to make the study of ethics scientific. Chapter Four nonetheless is lambent; it is sufficiently self-
tained that it is a joy to read on its own. Schurman's first ingenuity is the claim that Darwinian biology contains a principle of utility, a principle which it borrowed from the contemporary ethical theory of Jeremy Bentham and other Utilitarians. His first accusation is that it is circular to accept the utilitarian principles from one's social context, make them the central concepts in one's biology, and then claim that the biology explains why the original moral principles are true. His second is that although human morality may be useful to us, may be selected for preservation by the evolutionary process, it need not be the utilitarian ethics which get selected.

Special credit is given to John Stuart Mill's attempt to derive even non-utilitarian moral principles (absolute values, disinterestedness, obligation) from the process of evolution. Subtle uses of commercial metaphor in this exposition warn us of the deep connection between utilitarian ethics and the capitalist economy in which it flourished. The key manoeuvre is a distinction between something's being useful, and its existing only to the extent that it is useful. Even if goodness is an end in itself, and not just valued because of its useful consequences, "it still remains true that honesty is the best policy, that honest acts are the most advantageous acts, and that they will accordingly be preserved through natural selection in the struggle for existence" (Darwinism, p. 134). A virtue may be useful, in other words, without its usefulness being its essence.

There are three hidden bases on which the "evolutionary ethics" rests, according to Schurman. The first is the notion, already criticized, that if morality gives us humans an evolutionary advantage, and is therefore preserved by the forces of evolution, it somehow follows that that morality ought to have usefulness as its central moral principle. The second false premise is that morality can exist without judgements of absolute value. Not only does Schurman think that one can be both Darwinian (in biology) and Platonist (in ethics), he holds a stronger thesis: that those who maintain that something is only valuable relative to some consequence have failed to recognize something which cannot be eradicated from human morality. A great deal of philosophical ingenuity has been expended over centuries attempting to show what Schurman puts in a sentence: "if man be merely a pleasure seeking animal, you but mock him when you enjoin him to promote the happiness of others" (Darwinism, p. 137). The third false presumption is that a mechanical process could generate what requires intelligence and freedom. There is no original argument, here, but Schurman again insists that if these qualities do not exist in our biological predecessors, then evolution will not provide them. Evolution is only a process which selects for preservation what has already been provided.

The central conclusion of this central chapter is that there are features of human moral life (our sense of absolute worthfulness, our sense of duty) which cannot be accounted for by the principles of evolutionary biology. These convictions are defended without compromising his enthusiastic support for the progressive contributions of the sciences, themselves. Although
the human predicament has changed dramatically in the ensuing century, these issues still command the attention of moral philosophers, and Schurman’s work still serves to focus them for us.

Schurman was honoured in his time by his American fellow citizens. He received honorary doctorates, for instance, from Harvard and Yale, from Dartmouth and Columbia. The University of Edinburgh also honoured him. He deserves more recognition from Canadians. He belongs among those Victorians who sought to combine faith and science to make the world a better place. This is clear not only in his politics but also in his university life; he was disappointed that Dalhousie of his day had abandoned the principles of religious tolerance on which it had been founded, and he worked to make a Cornell education of practical value for a wide diversity of students. He wrote, too, with a minimum of scholarly apparatus, holding that “the first duty of any philosophical writer is to make himself generally intelligible.”

Reading him, then, ought to pleasantly relocate us in the moral and intellectual atmosphere of an important part of our history. It ought, too, to give us rigorous exercise in thinking about the most profound implications of our theories about biological nature. In this Schurman is in another sort of good company, for his are among the early responses to Darwin’s work by thoughtful philosophers.

Here I leave, and entrust you to the prose of Jacob Gould Schurman.

Notes

2. See especially his account of racial propaganda, facts and fallacies in the claims of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Romania to Central Macedonia (pp.79-91). Each group had claims to some of the local population, and had established schools, churches, etc. aimed at “nationalizing” the Macedonians.
3. George Munro was a great benefactor of Dalhousie University. He was a Nova Scotian who made his fortune in New York by publishing inexpensive editions of popular novels. He was indirectly responsible, too, for American copyright legislation, which was passed to protect the rights of other publishers in the works which Munro was so profitably republishing. In later American political life, Schurman was a vigorous opponent of such government interference in business freedom as anti-combines legislation. I do not know what he thought about copyright laws.
5. Ibid., pp.211-215.
Scribner's Sons, 1887), p.97. (I shall refer to this work as Darwinism).

7. Schurman received the D.Sc. in 1878. This research resulted in his first book, Kantian Ethics and the Ethics of Evolution (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881).

8. Jacob Gould Schurman, Belief in God: Its Origins, Nature and Basis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 18man is citing Livingston, who described this case of mother-kinship, and the husband settling with the wife's family. These were the customs of an isolated tribe not far from Zululand.

13. Darwinism, p.98. This “happy observation” Schurman attributes to Dr. James Martineau. It is a perspicacious commercial metaphor. R.C. Lewontin has pointed out that Darwin was an active player of the stock market; there is 6etaphor here, too, of the differential survival of the advantaged (New York Review of Books, Oct. 10, 1985, p.20). There is an interesting chapter to be written on capitalism and Darwin’s thought.

14. For a popular account of these debates, see Norman MacBeth, Darwin Retried: An Appeal to Reason (New York: Dell, 1973). The present example is discussed on p.30. Schurman takes clear note of the issue, quoting the reservation of Darwin’s friend and defender, T.H. Huxley, that “it remains to be seen how far natural selection suffices for the production of species.” (Darwinism, p.71).

15. T.A. Goudge, The Ascent of Life (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p.21. Goudge, a major figure in the recent revival of philosophical interest in evolutionary theory, is a fellow Maritime Canadian. He does not make 19th century citations, however, and so gives us no sense of a tradition of important Canadian contributions to the subject.


17. See, for instance, a study of such figures by Ramsay Cook, The Regenerators (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

18. Darwinism, preface, x. He is proud to be writing in the language of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, which, as they use it, is “in all three alike plain, transparent and unmistakable.”

The Ethical Import of Darwinism

Jacob Gould Schurman

It is important to fix accurately in mind what the subject of the present chapter is. With Darwin's own ethical views and speculations we have now nothing to do, though the exposition and examination them (both in themselves and in relation to his natural science) must form the topic of a later chapter. Just at present, however, our inquiry is of a more general character. We want to know whether, the Darwinian doctrine of evolution being assumed, it entails any particular theory of morals. Or, since natural selection is the essence of the scientific achievement of Darwin, we have simply to ask, Does natural selection involve or indicate a definite type of ethics, so that acceptance of the one logically necessitates acceptance of the other? This question, it is obvious, is not identical with an inquiry into Darwin's own moral system which, though dependent upon some philosophical principle, may be absolutely disconnected with the hypotheses of biology. Leaving Darwin the moralist, therefore wholly aside, we would fain settle whether Darwin the naturalist, in establishing the function of natural selection, thereby predetermined ethics to a particular form or invested its phenomena with a new cast of thought. And this point can be resolved only by ignoring the uncritical assumptions of the school and undertaking afresh an independent consideration of the facts and analysis of the notions which the Darwin theory involves.

That theory, as already expounded, consists essentially of two moments — the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest. The former connects it historically and logically with Malthusianism, and may be considered as an application of the famous doctrine of population to the whole organic world. That is to say, the struggle for life follows inevitably from the enormous increase of living beings beyond the means of subsistence, as first pointed out in the case of man by Malthus. This debt to the national political economy Darwin has openly acknowledged. But it has not been observed that the other moment of his theory — the issue of the struggle — was conditioned by a

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conception borrowed from the national ethics. He remembered distinctly, as he wrote Haeckel, how on reading Malthus's "Essay on Population" the thought of a universal struggle for existence first flashed upon his mind. But he could not remember, so early, so gradual, so subtly pervasive is the entrance of ethical ideas, when he had become inoculated with the national utilitarianism. Yet it can scarcely be doubted that it was from this source he extracted the notion of utility as determinator of the issue of the combat for existence. No one uninfluenced by the ethics of the school of Hume and Bentham would have ventured to interpret the evolution of life as a continuous realization of utilities. And yet the survival of the fittest, by which, according to Darwin, development is effected, just means the preservation of the most useful modifications of structure or habit. "Any being, if it vary, however slightly, in any manner profitable to itself," says Darwin, "will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected." Or, in other words, before the operation of natural selection there must be a utility of some kind on which it acts. What is useful is preserved, what is harmful is destroyed. "Nature cares nothing for appearances, except in so far as they may be useful to any being." Thus, as you dig down to the roots of existence, you find it draws its vital sap from utility. "Natural selection acts solely by and for the good of each." It may "produce structures" for the direct injury of other species, but never for their exclusive advantage. With certain exceptions that can be explained, the structure of every living creature as well as every detail of that structure "either now is, or was formerly, of some direct or indirect use to its possessor." Similarly, the instinct of each species is useful for that species, and has never been produced for the exclusive benefit of another species. Could these propositions be refuted, "it would," says Darwin, "annihilate my theory," for structures and instincts could not in that case be the product of natural selection. The survival of the fittest implies an antecedent utility — a modification advantageous to the individual or, it may be, to the community of which it is a member, but never directly and exclusively to others beyond this pale. Natural selection rests upon a biological utilitarianism, which may be egoistic or communistic, but which cannot be universalistic.

Let us now apply this doctrine to man, with the object of discovering its bearing upon morals. We have, then, to admit that the human species has originated and developed to its present stage through the preservation and accumulation of a number of useful modifications which, whether of individual or social benefit, gave our semi-human, semi-brutal ancestors an advantage over other animals in the struggle for life. Of these modifications, one of the most obvious is an erect attitude. This peculiarity, which the orang, the gorilla, and the gibbon seem now on the way to acquiring, has manifest advantages. It enabled simian man, not only to hurl missiles at his enemies without forfeiting the power of simultaneous locomotion, but also to break and dress stones for definite purposes, thus beginning the career of that tool-using animal whose skill and ingenuity have changed the face of his
physical environment. But this career, even in its commencement, would have been impossible without the emergence of a still more important factor in the development. Mind is infinitely more useful than mere bodily structure; and it is not necessary to deny intelligence to the lower animals when we asset that the human mind is the most colossal and revolutionary of all the modifications any species has undergone. Such an enormous advantage would be preserved and perpetuated by natural selection. For it enables man to do at once what nature takes ages to accomplish for the other animals; it enables him to adapt himself to his environment without change in bodily structure and organization. Imagine a group of carnivorus animals suddenly exposed to a severer climate and obliged to capture more powerful prey; only those with the warmest natural clothing and strongest claws and teeth could manage to survive; and as the battle with their evil star grew fiercer, the group, if not altogether exterminated, must languish through the long course of aeons until their modifying organs and structures had become completely adapted to the new requirements through the play of natural selection. But the mental powers of man render him, in similar circumstances, independent of nature. He makes thicker clothing, and he fashions sharper weapons or constructs more cunning pitfalls. Simple as these performances seem, how infinitely advantageous they must have been in the struggle for life. When the intelligence which made them possible first appeared upon the scene, it effected "a revolution which [to quote the language of Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace] in all the previous ages of the earth’s history had no parallel, for a being had arisen who was no longer necessarily subject to change with the changing universe."

Simultaneous with this revolution was another, scarcely less significant, due to the appearance and operation of the moral sentiments. The moral being lives for others as well as for himself. But the lower animals are at best gregarious, not social; they lead a life of individual isolation and self-dependence. Each is alone, in the battle for life, exposed to the whole force of the combat. The sick and the feeble fall victims to beasts of prey or die of starvation. There is no division of labor to relieve the one from directly procuring its own food, no mutual assistance to succor the other till health and vigor are restored. Accordingly, any group of animals endowed with the least tincture of sociality and sympathy would, through the internal union and strength which these qualities evoke, have a decided advantage over other groups not thus endowed. A tribe animated by these instincts contains in itself a principle of survival of scarcely less efficacy than the mental faculties themselves. If these check the action of natural selection on the body, and transfer it to the sphere of intelligence, the social and sympathetic feelings screen the individual and oppose to the play of natural selection the solid framework of a united and strengthened society. But sympathy and sociality imply fidelity, trustworthiness, truthfulness, obedience, and the like. And as these are useful in the struggle for life — being, in fact, means of social survival — not less useful are the other virtues which form the complex tissue
of our morality. Hence it follows that the moral sentiments, as motors tending to the preservation of the tribe, must, like the mental faculties, be self-preserving and self-accumulating under the utilitarian sway of natural selection.

This view of the development of the simian quadruped into the moral person by means of natural selection seems to confirm the general impression that utilitarian ethics is the necessary implicate of Darwinian biology. We began by remarking that the biological theory borrowed the notion of utility from empirical morals; but we must now confess the loan has been so successfully invested that there is some ground for believing the proceeds suffice, not only to wipe out the obligation, but even to make ethics debtor to biology. In demonstrating the evolution of plants and animals, organs and functions, instincts and intelligence and conscience, through the preservation and accumulation of modifications useful for survival in the struggle for life, biology has led up to an ethical theory which places the governing principle of human conduct in utility; since, on its showing, utility has generated that conduct as well as the life and the species in which it is manifested. In the war of nature, nothing seems inviolate except what is useful. The stone which the intuitive moralists despised has become the head of the corner. In the evolutiono-utilitarian theory of morals, the process which nature has blindly followed in the development of life comes to a consciousness of itself, and is recognized as the norm of human conduct. "The ideal goal to the natural evolution of conduct is," according to Mr. Spencer, "the ideal standard of conduct ethically considered." Moral life is held to consist in harmonious adaptation to that social tissue whose production through natural selection was a prime condition of the origin of a species of moral beings. Moral rules are regarded as the expression of those social adaptations which, on the whole, and after infinite gropings, proved most serviceable in the preservation of groups of human animals in the struggle for existence. They are the picked-up clothes which warmed and protected a naked social body and enabled it to vanquish all its rivals. Little wonder if, after the conflict, they have become a feitch to the victors — to all but the few who have tracked their fossil history!

Thus, then, this philosophy of human conduct has been merged in the wider philosophy of life. But the new utilitarianism wears an aspect somewhat unlike the old. They hold, indeed, the same fundamental position in regard to opposing theories; but as between themselves there is an obvious contrast. For, though the note of utility is as clear in the "Origin of Species" as in the "Principles of Morals and Legislation," there it means power-giving, here pleasure-giving; so that, far from running into each other, Darwinism and Benthanism might take their places respectively under those opposing categories of activity and pleasure into which Schleiermacher resolved every difference of ethical systems.

Of course, if it could be shown that what brings pleasure is identical with what gives power to survive — what is serviceable in the struggle for life — the
case would be changed, and the last residuum of the old utilitarianism would have been assimilated by the new. But for this identification Darwinian biology supplies no material. And though it has been speculatively attempted in Mr. Herbert Spencer’s elaboration of Professor Bain’s suggestion that pleasure is accompanied by an increase of some or all of the vital functions, his arguments are not so much deductions from evolutionary science as postulates of a foregone psychological and ethical hedonism. Even, however, where hedonism is theoretically held to, it is no longer the real vital moment of evolutiono-utilitarianism. Instead of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, you have another standard; and morality, as with Mr. Leslie Stephen, is defined as “the means of social vitality,” “the conditions of social welfare,” “the sum of the preservative instincts of a society.” In the last phase of its development, as in the earlier, utilitarianism retains the conception of morality as something relative, a means to an end beyond itself, and as a product of physical or psychological compulsion rather than the self-imposed law of a free moral agent. It has forfeited none of the essential attributes of a system of utility. But, in spite of the protests of its leading advocates, it is casting the slough of pleasure, which seemed a vital part of its earlier life. It still holds that the moral is identical with the useful, though when you ask, “Useful for what?” the answer is no longer “For pleasure,” but “For preservation” — i.e., for social vitality, for the well-being of the community. Of those pleasures and pains in which Mill found the sole motive of conduct, as well as the criterion and the sanction of morality, Darwin knows nothing; but, these apart, the essence of utilitarianism and the essence of Darwinism, the principle of utility and the principle of natural selection, have such strong elective affinities that to effect their combination nothing was required but to bring them together. Their union establishes the high-water mark of contemporary utilitarianism.

The transformation has given scientific completeness to utilitarianism. In the hands of Benthan, even, the phenomena of morals were held apart from all other phenomena, but through the common notion of natural selection they have been colligated with the facts of biology; and from the enlarged horizon a gain is expected similar to that which came to the sciences of heat, light, and electricity when they were recognized as merely different applications of the one general theory of motion. And already it is maintained, obscurities of the system on its lower plane are dissipated in the light of its higher altitude. Nor is this effected by the incorporation of elements foreign to the primitive doctrine, such as may be seen, for example, in that peculiarly noble and attractive exposition which the pre-evolutionary utilitarianism received from its last great exponent. In John Stuart Mill’s presentation of it the ethics of utility transcends itself, and the hedonism of Benthan has to be supplemented by the moral law or categorical imperative of Kant, which appears under the form of a “sense of dignity,” a reverence for the humanity in one’s person, an abiding consciousness of an ideal and attainable worth which forbids dallying with lower ends however
strong the attraction of their pleasures. But it is not by such an amalgamation
of opposing conceptions that the evolutiono-utilitarian commends his theory. He
holds that utility alone, under the action of natural selection, takes on the
appearance of morality, and he pledges himself to derive from this lowly
source all those lofty attributes with which men have invested the moral law
and glorified it as the oracle of God. Thus evolutionary ethics claims the field,
not merely as a deduction from biology, but as a complete scientific
explanation of the phenomena of morals. This aspect of it we have now to
consider.

The moral law is popularly regarded as simple unanalyzable or ultimate.
When it is said that justice is right, that benevolence is a duty, that stealing or
lying is wrong, we do not attempt to demonstrate these propositions by means
of others, but directly and immediately assent to them as carrying their own
self-evidence. It is instinctively felt that no reason can be given for them, any
more than for the axioms of geometry. And the unsophisticated sense of the
plain man is shocked by the suggestion that moral precepts stand or fall with
their conduciveness to pleasure, and still more by the suggestion that virtue,
which he takes to be the end of life, "is naturally and originally no part of the
end," but merely a means to something else — to pleasure as final goal. And it
was very difficult for Mill and his predecessors to explain how in theory men
had been duped into accepting ethical precepts solely on their own
credentials, and how in practice they had been hoodwinked into realizing
them disinterestedly, for their own sake, and without the slightest reference to
ulterior consequences. But the example of the miser did valiant service in their
psychology; and it was argued that, if money, originally only a means to what
it purchases, could through association of ideas come to be desired for itself,
and that, too, with the utmost intensity, virtue might undergo a similar
transformation, and through conduciveness to an end eventually become
identified with the end. Nor is the musty example of the miser yet obsolete, as
readers of Mr. Spencer will remember. It is, however, reinforced with new
arguments in the ethics of the evolutionists. They do not require the plain man
to believe that the tissue of his ethical sentiments has been woven in his own
lifetime. They show him how the warp and woof were spun in the brains of
animals scarcely yet emerged as men, and then, following the movements of
the shuttle in the roaring loom of time, they delineate the formation of a moral
texture in our race — a texture inherited by every individual when once it has
been acquired by the species. And how precisely is it acquired? By the help of
natural selection. The early societies that did not happen to hit upon the
practice of justice, benevolence, etc., could not possibly hold together against
groups observing these relations; and then the constant danger of extermination
impressed the survivors with the indispensableness of the fundamental
virtues, which flamed ever before them, as it were, in characters of blood.
What we are familiar with seems simple, what we have always done we do
again; and who can wonder, therefore, that our primitive ancestors, slaves of
imitation and of habit, should have deemed moral precepts self-evident and
the practice of them an end in itself? Equally with the simplicity and
ultimateness of our moral conceptions, the evolutionist explains their
innateness. Agreeing with the intuitionist that these notions are part of
the original furniture of every mind that comes into the world, the evolutiono-
utilitarian holds them to be ultimately derived from experience; and if he be a
hedonist, like Mr. Spencer, he will add, from experience of pleasurable or
painful consequences, though this experience is by him relegated to the past
history of mankind. "Moral intuitions are the results of accumulated
experiences of utility." Just as the emotion you feel in visiting the home of
your youth seems unique and inexplicable, yet is manifestly due to a vague
recolletion of joys formerly associated with the objects that surround you,
so, it has been ingeniously suggested by Mr. Fouillee, the sentiments which
accompany the performance of virtuous acts are the perfume of an earthy soil
—a kind of recollection or indistinct echo, not only of our own pleasures, but
of the joys of the entire race. And it is this reverberation over the ages of a
utility for the race that we take for an innate tendency to disinterestedness. A
similar account is given of the inmutability and universality of moral
conceptions. Morality being the indispensable condition of social existence, it
is coextensive with humanity. The primal virtues shine in every tribe and
nation, for without them no section of the human family could have found its
way through the struggle for existence. And as amid many smaller variations
the general conditions of social life are everywhere the same, moral laws could
not fail to be, if not eternal and immutable in the absolute sense of Cudworth,
yet as unchanging and enduring as the human species and the universe it
inhabits. The fundamental agreement in men's moral notions is thus
explained without any assumption of supranatural revelation or a priori
intuition.

Moral obligation presents a greater difficulty; and evolutionary moralists
of the school we are now considering have had to fall back upon the answer of
the ordinary utilitarians. They ascribe the sense of obligation to the effects of
the legal and social sanctions with which certain kinds of conduct are visited.
Moral motives being at first inseparable from political and social motives,
they have been permeated with that consciousness of subordination to
authority which naturally arises out of the relation of subject to ruler and of
individual to tribe. The coerciveness which now forms so important a
constitment in our consciousness of duty is a survival of the constraint with
which primitive man was forced by external agencies into certain lines of
conduct and deterred from others. And hence it follows that, as morality is
derifferenitated more completely from the legal, political, and social
institutions in which it originated, the feeling of obligation generated by them
will gradually fade away. Thus the evolutiono-utilitarian account of obligation
discovers it a transitional feature in the process of human "moralization," and
this essentially is all that it adds to the theory of Mill and Bain.
This newest theory of morals, here too briefly outlined, embraces in its range the entire province of moral conceptions and sentiments. But from what has been said the general character of the system will be readily discerned. It is simple, intelligible, and even plausible. That it should have proved fascinating to all, and irresistible to many, of the generation that has so long listened to it with an ardor brooking little distraction from other theories, cannot be a matter of surprise to anyone who has duly considered the facts with which the theory is associated. Borrowed, as they are, either from observation or from well-established sciences, and fitted ingeniously into current evolutionary ethics, they seem to be an organic part of the structure; and the question of otherwise explaining them is not likely to be raised. Conversely, the full implication of the principles upon which they are here grafted has been left unexplored. And thus, while the new ethical philosophy has been widely accepted, a determination of the bases on which it really rests still remains to be made. This want we must now attempt to supply.

In the first place, then, evolutionary ethics, as hitherto presented, takes for granted the derivative character of morality. I say "as hitherto presented," because I hope to show in the sequel that there is nothing in the notion of development when applied to morals which necessitates, or which even warrants, the assumption. But our exponents of evolutionism happen to have been trained in the school of Epicurus, Hume, and Bentham, and it is not, on the whole, very surprising they should have carried the old leaven into the new teaching. What is surprising is the assumption, so coolly made, that the theory of evolution in some way vouches for the utilitarianism our moralists associate with it. As though a follower of Plato or Kant, for example, could not be a Darwinist in science! Is it forgotten that, even if goodness be an end in itself — the sole end worth living for — it still remains true that honesty is the best policy, that honest acts are the most advantageous acts, and that they will accordingly be preserved through natural selection in the struggle for existence? All that natural selection requires is that something shall be useful; what else it may be, what other predicates it may have, wherein its essence consists, natural selection knows not and recks not. Be virtue a proximate end or an ultimate end, natural selection tells us it will be preserved and perpetuated if it is useful; and it tells us no more. It is, accordingly, a gratuitous assumption which our exponents of evolutionary ethics make, when they decline to allow more than a merely relative value to morality. And as their position derives no support from evolutionary science, so is it exposed to all the objections which moralists, voicing the universal consciousness of mankind, have brought against it, from the time when Aristotle asserted that virtue has no extrinsic end (Tov kalou Eneka) to the time when Kant proclaimed the absolute worth of a good will.

In the second place, the current expositors of evolutionary ethics having made the radical assumption that moral laws are not categorical imperatives which command unconditionally, but hypothetical imperatives which prescribe
means to the attainment of some end, they cannot escape the problem of determining wherein consists that ultimate end, conduciveness to which alone gives morality its worth and obligation. Nor, in general, has the school been dismayed by the magnitude or the obscurity of this problem. Possibly it has not fully realized that the question is nothing less than an inquiry into the highest good for man or the supreme end of human endeavor. Be that as it may, one cannot but be interested to find that, in spite of the distrust of reason generated by modern theories of knowledge, our evolutionary thinkers dare to face the problem which, in undisturbed consciousness of reason’s might, ancient philosophers put in the foreground of their ethics. Even in an age of agnosticism thoughtful men come round to the sphinx-riddle, What am I here for? what is the end of life? The question may not, it is true, take precisely this form in the mouth of a modern evolutionary moralist, but that, after all, is substantially what he is bent on discovering and what he must discover — must, if his thesis is to be made good that morality is only a means to something else. And there is no logical reason why he should not appropriate the Aristotelian solution that man’s highest good consists in the most perfect rational activity, that his supreme end or function is to inform life with reason and make his entire being the embodiment of reason. But, as a matter of fact, most typical evolutionary moralists have selected a very different ethical end — pleasure. They have maintained with Mr. Spencer that “the good is universally the pleasurable,” and that conduct is made good or bad solely by its “pleasurable-giving and pain-giving effects.”

Still the evolutionary moralist, even of the derivative school, is not necessarily committed to this solution of the problem. He may doubt that the supreme end of life is to get and to give the greatest amount of pleasure. And appropriating the language of the Rabelaisian description of Carlyle’s, on which Mr. Spencer has poured forth eloquent objurgation, our doubter may question whether the universe is merely “an immeasurable swine’s trough,” and whether “moral evil is unattainability of pig’s-wash and moral good attainability of ditto.” For certainly the hedonist cannot, in the absence of antecedent obligations which this theory excludes, but deem his own pleasure the highest good; and whether accepting or not the psychology of the school which teaches that nothing but one’s own pleasure can be the object of desire, he will acquiesce in the ethical dictum of Benthan, that “to attain the greatest portion of happiness for himself is the object of every rational being.” But as soon as this opposition between his own pleasures and the pleasures of other is brought distinctly into consciousness, and the former recognized as the end, the impossibility of constructing an ethic on this basis is manifest. There is no way across the chasm that yawns between “each for himself” and “each for others.” And if man be merely a pleasure-seeking animal, you but mock him when you enjoin him to promote the happiness of others. Accordingly, a sincere and logical utilitarian who felt with Mill, that the spirit of his ethics was that of the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, would drop altogether the notion of pleasure, which has hitherto filled the system with inconsistencies,
and allow the ethical principle, thus freed from the accidental setting of a psychological hedonism, to proclaim itself as the greatest good of the greatest number, or, better still, as the well-being of society. Whatever be the content of that well-being (and there is much in it besides pleasure), it, and not happiness either of self or others, is the end which utilitarianism pure and simple, the utilitarianism of Mill divorced from his more than dubious psychology, might set up as the ultimate end for every moral agent. And this, in fact, is the supreme principle of the ethics of Darwin, though he directs attention rather to the genesis of moral rules than to the reason for our observing them. And though Mr. Spencer is too strongly influenced by the national ethics to forego the final reduction of morality to pleasure — and even the agent’s own pleasure — he yet maintains that those acts are good which conduce to the welfare of self, of offspring, and of society. The same end is recognized by Mr. Leslie Stephen in his explanation of moral rules as means of social preservation; yet, Mr. Stephen has not been so unfaithful to what he calls his own “school” — Bentham, Mill, etc. — as to separate its psychology of self-seeking from its ethics of self-sacrifice.

When this divorce does take place, however — and already it is heralded in Darwin — there will be no longer in this respect a fundamental opposition between evolutionary ethics and common-sense morals. Attempts to patch up a truce, on the assumption that pleasures might through heredity be transformed into duties, have utterly failed. But the simple recognition of the welfare of society as an ultimate end is not to go outside of morality to find a reason for it, against which the intuitionist has always protested. It is to take one virtue, already recognized by the intuitionist, for the whole of virtue. And to that extent the two schools are in essential agreement. A difference, however, appears when you inquire if there are not virtues which the general formula of promoting the well-being of others does not embrace. Common-sense seems to say there are other duties as original, as self-evident, and as obligatory, as benevolence. And it does look rather incredible that every man should be an end to others and not to himself. We do not easily rid ourselves of the conviction that goodness consists rather in the realization of a certain type of character in ourselves than in the performance of any external actions, though of course conduct promotive of the welfare of others would be one necessary outcome of the character thus indicated.

I come now to a third characteristic assumption of current evolutionary ethics — the fortuitous origin of morality through a process purely mechanical. This must, I think, be regarded as the fundamental tenet of the school; but in England, at least, it seems to have been taught with all the reserve of an esoteric mystery. The accredited expounders of the subject have in their exoteric writings enveloped this point in such a wrapping of extraneous discussions that even a master in ethics like Professor Sidgwick has hazarded the declaration that evolution, however conceived, can make no difference at all in our ethical theories. But, with all deference to do so eminent an authority, I hold that if this mechanical conception of moral
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evolution be conceded, the question of an ethical end — of what we ought to aim at — becomes unmeaning, since there cannot, in a literal sense, be any ends or aims for a being conceived as a mere mechanism, even though its random acts have through natural selection been solidified into habits, and habits, on the supervision of consciousness, been reflected as rules. And this interpretation of evolution would be as fatal to practice as to theory. An individual who really accepted it must regard moral responsibility as illusory, as nothing but an echo of the modes of conduct which enabled the human species to overcome what was untoward to its progress or what threatened its extinction. For him the entire preceptive part of morality must seem a baseless imposition. And in the courageous language of M. Guyau he could recognize nothing but une morale sans obligation ni sanction. No longer avtonomes man must perforce be anomes. Had this point been brought out as clearly by the English as by the French evolutionists, they would have seen that their own principles required them to dismiss the incongruous problem of establishing the validity of moral rules, even if they still persisted in speculating on the origin of them. It is worse than idle for mechanical evolutionists to talk of the reason or end or ground of morality.

That morality has had a mechanical origin is, I have said, the fundamental assumption of current evolutionary ethics. The ancestors of man had no moral fibre in their constitution, but through long-inherited experiences of the consequences of conduct man has been rendered "organically moral." Just as intelligence, in general, according to the same theory, has been generated in unintelligent beings through the accumulation of modifications arising from intercourse between the organism and its environment, so the moral faculty, in particular, is the result of all those experiences whereby mutually repellent individual animals were fused together into society and enabled to perpetuate a victorious existence. The evolutionist conceives life as the continuous adjustment of inner relations to outer relations; so that, even before the rise of sentiency, the acts of living beings must have been adapted to their environment, and intelligence, when it did emerge, could be nothing but the consciousness of relations already blindly established, and the function of conscience could only be to recognize the utility of what promoted life. The evolution of man — the self-conscious and moral person — from lower forms of life is referred to physical causation alone. As the human pedigree has been traced up to the simian branch of the animal tree, and no ground discovered for absolutely separating the latest from the earliest offshoots, our most eminent living biologist maintains that when Descartes declared all animals to be automata, his only error lay in excluding man from the same class. This conscious automaton is but the highest term of an animal series whose law of development is already known, and everything in his constitution is explicable by that law. But the evolution of life has realized itself through a mechanical process; consequently those distinctive characteristics which mark off the human from the simian species must be the products of the same process. As natural selection has endowed all beings with the constitutions
and habits and faculties which they actually possess — the eagle with his eye, the bee with her sting, the lion with his rage and strength — so must natural selection have endowed man, not only with an erect attitude, but also with a reason that looks before and after and a conscience that responds to right and wrong. The mental and moral faculties are both reduced to the rank of natural phenomena. Indeed, to express their essentially derivative and, as it were accidental character, a new word has been coined, and intelligence is described as an “epiphenomenon.” By this term is meant that consciousness is a merely accessory aspect of the human automation, a psychological index of corporeal movements which are the prime reality, a reflex of mechanism which would go on all the same without any reflex, just as an engine would move along the rails if it did not whistle, or a bird fly if it cast no shadow. But if the school interprets consciousness as an accident of the human automaton, it makes conscience an accident of this accident. First mechanism realizing itself in certain relations (by means of natural selection), then consciousness of these relations, then approval of their life-conserving tendencies, or conscience. The moral faculty is the recognition of social relations; it is the social instinct of the animals come to a consciousness of itself in man; and this social instinct is but the consolidation of habit, and habit is the product, through natural selection, of random actions struck out in the struggle for life. Thus the moral nature of man is merged in the mechanism of nature. The logical, as the chronological, prius is, therefore, not intelligence, but mechanical action. The exegesis of Faust receives a startling illustration: In Anfang war die That.

This moral theory, therefore, implies and rests upon a system of metaphysics. I do not think we can too often reiterate that current evolutionary ethics is the outcome of a very dubious physico-physical speculation. From overlooking this connection the issue between moralists of this school and of other schools has not been clearly discerned, and the very heart of the question has been generally left untouched. I do not, of course, mean to call in question the results of the astronomical, physical, chemical, and biological sciences. What one teaches about the gradual formation of the universe, and another about the gradual development of organisms on our globe, I accept implicitly. But because minerals and plants and the lower animals appeared before man, I will not, therefore, hold that they were adequate conditions to his production, or that there is nothing in him that was not generated through actions and reactions between an animal system and its environment. Such a doctrine used to be called materialism, but in deference to the feelings of speculative evolutionists the word has nowadays been dropped. All the objections, however, which were formerly urged against the derivation of mental and moral functions from material combinations, however finely organized, are still valid against the evolutionary identification of intelligence with the modifications produced in the nervous and muscular systems from action and reaction between the organism and its environment. Man is later on the scene than the unintelligent organisms; but whence his intelligence we know not, unless it be the emergence of something
new from the fountain of being, from the underlying ground and sustaining cause of the whole evolutionary movement. Certainly it was not evolved by mere repetition of mechanical actions. Were intelligence not at the heart of the cosmos, it could not have turned up as the crowning glory of the development of life.

The same position may be taken up in opposition to the current evolutionary ethics. Biology warrants the belief that non-moral beings existed on our globe long before the appearance of the only moral being we know — man; and natural selection explains the process by which the latter may have been descended from the former. But natural selection, as we have already shown, creates no new material; it merely sits in judgment upon what has already appeared. Given acts, or habits, or moral practices, natural selection is the name for the survival of the fittest of them, not the talismanic cause which originates any of them. However they originate, they must have a definite relation to the constitution of the being that manifests them; and to suppose that moral sentiments, moral notions, moral practices, could be grafted upon a primitively non-moral being is, in the first place, to take a grossly mechanical view of human nature and, in the second place, to transgress the limits alike of natural selection and of evolutionary science. Yet this is what is done by our evolutionary moralists. A moral law, they tell you, is the formulation by intelligence of the social practices instinctively followed by the more or less intelligent ancestors of man, these practices themselves having crystallized into habits from an inchoate chaos of random acts. We have in the preceding chapter considered Darwin's derivation of instincts from casual actions, and we have here only to inquire whether conscience is nothing but the social instinct illuminated by intelligence. Were it so, we could not fail to admire the manner in which morality was forced upon unwilling beings until at last appeared an intelligence capable of freely accepting it and heartily setting about its realization. As in the education of the human race, according to Lessing, religion is at first revealed only that it may ultimately become rational, why should not the practice of morality at first have been compulsory that it might in due time become free and gracious? But, after all, I believe an analysis of the facts will not suffer us to take this view of the providential government of the world. In the contents of the moral consciousness I find unique elements, unlike anything that went along with the earlier stages of the development of life, and absolutely incapable of resolution into practices useful for social survival blindly followed by the non-moral precursors of humanity. If the social instinct is, as the theory supposes, only a means of preserving society, how could intelligence ever take it for more than that? But in the moral consciousness of mankind there is clear recognition of an absolutely worthful. And, in the next place, if this be denied, there remains one element in the moral consciousness that forever distinguishes it from a mere intelligence-illuminated social instinct, namely, the sense of duty. Even if moral law be supposed nothing more than the expression of devices wrought out unconsciously in the course of aeons, for
securing the vitality and well-being of society, why do I recognize myself under obligation to observe the law? This consciousness of duty, the most certain and most imperious fact in our experience, whence does it come if man have no moral fibre in his primitive constitution? On this rock the ethics of Kant, giving scientific shape to human morality, is firmly intrenched. And no better testimony to its security could be found than the shifts to which evolutionists are put when they attempt to resolve this element of the moral consciousness into race-accumulated experiences of utility. Mr. Spencer, indeed, supposes men to have been scared into moral obligation by the baton of the primitive policeman, the ostracism of primitive society, and the hell of the primitive priest. How a society could exist to deal out these political, social, and religious sanctions, unless it rested on a moral basis, the evolutionist does not explain. And one may, therefore, be pardoned for seeing here only another of the countless attempts to derive morality from ideas and institutions which already presuppose it. The *voteron proteron* is the bane of evolutionary ethics. Naturally enough, the sentiment produced by the terrors of ancient law, politics, and religion, will decay with the cessation of its causes; and as Mr. Spencer identifies this sentiment with moral obligation, one can understand how he reaches the paradox that the “sense of duty, or moral obligation, is transitory.” In another way the same conclusion is reached by M. Guyau, who follows Darwin. Conscience is the social instinct, he says, and the scientific spirit is the great enemy of blind instincts; it illuminates them, and in the flood-tide of light dissolves them; what habit has made, reflection unmakes; and nothing can save morality when conscience has met the doom of every instinct — dissolution under scientific reflection. “Pan, the nature-god is dead; Jesus, the man-god is dead; there remains the ideal god within us, duty, which is also, perhaps, destined one day to die.” But the irrefragable reply to these oracular prophecies is that they rest upon a misreading of the actual record. If moral obligation be the effect of certain historical causes, it may decline with the decadence of those causes, and if conscience be a blind instinct, it may follow the supposed law of dissolution of instincts; but the conditional ground of the consequence is in neither case established, in neither case does it rest upon evolutionary science, in neither case has it any antecedent probability apart from the *a priori* prejudice of the utilitarian in favor of the derivative character of morality and the moral faculties. Instead of so accounting for the rise of a moral sense and moral obligation, as a kind of accident in our constitution, mankind (a few metaphysicians apart) persists in regarding them as of the very essence of human nature. The absolute “ought” cannot be the product of any experience with the primitive policeman or priest, since (apart from the fact that there would be neither without it) experience only records what is advantageous for certain ends and cannot, therefore enjoin anything categorically. Hence the pretence of the evolutionists to have reconciled the experiential and intuitive schools of ethics cannot be sustained. Those predicates of the moral law which, in the earlier part of this chapter, we found
the evolutionary theory claiming to account for — its simplicity, universality, etc. — are not its essential attributes; so that, even if the evolutionists contention be granted, he leaves untouched the fundamental constituents of the moral consciousness — our sense of an absolutely worthful, the right, not merely the useful, and our recognition of its authority over us as expressed in the word "ought." For these ideas no experience can account, and every experiential theory virtually explains them away as the indispensable condition to its own plausibility. However long the process, whether extending through one generation, as the older utilitarians imagined, or through countless generations, as the evolutiono-utilitarians assume, there never will be success, as Lotze justly observed, in fetching into an empty soul, by means of the impressions of experience, a consciousness of moral obligation.

Nor, in fact, does evolutionary science, relieved of the metaphysical baggage with which it has hitherto been grievously freighted, require us to believe in the possibility of this desperate feat. It assumes that morality has been developed through natural selection. And because natural selection presupposes a utility — a fittest that survives — the evolutionists have fallen into the fallacy of supposing that morality was nothing but a utility. That is the explanation of the plausibility of their ethical theory as expounded in the earlier part of the present chapter. And no other refutation, after all that has been said, need now be added except the reminder that natural selection, though wide-awake to the uses of things, is blind to their nature and essence. It takes advantage of the utility of morality, but no more determines its content and meaning than a positivist who passes over the question of the essence of things. It acts upon germs of all kinds, once they have been produced and are moving through phases of development; but it knows not what the germs are, whence they come, or what develops them. The whole question, so far as ethics is concerned, turns on the nature of those primitive modifications out of which morality has been evolved. But on that point evolutionary science has no answer of its own to give, and the blank has been filled by the preconceptions of evolutionary speculators. Subordinating, as the school has hitherto done, intelligence to mechanism, it has invariably sough the first germ of conscience in a random action that proved useful to the species in which it was struck out. We have, on the contrary, maintained that this hypothetical derivation passes over the very essence of moral consciousness; nor can we imagine any other way of deriving it which does not already presuppose it. In opposition to this mechanical theory of conscience, we hold that it is an ultimate function of the mind, and that in germ as in full fruition it must be regarded, not as an action, but as an ideal of action. The consciousness of right and wrong is underived, and, like intelligence in general, witnesses to a supra-sensible principle in man — a principle which the wheels of mechanism, grinding through eternity, could never of themselves produce. This view of the subject may be affiliated to Darwinism as readily as the other. For an abiding ideal of action is, to say the least, quite as beneficial
as a chance action; and wherever there is an advantage, there natural selection may operate. But natural selection does not determine the material upon which it works. Given the forms of primitive morality, whatever they be, natural selection only settles which shall perish and which survive. Its function is the negative one of sifting whatever has attained to positive existence. In the book of Job, Satan represents, according to Professor Davidson, the testing sifting providence of God: natural selection is the Satan of the evolutionary powers. Strange, indeed, that it should ever have been mistaken for the powers themselves!

The ethical conclusions here reached and co-ordinated with the doctrine of evolution and Darwinism (which I everywhere take for granted) are so opposed to those of most evolutionists that some fallacy may be supposed to infect all our reasonings. After the evolutionary teachings of the last twenty years, it seems either blindness or disingenousness to maintain that evolution leaves our ethical problems precisely where it found them. And so, in spite of all the preceding analyses and criticisms, the old objections are sure to recur. Does not the evolutionary doctrine of heredity imply that man is what his ancestry has made him, and so abrogate our belief in the freedom of the human will? And does not goodness cease to be divine when you have explained moral laws as a statement of the habits blindly struck out and blindly followed by simian or semi-human groups in the struggle for existence? If morality is merely a formulation of the practices which, accidentally hit upon by some group of animals, made the group coherent and thus enabled it to vanquish rival groups with different practices, would it not seem merely accidental that justice and truthfulness are virtues, and not injustice and lying? For if these vices, or others, had enabled those primitive semi-human societies to survive, they would not have been vices, but virtues; for virtue is nothing but a useful means of social survival. Will not evolution, then, as thus interpreted, work revolution in our views of the moral nature of man, since it implies that morality is not grounded in the nature of things, but something purely relative to man's circumstances — a happy device whereby man's ancestors managed to cohere in a united society and so kill out rival and disunited groups.

Now, it is not necessary to deny either the social utility of morals or the influence of heredity in order to show that, whatever the first appearance, evolution is not in reality revolution in the sphere of man's moral nature. It is no doubt true that heredity supplies us with much of the material out of which we make our characters. But it is only by an oversight that we identify our character with the inherited elements out of which we form it. As Aristotle profoundly observed, nature does not make us good or bad, she only gives us the capacity of becoming good or bad — that is, of moulding our own characters. Emphasize as you will, then, the bulk of the inheritance I have received from my ancestors, it still remains true that in moral character I am what I make myself. On stepping stones of their dead selves men rise to higher
things; and neither our ability to do this, nor the consciousness of that ability implied in the freedom of the will, is affected in any way by evolution.

But surely, it will be objected, evolution does mean revolution in our views of human nature, if it makes moral rules a mere social utility. I admit the conclusion, but reject its premises. For, as I have already urged, the facts of human life will not allow us to interpret morality as a mere accidental arrangement whereby our animal ancestors came out victorious in the struggle for life. I do not deny that morality would, as a matter of fact, be useful to any society practising it in the war of all against all in the struggle for life. That it is useful is clear from the readiness with which people follow Hamlet's advice to his mother and assume a virtue when they have it not. But if morality be nothing more than mere social utility, a mere device which enabled man's ancestors to kill out rival groups, I fail to understand how there has arisen in man a conscience which makes cowards of us all; a remorse which drives a Lady Macbeth to madness, and a Judas to suicide; a sense of eternal right so strong that no theory can make us believe we are hoodwinked into righteousness, truth, and justice, by the mere accident that lying, injustice, and unrighteousness were less useful in holding primitive societies together and enabling them to kill out their rivals. And all this might be conceded by the evolutionist, had he not fallen into the fallacy of holding that, because virtue is socially useful, therefore it is nothing but a social utility. There are other things besides morality which favor the survival of primitive societies. We have already spoken of the advantages of an erect attitude and of a sound intelligence. Yet the evolutionist does not call these characters mere social utilities. The eye, for example, has no existence among the lowest animals; yet when it does appear, its own new story is accepted as a fresh revelation of fact. Instead of describing it as an advantage in the struggle for life, the evolutionist sees in the new organ the possibility of a deeper communion with reality; and the more developed the organ the more valuable its evidence. The earliest eye was probably nothing more than a tingling sensitiveness to light and darkness. The most developed eye discerns a spectrum of seven colors; and along with this advance it has also acquired the capacity of measuring distances, magnitudes, and situations. Both these functions of the eye were eminently useful in the struggle for life: they enabled their animal possessor to get food more easily and escape foes more deftly. Yet the evolutionist does not hold the eye is merely a utility. Bringing the surprise of something new and unexpected, the eye, he will recognize, is useful only because it makes us aware of fact. But if you accept the evidence of the eye when it testifies to the colors or sizes of objects, you cannot reject the depositions of conscience to the moral character of conduct and motives. This is a new mental function, and has the same claim upon you as the other. The validity of the intuition, "Injustice is wrong," is neither greater nor less than the validity of the perception, "Snow is white." The vision of both the outer and the inner eye is useful, but useful simply because each gives us new revelations of reality.
The same result is reached by comparing the deliverances of conscience with the discoveries of intelligence. The lowest animals have neither conscience nor reason. The infinite advantage of either we have already described. Even the germ of reason suffices to make man lord of creation. Think only of the significance of the discovery that twice two are four. An intelligence advanced to that point is on the way to geometry, trigonometry, and the calculus, to all those sciences whose application has chanted the face of the material world. As the highest mathematics is useful to us, so was the first germ useful to our ancestors. But it does not, therefore, follow that arithmetic is merely a social utility. On the contrary, it is useful for the reason that it brings man into deepening relation with fact; but its validity is wholly independent of its advantage to mankind, and only the satirist could suggest that twice two would be five if that product were more advantageous to us. Arithmetical facts cannot be determined by a plebiscite of utilitarians. And the same is true of the deliverance of conscience that injustice is wrong. Ultimate mathematical principles and ultimate moral principles have the same intuitive evidence; and it is not weakened by the assumption that man owes his bodily organism to animals in which there was no trace either of a moral or a mathematical faculty. Fact is fact; and neither morality nor geometry ceases to be objectively grounded from the accident that our ancestors only gradually came to an apprehension of them.

From all points of view, then, we are led to the same result. Evolutionary science in general, natural selection in particular, does not necessitate, or even indicate, a new system of ethics. It stands logically indifferent between intuitionism and utilitarianism, though from the accident that most expounders of evolution happened to be utilitarians there has arisen a belief that the two were in some way connected. In reality, evolutionary ethics, as hitherto expounded, is nothing but an arbitrary combination of utilitarianism in one or other of its forms with a speculative metaphysics which discovers the ground of mind and conscience in an antecedent physical or nervous mechanism. And as such it not only has no support from evolutionary science, but is at the same time exposed to all the objections which the common-sense of mankind has always brought against every empirical theory of morals and every mechanical theory of intelligence.