

Swami Omkarananda

Ethics, Society and Worldpeace



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Ethics and Economics

Among the notable advocates of a close relationship between economics and ethics, Carlyle and Ruskin take an important place. John Wesley rated economic problems as primarily ethical, and, for that very reason, religious. Ancient India knew no contradiction between materialism and spirituality, and assumed the attitude of equating economic activity with factors of ethical excellence.

In the minds of modern businessmen and industrialists, there should subsist a distinctive moral awareness. The active acceptance of the fact of human existence that man does not belong to himself alone, but to all mankind and to God who governs 'immanently' all that is manifest, is central to that awareness.

As a University subject, modern business acquires a certain scientific dignity, demands as a condition for success, years of special study and equipment; and as a practice, requires disciplined training. It wears the halo of a really honourable occupation when persons concerned with it evidence an abidance by ethical elements, are governed by no mean motives, distinguish themselves by feats of industry, and give ascendancy in their personal nature to sentiments which include a concern and a care for general human welfare, happiness, and progress.

As the multiplicity of man's economic activity constitutes but an external corollary of the complexity of his inner motives, none may seek to deny that a real relation is involved between economics and ethics. It is not unknown and never a remote knowledge that the rights of exchange and distribution of property are derived from, and the rights to property are dependent upon, the moral rights of personality in the process of self-realisation. This implies, and makes necessary, the subordination of economics to ethics. Again, the intimacy of a relationship between the science of ethics and the science of economics is observable in the attempts of human intelligence at a determining and examining of the purposes aimed at, by [looking at] the values that govern, and the ideals that regulate, the facts and processes of economic activity. Since the hypothesis of 'the economic man', of man as a merely economical unit, has been deservedly much discredited, though unjustifiably over-criticised, it should become quite easy to envisage that the human individual is primarily a psychological entity, a psychic being, a spiritual person, and as such will never be able to extricate himself from the evaluations in his expressions and activity, whatever be those expressions and that activity, of good and bad, of right and wrong, of the valuable and the valueless.

Also, he would never fare well by a liberation from such ethical considerations and by the consequences such a freedom burdens him with, consequences in terms of loss of peace of mind, the gnawing residual unhappiness, an impoverished personality, a sense of being totally ill-at-ease, - being a factor for social discordance, or for a regression in, or retardation of, general social well-being.

It cannot be overemphasized that real success and morality are a conjoint phenomenon, that happiness cannot endure without virtue, that material prosperity will defeat its own central objectives when divorced from ethical life and spiritual welfare.

A Fundamental Flaw in the Ethical Studies of the Great European Thinkers

Ethics as a field of scientific, psychological and philosophical studies, is the significant achievement of the labours of generations of first-rate European thinkers. Ethics as an attitude, an outlook, a style of life derived from, and resting upon, mystical perceptions into the eternal and unalterable laws that guide the destinies of man and the universe, is the proud accomplishment of the Eastern mind of predominant metaphysical realizations.

The intrinsic worth of character, the true nature of moral excellence, upon which men of God-consciousness lay so much of an emphasis, have eluded the intellectual perception and theory-spinning acumen of the Utilitarians like Mill and Bentham, [and so] exposed their doctrines that rendered so inestimable a service to the interest of social justice, to the infection of a fundamental flaw. That flaw resulted in the release of forces that did contribute to the impoverishment of the higher culture which alone cements and secures the enduring foundations of material happiness and progress.

The governance of our daily life by the time-tried codes of conduct is propaedeutic and an indispensable preliminary discipline for spiritual experience.



Ethics for the Integral Perfection of the Human Individual

Brought into the light of our inner spiritual experience, ethics becomes ethics; and the essence of the ethical being consists in the pursuit of good, good howsoever envisioned and striven after, or developed to whatever degree, good which in its inner law and as an end in itself rests upon, finds its source and its culmination in, the Heart of the Divine.

It is neither natural nor in harmony with the demands of a free and progressive reason to coerce and distort ethics into

1. The pursuit of utility to which utilitarianism as an ethical theory earnestly persuades us,
2. The striving after pleasure to which Cyrenaic, Epicurean and other types of hedonism as systems of ethical thought, invite us
3. The pursuit of an abstractly conceived duty, knowledge, beauty, to which the rationalist, the intellectualist, the aesthetician would delight in drawing our attention.



The Two Central Errors in Western Ethical Theorization

The doctrine of the autonomy of ethics and the final purposes of Eudaemonism which seek to make ethics self-sufficient and a totally independent discipline, and the naturalistic and other cognate ethical schools which attempt to constitute ethics into a natural science, go to demonstrate the two central errors within the framework of Western ethical theorization.

These errors emerge as much from a failure to grasp the origins, the nature, and the

destiny, of the ethical impulse, as from the paucity of vision and experience that cannot be expected to present any view of man except the erroneous.



The Aim of the Ethics of the Great Europeans

The ethics of Eckhart, as also the ethics of St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Bruno, Spinoza, assign to morality a high and exalted mission. It is the mission of bringing the soul of man back to an identity with the Divine. Morality is here a realisable mystical ideal.



The Insight that Resolves the Riddles of Various Western Ethical Schools

[This is the] insight which, by deducing moral laws and principles, and deriving their validity, their rational warrant, their compelling power, from the summum bonum of existence that the Godhead is, shifts the crux of moral life from the limitation-ridden special faculties in the human mind and nature, to a perpetual awareness of the operative presence of the ultimate divine Principle in all life.

It thus affords the best solution to the inherent riddles of the Moral Sense School, the Aesthetic Sense Theory, the phenomenological ethics of Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann, and the other forms and versions of intuitionism such as the dogmatic, the perceptual, the philosophical or the intellectual which includes the axiological and the utilitarian.



Conscience in the Great Jewish Ethics

Jewish Ethics, extending beyond the central content of the Mosaic Code embracing the apocrypha, and embellished by the exegetic and interpretative rabbinical literature, constitutes conscience into the motive power and the ultimate arbiter for the moral rectitude or uprightness of man. Ethics in Judaism esteems conscience a judge and the final ethical criterion, elevates it over the purely legal prescriptions, derives its power from a true conception of the relation between man and God, and finds its seat in the heart.

The ethical thought of the Jews equates conscience with the perfect purity which the heart, leavened by love and lifted above law, or as law itself, can acquire. It accords conscience an autonomy, sees in it no other motive than that of self-sanctification and assigns its acts the role of hallowing all life.



Ethical Awareness is Indispensable for Political Thought, Life and Action

Machiavelli and the advocates of his maxims repudiate all relations between ethics and politics. Hobbes and Bain, and the thinkers greatly influenced by the former, tie ethics

to the apron-strings of politics. Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza and Hegel annex politics to ethics.

A vision that is higher, and an experience that is valid for all times in human history, pronounce anarchy and transience upon political institutions, laws, thought and action that are not founded upon, and buttressed by, an essentially ethical awareness.



Higher Psychological Values for Human Unity and Individual and World Harmony

Lack of 'something' to live by, or the want of a practical philosophy and psychology of living, is largely responsible for the present crisis in individual lives and human affairs.

Modern man, for some time past, has been making restless efforts at finding peace; but peace has always eluded his grasp. In the absence of a faith, a sane way of lifestyle that could give him an inward, and so a real, poise and rest, he has been embracing abnormal ideologies and 'pernicious' philosophers.

Common sense revolts against fitting the circle of unsuitable ancient religious dogmas into the square of the peculiar modern conditions thrown up into existence by the complex twentieth century civilization.

The newfangled philosophies, though based on reason, with their tall claims, are fizzling out for want of an idealistic attitude, an inner energy that could sustain the soul of modern man, help the flowering of his tendency to exceed himself, and enable him to attain an internal growth and peace which correspond to the proportions of external achievements and order.

Responding to a long-felt need, thinkers of light and leading, here and there, have individually made sincere and painstaking efforts to evolve a new philosophy and psychology of life for contemporary humanity, by synthesizing the best in the ancient religious wisdom and modern thought. For obvious reasons, their success has not been considerable. And now, we find ourselves confronted with the easy-of-solution problem of building up an entirely new structure of philosophical and psychological values for a happy daily life, on the foundations of all that is best in the cultural and spiritual heritage of the world.



The Cause of Civilized Barbarism

It is worth remembering that the universal degeneration of the human character and unrestricted play of baser passions in the individual and social life, is at the root of each repeated wave of scientific and civilized barbarism that sweeps over the world, time and again. Uncontrolled human passions are certain to plunge the nations into savage warfare in the future also.

A living faith in spiritual values and an earnest practical religion seem to be the one hope if mankind is to live. The refinement, ennoblement and sublimation of human passion and desire, are the special function and purpose of true religion.

The dictates of elementary logic and rationality clearly direct that to rescue humanity from the present, and safeguard it in the future, the right way is to recognise the important role of Ethics.

Moral growth is indispensable for human peace and happiness. To disregard moral values, as the modern world has done, is to plunge the world in savagery.



Practicable Ideals for the Nations

The aim of nations should be to direct their power towards the transformation of the hearts of the people from the subhuman and the weak human nature into the rightly human and divine natures, through right government, right education and insistence on right living, based on perfect Truth. This shall effect the great renaissance for the healthy and peaceful life of all on earth, and also for the eternal Life transcending the earthly life.

Man cannot discard material prosperity, nor can he ignore spiritual refinement. Either he effects his balance between material prosperity and spiritual progress, and thereby ensures peace and welfare, or he inflicts destruction on himself, through the worship of the deities of materialism, by their subservient genie, the weapons of destruction.



Interdependence of Morality and Religion

Descartes, Locke and Paley have sustained the argument that the sources of morality lie in religion. Kant and Martineau hold the view that morality leads to religion.

With us, religion and morality are interdependent at the threshold of all human perfection, and as their commingled phenomenon develops further and further on, moral life becomes perfected, fulfilled, and transcended in the most profound and self-maintaining religious experiences.

It is only at such altitudes that the human individual is no more human but divine, and stands in a realm beyond the limitations and boundaries of ethics. This realm beyond ethical phenomena is quite different from the realm of the "blond beast" raised by Nietzsche into the beyond of his Beyond Good and Evil.



Dynamic Psychology of World Peace

Unless we seek through the agency of cultural organizations, through strenuous world-encompassing and ennobling propaganda,

1. To raise the consciousness of mankind to a universal perspective, and
2. To build the true spirit of universal brotherhood in the feelings, minds, thoughts, natures of men and the national organisms,

individuals would find it difficult to come close to each other in feelings, nations would continue to seek subtle forms of self-aggrandisement, science cannot be rescued from being put to wrong uses, and no right political experience can develop.

The cardinal note in the republican gospel, fraternity, the four clauses in the first article of the United Nations Charter, and the first article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, cannot be implemented and brought into the vital field of practical action, to the fullest measure of their high implications, unless there is set up a

complexus of worldwide cultural forces for the creation of a psychological oneness and the formation of emotional integrity, in the very mind, heart and soul of mankind.



The two outstanding achievements of the twentieth century civilization are,

1. The tremendous strides the scientific and technological progress has forged in effacing the barriers of time and distance, and rendering all mankind, isolated by geographical limitations, into the sociological unit of almost a single family,
2. The creation of the United Nations Organization which has come to be the meeting ground for the races, nations, and representative individuals of vast masses of men; and which has effectuated, through its specialized agencies, splendid victories over world human ill-health, ignorance, poverty.

If these two great achievements of the twentieth century are to fulfil the positive purposes and goals which the best aspirations of humanity assign to them, the only way that lies open is through an increasing expression of the moral character, a manifestation of love, an activity of service and sacrifice, of faith, charitable disposition and goodness, on the part of both individuals and nations.

Unless the psychological requisites for universal brotherhood and world peace are satisfied by the mind of mankind, its attempts to establish an external brotherhood, unity and peace, will never succeed; and if ever they succeed, will never yield any returns worth the pains, much less any fruitful results.



The International Ethics

Though the pre-Greek civilized world bears varied testimony and trace to the bare rudiments of what may be construed as approximating to internationalism as we now conceive, internationalism as a specific intellectual sentiment took its indefinite initial steps from the idealistic stages of the French revolution. As a definite and all-important activity, it constitutes the distinctive expression of the liberal contemporary world tendencies. We need to note that the increasing international intercourse, tensions, affairs and problems render it highly incumbent upon observers and the nations to create a common world-conscience, world-consciousness, and cause and construct a powerful world-morality.

The reasons for low international morality are far more than what can be listed as,

1. The recurring reign of 'the survival of the fittest' in international relations,
2. The persisting types of diseased nationalism,
3. The absence of active units that could form world-conscience,
4. A weak world public opinion,
5. The political and cultural backwardness of some nations,
6. The inadequacy of the techniques developed and used by the UNO for the settlement of acute international disputes.

In the cultural field, for a rapid raising of the cultural consciousness and psychological

oneness among nations and mankind, it is high time that we grow increasingly sensitive to, and employ vigorously the many possible and available modes of setting into operation around the world, powerful moral factors that pave the way for, and ensure, high international morality.



World Peace

Humanize man - there will be no wars. Spiritualize man - there will be a world of creative dynamism, peace, joy, manysided progress and the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is illegitimate, if not lunacy, to ask for world peace, or happiness, or welfare, while we plunge ourselves in the fostering of a world of demoralizing sensations, enervating pleasures, irrational excitements, and destructive economic, social, political passions. We cannot demand light, while we hold on to darkness.

The true greatness and beauty of the human individual consists in seeking to light up a thousand faces with joy, a thousand hearts with peace, and a thousand lives with strength, hope and a new vision. Let us purify the world by our self-discipline, by our pure thoughts, and dignify the world by our dignified feelings and actions.



The Unity of Humanity

God is present in all men, whether they be believers or not believers. The non-believers deprive themselves of the many blessings that accompany a conscious recognition of God.

God is in all beings, whether they be good or bad. The bad build between themselves and God a dark wall that prevents them from partaking of the delights of the Light.

This truth that God is in all beings, is the basis of universal brotherhood. Development of universal love, the love for all beings, is the practical expression of the recognition of the truth that God is the one Being resident in all.



Not Condemnation but Love, Humanity Deserves

Humanity needs to be understood and loved, not judged and condemned. Sympathy, comfort, inspiration, - these mankind requires, not threats of punishment and pictures of a dismal future.

Not powerful speeches, but transforming examples, not that kind of general and universal instruction, but some kind of definite illumination and culture, is the immediate need of mankind. Humanity needs guidance and wise leadership.

Today, more than ever, mankind needs the right and the best leadership. Leaders should not lack fundamental thought, fundamental goodness, fundamental insights, nor allow themselves, from within themselves, to be dominated by any great force of ignorance. Kindness, selflessness, the genius of the right type, intrinsic nobility, and awareness of God, should characterise them.

History shows that the crimes of mankind have always emerged from evil and wrong leadership. The blame rests largely with the leaders, who seek their self-interest, and not with mankind. When men of understanding and illumination are leaders, we have a paradise on earth.

Lead by Love, Culture and Illumination, not by force, threats and self-aggrandisement.



Factors that Prevent One from Loving One's Neighbour as Oneself

Egoism, vanity, selfishness, pride, ignorance - these do not allow us to love the neighbour as ourselves. Our ignorance, ego and pride raise a hundred barriers between ourselves and others, and make all the differences between man and man. It is the development in ourselves of the love for One Infinite God in the heart of all beings, that can dissolve all artificial differences, barriers, and walls, and makes us love the neighbour as ourselves.



Great is Your Responsibility In a Difficult World

All the World may be bad, but if there is no badness in your heart, then the world is to that extent good.

All the world may be unjust, but if there is no injustice from you, then the world is to that extent just.

All the world may be peaceless, but if there is no peacelessness in your inner mind, then the world is to that extent peaceful.

Great is the responsibility upon your noble shoulders. And great is our admiration for your nobility.



Waft Your Fragrance and Make a Joy

Because there are too many wars and too much badness in the world, the roses have neither stopped looking beautiful, nor denied the world their rich fragrance. Why, then, should you grow pale with depression and lose your fragrance by condemnation of mankind? The roses do not smell less fragrant in the hands of bad men, and more fragrant in the hands of good men. They do not look less beautiful in a fort of battles, and more in a palace of peace.

Be equal souled. Continue to shine in your luminous nature of beauty and fragrance. And, however bad and warlike be the nature of the world, it will look less bad and less warlike when we look at you.



You are a Blessing to the World

Whatever may be the extent of evil, injustice and unhappiness in the world, at least let your life be completely free from these dark forces.

Over the evil, injustice, unhappiness in the lives of the others, you have no control. In your own life, over these negative forces, you have a complete control. To the extent you eliminate them from the field of your life, the world is nobler, happier and more beautiful.

A blessing to the world you are. And if everyone follows your example, the world will be a real Heaven.

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