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Moral Problems of To-day.

VIII.

Self-Realization.

BY PROFESSOR JOHN MACMURRAY, M.C., M.A., UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.

It is usually unwise to interpret a catchword positively. A catchword is a battle-cry, the symbol of an offensive, and its meaning is determined by opposition. 'Self-realization' is no exception. It is the battle-cry of a new idealism, and it is a call to arms. Its business is to rouse our emotions to take sides, to become partisan. If we are to respond, we must know first of all not what it stands for, but what it stands against.

The modern emphasis upon self-realization is a recoil from the demand for self-subordination, self-devotion, and self-sacrifice. It insists that our first duty is to ourselves, to realize to the full the potentiality of our own nature. It sets this duty in opposition to all ideals which find the value of human life in the service that it renders to humanity at large, to a particular cause or a particular society, or to other persons. It would seem, therefore, at first sight to be essentially egocentric, anti-social, and anti-Christian, and it does undoubtedly reveal these characteristics in some of its phases.

But before condemning it outright, it would be wise to consider whether such characteristics are either a necessary or a natural part of a crusade against self-sacrifice. Even the staunchest admirers of self-sacrifice would agree that it makes an important difference what a man sacrifices himself for, and whether the sacrifice is voluntary or unwilling. Many a man has sacrificed his life for his country in battle with the utmost reluctance, and the martyrs of pleasure-seeking are to be found in all the Spas of Europe. In this matter we clearly need a principle to guide us. Self-sacrifice is palpably absurd and immoral in certain cases.

Now no prophet of self-realization would waste powder and shot on a doctrine of self-sacrifice which nobody really believes in, and no one who believes in the virtue of self-sacrifice would admit that self-sacrifice is good in itself. We must be more explicit about the real issues if we are to understand what is at stake. The ideal of self-sacrifice which is challenged in the name of self-realization is really the attitude of mind which feels that society is more important than the individual, and which therefore believes that it is the duty of the individual to

devote himself to the service of the society to which he belongs. Behind that attitude lies the whole weight of the romantic idealism of the last century, the whole influence of evolutionary thought and the ideals of progress which it has generated, the whole effort of humanitarianism and social service in its many forms. It is *this* that the ideal of self-realization challenges to battle. The self-realization of individuals is more important, it maintains, than the realization of social welfare or of social progress. It seems to me that this position is true and Christian, and that the ideal of social service is false and unchristian.

The great fallacy which underlies all ideals which bid us subordinate our own welfare to the welfare of society is as old as Plato's Republic, although it never dominated human life as it has come to do in our own time. In its simplest form it is the fallacy of applying mathematics to the things of the spirit, of thinking that the welfare of two men is more important than the welfare of one. In this crude form the absurdity of the assumption is readily apparent. A sorrow is not twice as great because two people feel it. Indeed, it is lessened if they bear it together in sympathy. We cannot add souls together, nor their experiences. An injustice is not less important because it is suffered by a solitary individual. The majority principle has no standing in the moral life, in spite of the ingenuity of utilitarians, for there is no experience which is not the experience of a single individual.

The first result of thinking that the individual should subordinate himself to the group because the welfare of the group is more important than the welfare of the individual is to produce an effective social materialism. For if human welfare is to be measured by numbers it must be measured in terms of that which can be multiplied and divided, and so bought and sold. This is by no means what the idealism of self-devotion to the service of society intends, but it is none the less its only possible result. The welfare of the group is something less than the welfare of the individuals composing it, not something more. For it is the welfare of the individual members in so far as that welfare can be

produced and distributed among them by organized corporate effort. Only material welfare can so be produced and distributed, for it alone can be handled and managed statistically. And the group is a statistical conception. This helps us to understand the curious paradox of the history of the last century, to see why the lofty idealism of a Hegel becomes in practice the economic interpretation of history of a Marx, why the humanitarian movements degenerate into a national scramble for wealth and possessions, why a war to make the world safe for democracy ends in a peace of the pickpockets.

The second result of subordinating individual welfare to social welfare is that in effect it sacrifices persons to organizations. This is inevitable. It is organization which turns a mere multitude into a society. When therefore we *contrast* 'self' and 'society,' when we distinguish the welfare of the individual from the welfare of society, we are in reality contrasting persons with institutions. If we imagine that the individual is of less importance than society, we are effectively asserting that institutions are more important than persons. The service of society consists, in fact, in serving people in the mass, impersonally. It consists in maintaining, improving, and elaborating the organization of society. The service of society and the service of others are essentially different activities. They do not come to the same thing in the end. The one is personal and involves personal contact and personal interest. The other is impersonal and is best done in an office, by statistics. If, then, we generalize the service of society as an ideal of human conduct, we are demanding of every man that he should look upon himself as a means to the maintenance and improvement of social institutions. We are denying the intrinsic value of human personality, and exalting the impersonal organization of life as the end which personality should serve. From a moral or religious point of view, this is a hideous thing to do.

We can now see the real meaning of the attack upon 'self-sacrifice' in the name of 'self-realization.' The personal must not be subordinated to the impersonal. The spiritual must not be sacrificed to the material. So far from being anti-Christian, the cry for self-realization echoes the central doctrine of all Christianity, the absolute value of the individual person. Men must not serve institutions. 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.' Society exists for the realization of selves, not selves for the realization of society. Is it really possible to imagine Jesus exhorting His

disciples to devote themselves to the service of the Roman Empire, or to sacrifice themselves for the cause of Jewish nationalism? I think not. Nor can I believe that it would have made any essential difference to Him if He had been confronted by the British Empire and the League of Nations. Yet by a masterpiece of strategy the Prince of this world might seem almost to have persuaded the Protestant Churches to identify their Christianity with the defence and maintenance of the earthly societies of which they are members.

From this point of view, at least, the ideal of self-realization is fundamentally Christian. It insists on the supreme value of the individual person. Yet for most of us it retains a flavour of self-centred egoism which we cannot associate with the teaching of Christ. There can be no doubt that in the minds of many of its modern adherents self-realization and self-assertion are close companions. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' they seem to say. 'I have my own life to live. Why should I bother myself about any one else?' Such an attitude betrays a gross misunderstanding of the nature of selfhood. It is a psychological law that 'He that saveth his life shall lose it.' It is one of the conditions of self-realization that a man shall not keep himself locked up within his own heart. Self-realization is the true ideal of human life, but it demands an understanding of the nature of the self and its reality.

The characteristic of the reality of selfhood is its objectivity. Our own reality is not self-contained. It consists in our capacity to realize the independent existence and value of what is not ourselves. To be ourselves we must live beyond ourselves. If we misapprehend the character of the world in which we live, we are infected with illusion. The unreality that results is in us, not in the world outside us. It is *our* unreality. The more real our apprehension is of what is not ourselves, the more real we are in our own selfhood. This is the essential nature of personality. To realize ourselves, therefore, is to realize the world that is not ourselves. The self which is indifferent to the nature and significance of what is other than it, is indifferent to its own reality and cannot realize itself. This is obvious in the field of pure knowledge, where error is at once a failure to realize the self in its capacity of knower, and a failure to grasp the nature of that which we seek to know. But it is equally true and more important in the field of desire and emotion. To set our desire or our affection upon any object is to endow it with value and significance. If the object really lacks the value

we assign to it, if it cannot sustain the significance we put upon it, we are deluded in our emotion and in our desire. The delusion is *our* delusion. The unreality which it generates is an unreality in us, and it frustrates our own self-realization. Thus any failure to live in and by the reality beyond us is a destruction of the reality of the self. All egoism is deliberate self-frustration, for the self which shuts itself off from its other shuts itself off from the possibility of its own realization.

To this we must add another important factor in the problem. Since the self must realize itself in and through its other, the limits of self-realization are the limits of the reality of the other. In particular, the self can only realize its personality in and through another person. The self-realization of persons is a mutual thing, possible only through the fellowship of love. The self cannot be real in isolation, because the reality of persons is a mutual reality. This is the first wisdom, and to grasp it is to destroy the illusion that self-realization is an egocentric and anti-social ideal. On the contrary, it brings us straight to the new commandment of the gospel that we should love one another, and to the first principle of Christian metaphysics, that God is Love.

Each of us stands, in unescapable isolation, over

against the whole universe in its infinite otherness. Yet in mere isolation from it we are absolutely nothing, completely unreal. To be real at all we must somehow pass beyond ourselves and enter into fellowship with the world. In doing so we become ourselves and remain ourselves. This continuous flow of our life beyond itself into the world, into fellowship with its other, cannot be a one-sided transaction. The flow must run both ways. We must take the reality which lies beyond us to our own hearts. It must give itself to us in a mutual fellowship. This is the law of our being. We find our reality in the love of other men and women. Our friendships are the nodal points, as it were, the centres of concentration of our own reality in its self-transcendence. Yet in their isolation they too are only points, these friendships. They depend for their reality on the infinite beyond them. Through the love of men and women our individual selves reach out to fellowship with the whole infinite otherness of the world which is not us, yet in which we live and move and have our being. If this fellowship is to be possible—and its possibility is the condition of our own reality—then the infinity that stands over against us must needs be a personal God. For God is the postulate of our own being; and our self-realization is the realization of God.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Where's Eros?

BY THE REVEREND A. BEAGHAN, EAST MOLESEY.

‘Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.’—Is 45¹².

IF you lived in London and knew Piccadilly Circus before they built the wonderful Underground Station, which is a perfect marvel, you will remember the fountain that stood in the middle of the Circus with its flower-sellers sitting round, and the lovely winged figure of Eros poised on one foot, with wings outstretched, and holding a bow in his hand. He is the very image of lovely grace and beauty, and he has been absent from his old place for a long time, and Londoners are asking, ‘Where’s Eros?’ ‘We want our Eros back again.’ The flower-sellers say the Circus is not the same without him, their trade has gone all to pieces, and they are

sad and feel lonely without their old friend. There is a fuss indeed! I don’t suppose many people know where Eros is, but I know, because I saw him the other day, and you will be surprised when I tell you. I wouldn’t dare tell the flower-sellers where their old friend is; they would weep, I feel sure. Here’s the secret. I’ll tell you, but you must not tell the flower-sellers or the many London folk who love their Eros. I went to a foundry the other day where they make statues, and I saw them making all kinds of lovely things, and the man who showed me round told me how they make those big statues of famous people that stand in the City Squares and the Parks, and sometimes in homes and churches. I couldn’t tell you all about it; it’s much too complicated, but I saw one or two famous people in bronze while I was there. There was a huge statue of a great man who started Sunday schools—Robert Raikes—and he was lying on his side, to be