

The New Ethics[†]

J. HOWARD MOORE

The inhabitants of the earth are bound to each other by the ties and obligations of a common kinship. Man is simply *one of a series* of sentient, differing in degree, but not in kind, from the beings below, above, and around him. *The Great Law—ACT TOWARD OTHERS AS YOU WOULD ACT TOWARD A PART OF YOUR OWN SELF*—is a law not applicable to Aryans only, but to *all* men; and not to men only, but to *all beings*. There is the same obligation to act toward a German, a Japanese, or a Filipino, as one acts toward a part of his own organism, as there is to act in this way toward Americans or Englishmen; and, furthermore, there is the same reason for acting in this manner toward horses, cats, dogs, birds, fishes, and insects, as there is in acting so toward men. Restricting the application of this all-inclusive injunction to the human species, is a practice dictated solely by human selfishness and provincialism. The restriction is made, not because we are logical, but because we are diminutive.

How would it be for ants or elephants, or some other distinct group of the inhabitants of a world, to cut themselves off ethically from the rest, observing in their conduct toward each other THE GREAT LAW of social propriety, but ignoring this law in their conduct toward others, and acting toward all others, although these others were like them in every essential respect, as if they were without any of the ordinary rights and sensibilities of a common consciousness? Is it probable that men would have any difficulty in seeing clearly the untenableness of such an attitude? And yet it would be just as logical for any other group of animals to do this as it is for men to do it. The philosophies of this world have all been framed by, and from the standpoint of, a single species, and they are still managed and maintained in the interests of this species. What insects! The breadth of human sympathy and understanding is the catholicity of katydid who never see beyond the hedgerows that bound the little meadow in which they sing their lives away.

Moral practice and understanding are everywhere tribal and antagonistic. They have been *inherited, not reasoned out*. They have been handed along to us, not generated by us. They have come about as a result of the militant condition of things in the midst of which and in conformity with which life has been developed on the earth.

The ideal conception of social obligation is bigger than family and friends, bigger than the city and state in which one happens to be born and raised, bigger than species, bigger even than the particular world of which one is a tenant. *There are no aliens anywhere*, not even in hell, to the being who is as big morally as he ought to *TQQ—only brothers*. The universal heart goes out in tenderness beyond all boundaries of form and color and architecture and accident of birth—into every place where quivers a living soul. *The Great Law* is for the healing and consolation of all. *Moral obligation is as extensive as the power to feel*. [...]

Man has defined himself as the "paragon of creation."

This is an overestimate. Man is no more a model animal than the universe is a model universe. They are both of them very immodel, as every one must know who has powers of understanding exceeding those of the infant.

Man is a bigot, and in his conception of himself and in his estimate of the relative importance of himself and others, he is true to the weaknesses of his kind. But, omitting altogether the question of whether man is the masterpiece of the universe or not, we may affirm with perfect confidence, and without fear of contradiction, that if man *is* the paragon of the universe, the universe has no cause for dry eyes.

[†] London, 1907.

Man's treatment of his fellow-men, and especially his conduct toward the forms of life differing anatomically from him, are such as to stamp him as being anything but an ideal animal—anywhere outside the psychologies of brigands, at any rate.

Human beings have been sufficiently enterprising and sufficiently devoted to each other to evolve into the master of the earth; but instead of recognizing their responsibilities and converting themselves into preceptors for the vanquished races, as an ideal race would have done, they have become the butchers of the universe. Instead of becoming the models and schoolmasters of the world in which they have outstripped, and striving to improve the faulty natures, and guide the wayward feet of those by means of whom they have been hoisted into distinction, they have become colossal pedants, proclaiming themselves the pets and specials of creation, and teaching each other that other races are mere things to furnish pasture and pastime for them. They preach that it is the ideal relation of associated beings for each to act toward the others in the way in which he himself would like to have others act toward him. This ideal of social rectitude was discovered two or three thousand years ago, and has been taught by the sages of the species ever since. But in the application of this rule human beings restrict it hypocritically to the members of their own species. No nonhuman is innocent enough, or is sufficiently sensitive, intelligent, or beautiful, to be exempt from the most frightful wrongs, if by these wrongs human comfort, curiosity, or pastime are in any way whatever catered to. Our own happiness, and that of our species, are assumed to be so pre-eminent that we sacrifice without hesitancy the most sacred interests of others, in order that our own may be carefully provided for. Even for a tooth or a feather to wear on human vanity, forests are silenced and communities littered with the dead and dying. Beautiful beings that fill the groves with song and juvenility are compelled to sprawl lifeless and dishevelled on the heads of unconscionable sillies. [...]

Look at the scenes to be met with in our great cities! They are sufficient to horrify any being susceptible enough to the sufferings of others to be rated as one-fifth civilized. An army of butchers standing in blood ankle-deep and plunging great knives into writhing, shrieking living beings; helpless swine swinging by their hinders with their blood gushing from their slashed jugulars; unsuspecting oxen with trustful eyes looking up at the deadly pole-ax, and a moment later lying aquiver under its relentless thud; an atmosphere in perpetual churn with the groans and screams of the dying; streets thronged with unprocessed funerals; dead bodies dangling from sale hooks or sprawling on chopping blocks; men and women going about praying and preaching, and sitting down two or three times a day and pouncing on the uncoffined remains of some poor creature cut down for them by the callous hands of hired cutthroats—such are the sights in all our streets and stockyards, and such are the crimes inflicted day after day by Christian cannibals on the defenseless dumb ones of this world.

Oh this killing, killing, killing—this awful, never-stopping, never-ending, worldwide butchery! What a world! "Ideal"?—and "perfect"?—and "all-wise"? Certainly—to tigers, and highwaymen, and people who are sound asleep; but to everybody else it is simply *monstrous*.

We are nothing but a lot of ferocious humbugs—that is the long and the short of it—leading lives all the way from a tenth to two-thirds decent in our conduct towards our fellow men, but almost absolutely savage in our treatment of not-men. A being who can look without weeping on the heart-rending facts that fill the cities of our so-called civilization has a psychology granitic enough to gaze unmoved on a hellful of roasting souls.

The Chicago stockyards alone grind up annually 4,500,000 sheep, 5,500,000 cattle, 450,000 calves, and 10,000,000 hogs—20,500,000 *living beings a year*, or an average of *over 100 a minute* during every ten-hour working day!

What a mill! Just think of it! You who find it hard to realize vividly, and who stand blank and

unconcerned in the presence of horrors that ought to make your very viscera crawl, and the very stones at your feet rise up, just remember, as you go about your daily duties, wherever you are and whatever you may be doing, that *every time the clock strikes, 6,500 innocent, intelligent, and highly sensitive beings have had their heads smashed with an axe, and their throats lunged through, and have struggled, and shuddered, and seen the world vanish from their eyes, here in these godless charnels.* And remember, too, that this appalling carnage goes on, and on, and on, day after day, month after month, year after year.

"What for"? Why, bless your life! In order that men and women may pray for mercy, and preach the Golden Rule, and deplore injustice, *with their bellies full of blood!*

I would like to retain respect for the religion of my boyhood, but when I see that religion look with indifference, and even levity, upon a hemorrhage wide as the continents, and horrible even to "heathens"—not only wink at it, but apologize for it, and even belittle those few emancipated souls who are trying to stop it—I can but feel that such a faith has no just claims on the allegiance of thinking men. "Does it not shame you," cried "pagan" Plutarch away in the dawning, "to mingle blood and murder with Nature's beneficent fruits? Other carnivora you call savage and ferocious—lions, tigers, and serpents—yet you yourselves come behind them in no species of barbarity." Men and women who hold shares in the responsibility for the common crimes of our civilization would do better to stop giving money for missionaries and begin on themselves; for they commit every day of their lives greater crimes and more of them than the so-called heathens they are trying to "convert" ever dream of. The gods pity this world if we have got to go on for ever as we have in the past—a globeful of lip-virtuous felons!

It has been claimed that man cannot be a consistent humanitarian, because it is necessary for him to exploit others in various ways in order to provide for his own needs and desires.

This is the most common objection. ... It is the most common because it is the most selfish. So prominent is egoism in human psychology, and in the philosophies that have sprung from that psychology, that the most natural and convincing objections to any proposition are those prompted by and appealing to the selfish instincts. The question that arises in the mind of the ordinary man when a change in the arrangements of the world is suggested to him is not what will be the effect of the change on the universe, but what will be its effect on *him—on* that remarkable atom of the universe so zealously partitioned off from the rest of his own skin. Man has been so long accustomed to the undisputed privilege of spoliation, and has so long and so brilliantly imagined himself to be all there is in the world, that a proposition denying this privilege, however fair the proposition may be from an impartial point of view, is promptly classified as the allegation of a zany, and is supposed to be conclusively disposed of when it is shown to be capable of interfering with human convenience or pleasure.