

# Personal Morality

by Olin Alfred Curtis

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*Personal morality is the realization that one is the servant of the moral law, with a consuming ambition to serve righteousness and keep the whole complex motivity of an action as clean as blowing snow.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 9:10, Romans 8:15, 2 Corinthians 7:10, 1 John 4:18

**Topics:** "Moral Law", "Holy Love"

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## Description

Olin Alfred Curtis preaches about the journey from personal morality to religion, emphasizing the taproot of moral concern in man as a sense of belonging to a supernatural overmaster, leading to a feeling of obligation and fear of doing wrong. He discusses the impossibility of becoming an organic moral person under the moral law due to fear as the main motive, highlighting the need for holy love as the only motive capable of organizing a man. Curtis explores the transition from ethical despair to the first glimmer of repentance, signaling the dawn of religion as the moral ideal is exalted through personal sorrow and a hopeful change.

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## Transcript

To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour.

-- Henry David Thoreau, Walden.

Go, and demand of him if there be here

In this cold abstinence from evil deeds,

And these inevitable charities,

Wherewith to satisfy the human soul?

-- William Wordsworth, The Old Cumberland Beggar.

For it is to be remembered that moral qualities reside not in actions, but in the agent who performs them, and that it is the spirit or motive from which we do any work that constitutes it base or noble, worldly or spiritual, secular or sacred. The actions of an automaton may be outwardly the same as those of a moral agent, but who attributes to them goodness or badness? . . . Many actions materially great and noble may

yet, because of the spirit that prompts and pervades them, be really ignoble and mean; and, on the other hand, many actions externally mean and lowly may, because of the state of his heart who does them, be truly exalted and honorable.

-- John Caird, from a sermon preached before Queen Victoria; text, Rom. 12.11.

A feeble unit in the middle of a threatening Infinitude, I seemed to have nothing given me but eyes, whereby to discern my own wretchedness. . . . And yet, strangely enough, I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear; tremulous, pusillanimous, apprehensive of I knew not what; it seemed as if all things in the heavens above and the earth beneath would hurt me; as if the heavens and the earth were but boundless jaws of a devouring monster, wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured. . . . I asked myself: What art thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper, and go cowering and trembling?.. . . Thus had the EVERLASTING No (das ewige Nein) pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my Being, of my Me; and then was it that my whole Me stood up, in native God -- created majesty, and with emphasis recorded its protest.

-- Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus.

Before we can wisely discuss intrinsic morality, we need to eliminate formal morality, or those empty forms of conduct which look moral but do not spring from right -- motive. In a sweeping way morality can be defined as conformity to the moral law as that law is understood in a given community. With this comprehensive definition in mind, readily we can see that there is possible a merely external conformity; and when we closely study human life we find actual instances of such conformity. Of these superficial forms of morality there are at least two distinct kinds:

1. Morality based upon self-advantage. A purpose of utility does not necessarily poison the quality of conduct. Utility may sometimes, indeed, furnish our only reliable test as to whether a course of action be right or wrong. But when the personal aim is to obtain self-advantage by using moral forms without having any moral intention, then the conduct, however noble in appearance, is thically worthless. For example, a short time before a close and important election in one of our cities, certain party managers yielded to public sentiment and checked a crying vice; but we now know that their moral alacrity was nothing but a political device. Not a man of them really cared for the moral law.

2. Morality based upon inherited disposition. Already we have seen (in the discussion of Moral Freedom) that a man inherits many traits and that these traits do not always express what he is in personal and moral bearing; but the point is of such practical moment that I wish to touch it from another angle. One may inherit a disposition, I say, which in its very nature is a formal moral bias, rendering it difficult for him not to conform at a particular point in moral demand. A man, for instance, might inherit a disposition so extremely gentle as to make it well-nigh impossible for him to commit murder. Wendell Phillips, as I once heard him tell it, tried one day to shoot a plover, and the act made him suffer so that never again would he engage in such sport. "That little, wounded, fluttering, helpless thing just looked at me and said: 'When did I ever do you any harm?'" Cannot anyone see that a native disposition like that would practically prevent certain kinds of wrongdoing? Surely. But what we are not so sure to see is that under this very gentleness a man might not be truly kind and noble in person. He might be not only selfish, but actually malicious, and even cruel in some subtle manner. Wendell Phillips himself was a moral hero; but even in his case his natural gentleness was not a reliable index of his personal character. Any opponent relying upon that mild disposition would have been subject to disabusement sudden and dire. Why, some of the worst women in

all history have been in disposition like the saints of God, and because of this very fact they were the more dangerous. Again and again (and you must be made to feel this) the most noble features of individual character have been utilized -- to get a victory for some ignoble cause. And thus both kinds of formal morality can be combined, conduct based upon inherited disposition becoming conduct based upon both disposition and self-advantage.

The Intrinsic Moral Deed. This deprecatory emphasis has been placed upon formal morality for two reasons: First; that we may be more discriminating in our estimate of the morality about us; that we may not be deceived and think that we are getting on in morals when we are only getting on in respectability. But, second, that we may appreciate the intrinsic moral deed when we have it before our eyes. Whenever a deed, whatever its form, is done, not because it is the point of least resistance, not because it receives commendation in society, not because it gains money or votes or influence, but directly and only because to us it is right, that deed is intrinsically moral. This statement I refuse to modify by so much as a stroke. Ethical teachers are constantly telling us that deeds are moral when and because they conform to standards of experience and contribute to human welfare. These standards and contributions, however, have to do with manifestation and not with spirit. They are societary, but not personal. They are important, but not profound. Deeds are moral, personally moral, intrinsically moral, only when they express a man's own conception of duty, or his own feeling of moral love, as he has the conception or feeling when self-conscious.

This distinction between spirit and manifestation is of the utmost practical importance also. Given the moral spirit, and you are certain finally to have the best expression of it, for it is deep in the nature of the moral spirit to seek better and better ways of getting out among men. But the appearance can be had without one spark of the spirit; and when this is the fact -- when you are working merely for individualistic ends, or for a frictionless society, or for an aesthetic paradise, or even for a socialistic brotherhood -- when you are working for anything short of fundamental personal righteousness -- you are not doing one abiding thing either for the individual or for mankind. Man is too great to live on your utilitarian schemes of makeshift.

Continuity in Moral Bearing. This intrinsic moral deed has not, though, as an isolated point in conduct, any sufficient ethical worth. It is not enough to be true once in a lifetime. Perhaps no wreck of a man ever lived who had not in some flashing instant won a real moral victory. Nor is sporadic morality, or the doing of intrinsic moral deeds now and then, of large ethical significance. The deeds are not joined, and so they do not express any continuity of personal intention. They are like some summer nights when the scene is intermittent with lightning. Now it is so light that one can pick up a pine needle, and then it is so dark that he cannot find the turnpike. In some way we must get out of our piecemeal luminosity. If we are to make any moral headway we need to have continuity in our moral bearing.

Alliance to the Moral Ideal. We can, I am quite sure, discover the steps by which a man passes out of sporadic morality. In the first place, he gets a vision of right as a totality. The earliest moral possibility in performance is to do right at one definite point. Then, as the developing person keeps on doing right, here and there, at definite points, there comes to him sooner or later a vision. He sees that to be honest and to tell the truth express the same fundament; he sees that rightness is one and whole. All this was in his original notion, was in the first beat of moral intuition, but it was infolded, and only now, in this new vision, does the full import open out. In the second place, the man obtains a moral ideal. When he gets a vision of right as a totality he realizes that it is not enough to do right here and there, now and then, on concrete demand; he ought to be everlastingly committed to this total right. Thus he obtains a lofty moral ideal. In

the third place, there is the actual commitment in personal allegiance to the moral ideal. Now the man passes out of sporadic morality. No longer is he satisfied with unjoined items of worthy conduct -- with trying to -- day not to lie and then tomorrow not to steal; his aim is to be loyal to the right all the time. This bearing of personal allegiance to the moral ideal is the only thing worthy of being termed personal morality.

#### Analysis of Morality

Morality -- In widest Speech, morality is the individual conformity to the moral law as that law is understand expressed in the ethical standard of a given community.

Formal Morality -- Wherever there is such individual conformity without right motive the morality is only formal.

The Intrinsic Moral Deed -- Whenever there is conformity with right motive at any point of moral demand there is an intrinsic moral deed.

Sporadic Morality -- Intrinsic moral deeds done, without continuity in moral bearing, only to meet the demand of the immediate occasion, constitute sporadic morality.

The Passage Out of Sporadic Morality -- A man passes out of sporadic morality by three steps: First, the realization that the right is a totality; second, the realization that a man's ideal moral life is nothing less than absolute and everlasting loyalty to the right as a totality; and, third, the actual, personal surrender to this ideal.

Personal Morality -- When a man aims to be perpetually loyal to all moral concern, in deed, in word, in principle, and in spirit, his bearing is personal morality.

#### The Expansion of the Moral Task

This is a place of extreme difficulty. But the difficulty springs, not from the subject, not from any failure in fact but altogether from the incapacity of the audience. We live in a Christian atmosphere; and with many the natural moral process has been taken up into the swifter Christian process, and so the moral movement, as a peculiar and complete movement, does not stand out in memory. It is as though we attempted to describe the final scenery of a long highway to a man who had traveled the first third of the distance on foot and the remaining two thirds by express train. To him our account would be too minute and clearcut to be convincing. And, again, of the men about us who are not greatly influenced by Christian teaching, only a few ever grant the moral ideal full play in their life. Quickly they hide away from the searching flame. This retreat, this personal flinching under severe moral demand, is fostered by the spirit of the time. We live in an age of externality. In many ways the age is magnificent, but its standards are conventional, its tests objective. We no longer expect any great inner things of men. And this externality, this sheer conventionality of mood, means badly for the intrinsic moral life because it pays a premium for moral cowardice.

The Servant of the Moral Law. If we try to find the dominant feature of personal morality we shall most certainly perceive it to be the realization that one is the servant of the moral law. And the most extraordinary emphasis should be placed upon that word servant. The man is not, like Goethe, seeking to enlarge, to perfect himself. He does not regard mankind as tributary; to his own supreme development. He does not even say with Emerson, "That can never be good for the bee which is bad for the hive." If you

take personal morality in any individualistic or in any utilitarian manner, you will entirely miss the noble fineness of its spirit. It is directly and constantly the spirit of service, the absolute service under moral concern.

The Deepening of the Moral Deed. As a servant of the moral law, the person demands that his deed shall express the very spirit of righteousness. This does not mean -- at least, usually it does not mean -- that the man must reject the societary commonplaces as to ethical action. Rather is it likely to mean that he must reinterpret, that he must deepen these commonplaces. For example, honesty in business cannot now be expressed by a transaction of scrupulous legality, while within the transaction there is concealed a plot to create an artificial stress in the market which will ruin a score of men. No profoundly moral man can plan the financial wreckage of a fellow trader, no matter what the law may say, and no matter what the societary view of it may chance to be. All this covert manipulation of stocks into arbitrary values; all this strategic campaigning to crush small merchants; all this building up of huge fortunes without regard to the daily needs of men, women, and children -- yes, many things which are sanctioned in the business world and praised in the social world are to the servant of the moral law positively immoral.

The New Test. In getting a deed adequate to express the very spirit of righteousness, the servant of the moral law must have a new test. Of course, he still uses his own moral judgment, as he used it in doing his first, isolated, intrinsic moral deed; but he uses it in this new spirit of service; with a most righteous ambition, namely, to glorify the totality of moral concern, to make the moral law absolutely supreme among men. In this spirit and with this ambition he feels what Immanuel Kant termed "the categorical imperative." In various ways Kant was wont to affirm that the one perfect test of moral performance is that the embodied principle shall be meet for universal legislation. "How would this maxim, if universally adopted and executed, affect the moral welfare of men?" Thus Kant appropriated the only valuable thing (almost) there is in utilitarianism to deepen the moral deed; but he appropriated it without dropping any of his emphasis upon moral intuition.

There is need here, however, of a word of close discrimination. The regard for men by the servant of the moral law is not a philanthropic passion for humanity, nor a Christian love for men because our Lord has redeemed them; no, it is precisely a regard for men as the best method of serving the cause of righteousness. The new test is to be related to all men because nothing less comprehensive will fully express and exalt the spirit of moral concern. Once catch this distinction, and you can easily understand why, now and again, there is a great moralist who will live for men and make constant sacrifice for men, and yet not have any real sympathy for men. Not every abolitionist loved the negro. To some of them he was "a strange, tormenting incubus"; but the spirit of righteousness was violated by slavery; the principle of slavery was not fit for universal application; and so the negro must be set free. With this discrimination in mind, it becomes possible to utilize the statement made by John Stuart Mill: "A morality grounded on large and wise views of the good of the whole."

The New Conception of Motive. But even Immanuel Kant did not see the profoundest feature in personal morality. The moral loyalist has now not only a new conception of the moral deed, and a new test to use in deepening the deed, but also a new conception of motive itself. In the old piecemeal life it was enough, if the initial motive-drive of an action was right, even if the main motive did take on imperfect accretions. The man never lit a lamp and held it steadily through the winding caverns of his deed. He was hesitant of any introspection. But now his consuming ambition is to serve righteousness, and it never can be completely served when a deed starts in the right and ends in the wrong. The ethical demand upon him now is to keep the whole complex motivity of his action as clean as blowing snow. This is saying no more than that

he must be loyal to his ideal through the entire reach of his personal intention. For illustration: Suppose that I tried to rescue a man from debauchery, and my original motive was to make him moral, but in the days of effort there came, as an accretion, the desire to make out of the rescue ten thousand dollars; would that deed as a total satisfy the ideal in personal morality? The question requires no answer.

But we are not done. This new demand as to motive really means an absolutely righteous man. To have a perfect moral deed, motivated in purity from end to end, there needs to be behind the deed a perfect moral man; or, at least, a man whose entire motivity is so organic in relation to his personality that it ever works for moral concern. Here I barely touch the point to indicate the merciless sweep in the expansion of the moral task. In a word, I maintain that no man can pass through the moral process to the end -- that no man can follow his moral leadings unflinchingly -and be personally content with anything short of absolute inner righteousness. Instead of being an easy thing of palliation, real morality is a thing of the most strenuous exaction.

### The Expanded Moral Task Impossible For Man

Steadily we have been moving from the beginning of personality on through man's moral life, until now we reach a task for man which we instantly pronounce impossible. But can we precisely locate the cause of the impossibility? Why is it that a servant of the moral law cannot satisfy his own ideal? Why is it that he cannot be a righteous man through and through? The theologians are ready with an answer. The failure, they say, is due to inherited depravity. Later we shall see that this answer has some truth in it. But this truth lies on the surface and does not expose the deep root of the failure. Another answer sometimes given is essentially this: In a complicated situation the moral loyalist, truly to serve the cause of righteousness, needs a moral judgment as nearly perfect as possible; and he cannot be certain that he has such a judgment. Again and again in his anxiety he says: "Can I rely upon my judgment? is my judgment what it ought to be? Have I so lived in all my past, have I so sought all light, have I so used every ray of light which has come to me, that my moral judgment is at its best?" If the questions can be answered by the anxious moralist at all they will be answered in the negative, and so moral content to him becomes impossible. This answer is quite worth while, for it does explain some of the ethical distress of the servant of the moral law. Still it does not explain the fact that he never comes to peace; that even when there is no question as to the adequacy of the moral judgment, he has moral unrest. The flaw must lie deeper.

In speaking of the new conception of motive which arises as the moral task expands, we really caught a glimpse of the profound flaw in personal morality. This flaw is the accretion of imperfect motives. Our initial motive may be splendid in its purity; but as we use it accretion after accretion is formed until our deed comes into port like a ship out of the tropics incrustated with barnacles. There are, in man 5 natural experience, few things so utterly impossible as to do a great moral deed and keep it clean in all its relations to self-consciousness. In spite of all you can do, your mood will slip and some taint will steal in, and the very man who launched his deed in righteousness will sail it with a lower purpose. Leaving out the one motive of love, which will be considered soon, never in all my life have I severely scrutinized a good deed and been sure that it expressed from end to end my ideal of righteous conduct. Good deeds are of large value in several ways, but as a means of securing rest under a lofty standard of duty they are simply worthless. They may for a period keep a man so busy that he has no time to live with his own soul; but the first hour he looks his whole manhood squarely in the face he is bound to have distress. There are, I know, those who cultivate this ethical busyness and call it peace; but it is not personal peace. It is as superficial as the quiet and sense of health a sick man may obtain by taking an opiate. Let it be ever understood that

sooner or later a man must face his own soul and face it in the most searching mood. He was not created to live merely an objective life, and he cannot always be satisfied with bare busyness.

In his Philosophy of Religion, speaking of the contradiction between the lower and the higher elements in man's nature, John Caird says: "But morality is, and from its nature can be, only the partial solution of that contradiction; and its partial or incomplete character may be said, in general, to arise from this, that while the end aimed at is the realization of an infinite ideal, the highest result of morality is only a never-ending approximation to that ideal." This is true, and yet it does not strike the definite reality. Man's moral weakness does not, exactly speaking, spring from his finitude, nor from his finitude under an infinite requirement; but precisely from this: Man cannot become an organic moral person under the moral law. As a self-conscious moral person, a man keeps yielding to conscience until he has a moral ideal to which he gives allegiance. With this personal allegiance, his task expands until he must, to satisfy his own standard, be righteous through and through. He tries to meet this demand, but he cannot organize himself about his main intention. He cannot control the depths of his individuality. He cannot gather all his moods, all the flying moments of desire, all the dim, basic longings of his nature, all the subtle interlacement of body and soul -- he cannot get together.

The Taproot of Moral Concern in Man. But why cannot the servant of the moral law organize himself about his main intention? To answer this question, we must greatly deepen our discussion. We have analyzed conscience, and we have brought to light the process by which the loftiest moral ideal is reached; but now we must do more, we must dare to ask the radical question, Why does a man have any concern whatever for this inner demand we call moral? To this most radical question all sorts of answers have been given. What is perhaps the most popular answer today amounts to this: We find in ourselves this "narrow and easily worried organ," conscience, and simply try to make terms with it, try to get a bit of comfort under the tormenting peculiarity, very much as one might make frantic and idiotic gestures to relieve the cramp. Then, there are various answers which play a fugue about a thematic \*summum bonum.\* Fairly to treat all these answers and sift out the grains of truth would be necessary in a work of pure ethics, but is neither necessary nor helpful here. The positive path is better for us. The taproot of moral concern in man is, as I see it, this: His intuitive sense of belonging to the supernatural overmaster. Whenever a man becomes self-conscious of moral distinction he spontaneously feels that the right owns him beyond all natural claim. It is out of this sense of being owned that the definite feeling of obligation springs. If we try to analyze his whole mood we shall find in it the following features:

1. There is a sense of the supernatural. What this term supernatural really means to a man I will more closely consider in another connection. Here it is sufficient to say that every unsophisticated man projects a supreme mystery beyond the realm of nature. His initial attitude is dualistic. He does not feel that the mystery beyond is "one with blowing clover and falling rain." He has two worlds.

2. There is a sense of fitness. The word fitness is not quite adequate, but it must be made to serve. The man feels that this supernatural, this transcendent mystery is his own place. I would say his own home, but the word home is friendly; and the man does not feel, in his primary mood anyway, that the supernatural is friendly. No, it is just this and no more: "I fit into that; I was made for that; my place is over there." Precisely as a dolphin may feel that he is in fitness with the sea, or as a petrel may instinctively feel that the wild fling of the spray suits him, so (a normal man intuitively feels that he fits into the vast mystery beyond nature, that the supernatural is in vital and necessary and everlasting conjunction with his being.

3. There is the sense of the supernatural overmaster. Both of the feelings, that of the supernatural and that of fitness, are gathered up into one' feeling, namely, that this non-natural mystery owns him, and so has a boundless, unyielding claim to all he is and all he can do. \*Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi.\* That this feeling has both a theistic implication and a theistic trend seems to me to be evident; and yet it is a mistake to teach that all men recognize in conscience the imperative of a personal God. Some men feel only a solemn presence or power, something in them and yet above them, an unpliant overmaster.

Another thing should be noted: This feeling that there is an overmaster with absolute claim upon us is not the feeling of dependence, but a feeling many reaches loftier. In the sense of dependence one feels need, but in the moral mood one feels authority. It is not that I require something, but that my overmaster requires something. Homer says: "As young birds open the mouth for food, so all men need the gods;" and the sentence would make a suitable text for a large part of the moral and religious discussion since Schleiermacher. But the conception is superficial and leads to sentimental weakness in the religious life. Surely we do need God and the gifts of God. Surely we have this sense of need and should give it large place later. But (and I must urge this upon you!) the fundamental moral feeling is that of authority, and the supreme moral action is that of obedience.

If now we can succeed in keeping this taproot of moral concern free from Christian and theistic interlacing, we can, I think, perceive that the primary moral feeling is essentially a feeling of fear. Under recognized supernatural authority the truly moral man fears to do wrong. But we must be extremely discriminating here, or we shall plunge into a cheap utilitarianism. This moral fear is not like the animal fear of pain. (Remember our discussion of Conscience.) It is not, primarily, an associational fear of results. It is an intuitive fear of the supernatural authority. The man has no reason for it. He is made to fear conscience, that is all. The fear is just as immediate, just as constitutional, as the sense of moral distinction itself. Inasmuch, then, as the simple, unenriched moral bearing is one of fear, the man of bare morality is a slave; a slave not in the sense that his volitions are necessitated, but in the sense that his motivity is charged with fear. "The crack of the moral whip never ceases." Personal morality never can be anything better than the most noble slavery.

Now we are prepared to come back to the question of the accretion of motive. I said that under the moral law no man can become an organic moral person; and I now add the reason. The impossibility lies in the fact that the main motive of personal morality -- fear -- is not an organizing motive. Indeed, fear is a motive of disintegration. Make any creature afraid, and the result is a scattering of all its forces like an army in flight. The profoundly moral man, then, who is merely moral and nothing more, is in this anomalous condition, namely, the best thing in him, his motive enthroned, is all the time rendering it less and less possible to bring all the elements of his manhood into moral unity. Were there nothing beyond morality -- and I say it deliberately -- it would be much better to have no moral life at all, yes, much better to have no personal life at all. An eagle, or a tree, is a success, for there is organic life in small range; but a moral man is a failure; never deeply at peace with himself; constantly afraid of an abstruse, sublime something with which he dare not fellowship; a shivering slave without a dream of freedom; an inorganic man never once bearing toward the universe in personal triumph. Moral loyalty is of large value; but the value is not that of a finality, it is that of an increment in a spiritual process. Praise the moralist as we will, glorify his heroism as we should, still we are to say unto him, "Go on. the end is not yet!"

Only one motive is there which is capable of organizing a man, and that one motive is holy love. We must have love. It is not enough to have "morality touched by emotion." Many a moral man can take fire at bare

thought of the supremacy of righteousness. It is not any emotion, it is not any great emotion which we need, but the one peculiar kind of emotion, the creative passion of love. This -- love in the heart -- is the organizer paramount. It will dominate every mood, make all idiosyncrasies coalesce, bring every wandering element of manhood into organic simplicity and beauty. It is not merely love's power of fusion, the fire, the intensity of the passion by which other emotions are transformed into blended urgencies, all driving toward the same object; neither is it the fullness of love, its oceanic occupancy of self-consciousness; it is these, fusion and fullness, with the addition of psychic endurance, the staying-power of love In consciousness -- it is these three qualities which make love the organizer it is. But, further, it is not any sort of love which can organize a man. He must have holy love. Man is a moral person, and he can be fully organized only under moral terms. The love must be just as ethical as that great fear which the moral loyalist has. You must not throw that fear away. You must take that very fear and make it over into a holy love, a boundless passion for all moral concern, a passion so ethical that it would be an awful fear were it for an instant to stop throbbing with the joy of personal fellowship. But how, pray, can this be done? how can moral fear be made over into moral love? In some way the moral law itself must be transformed into a personal Friend.

From Personal Morality to Religion. As a matter of (fact men do not today very commonly pass into religion from personal morality. They are, as said before, too cowardly to try to meet fully and patiently the requirements of their own ideal; and so they go back into sporadic morality, or into formal morality, or into a life immoral out and out. But whenever the loyalty is steadfastly maintained the man is certain sooner or later to realize the impossibility of his expanding task, and with this realization to experience ethical despair. An instance we have in the life of Thomas Carlyle. It is, I am aware, quite the fashion to depreciate Carlyle as "a dramatic exploiter of abnormal emotions"; but with sanity and verity he wrote out his own experience. And his own experience was typical -- was the experience common to every soul morally in earnest.

The First Glimmer of Repentance. With serious purpose I have termed this despair of the hopeless moral loyalist an ethical despair. It is ethical because the ethical ideal is exalted by the very despair itself. The hopeless man cares more and more for his ideal, cares more and more for righteousness, in every moment of his distress. And so his consciousness is flooded with ethical quality. It is, I believe, this brave moral insistence, this unflinching purpose rather to perish than to cheapen one's life, which opens up the way for supernatural help. Anyway, a wonderful change takes place. The fierce determination turns into a personal sorrow for failure, perhaps the most beautiful thing in the universe. Yes, and, strangely enough, a hopeful thing, too; for the despair begins to break up like a clearing storm. This is not by any means so profound as is Christian repentance, but it is morally the same kind of an experience. I call it the first glimmer of repentance -- and the dawn of religion.

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