

# **THE NEW MORALITY**

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The New Morality by Geoffrey Mortimer

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**GEOFFREY MORTIMER**

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BY  
GEOFFREY MORTIMER

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# THE NEW MORALITY

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF MORALITY

BEFORE man was, the rudimentary sense of morality existed among animals. During the pre-scientific stages of human thought, the beasts that perish were regarded with contempt, and the possession of reasoning capacity was denied to them. It is true that certain animals were looked upon with superstitious reverence; but it was long ere men began to trace a crude sense of right and wrong back to their lowly companions of the earth. Pleasure and pain men shared with the brutes, and in mere physical sensation mankind acknowledged a kinship with all breathing creatures. Yet men failed to realise that "the tribal conscience," that safeguard of the individual and the community, which experience fostered, had its analogue in the display of sympathy and mutual protection afforded by gregarious animals.

The sentinel bird that braves death before deserting its post, the feeble herb-eating mammal that defends its helpless young with supreme courage against the attack of the deadly carnivore, the dignified and magnanimous dog that patiently endures the menaces

and the affronts of a smaller and weaker dog, the willing horse that, without the lash, strains every sinew in drawing the master's load—these instance qualities which savour too strongly of morality to be dismissed without reflection upon their origin. Love, sympathy, bravery, patience, and fidelity are virtues highly evolved in the dog, and these spring from a developed brain and reasoning power. The instinct of self-preservation becomes an altruistic and reasoned action in such an instance as that recounted by Darwin, when an old ape at much peril fought single-handed with dogs that were worrying a young ape.

The necessity for morality forced itself upon the intelligence of the first human communities. Regard for the dictates of "the tribal conscience" was inevitable, for without moral ideas no tribe could exist, no community could prosper and survive. Man's sense of right and wrong, which has filled the philosopher's mind with awe, is a natural law. Its sanction is in reason and experience; its rate of evolution is in proportion to men's capacity for exercising reason, and benefiting by the teaching of experience.

At a very early stage in man's history, right and wrong became personified or embodied in spiritual beings; but there was a period when the gods of good and evil were unknown, and men were devoid of the religious yearning. The idea of causality is not inborn; it comes through experience, and in the day-dawn of religion man believed that even the stones were animate. He had not yet learned to account for the mysterious manifestations of nature as the work of a supernatural being or deity. The first great problem was the stern fact of death, and, finding it

hard to acknowledge this strange cessation of life as natural, primitive man conceived that in his being there were two parts—a bodily and a spiritual. Hence arose supernatural belief, and the theory of the existence of soul or immortal essence, though for ages men believed that souls existed in a material form upon earth after death, and that they experienced physical desires and needs.

When we reflect with what difficulty many persons in civilised countries understand the laws of causation in respect of quite simple phenomena, we may readily apprehend how savage minds naturally resorted to supernatural explanations when confronted by the mysteries of life and death. The evil and the suffering of existence were thus ascribed to the influence of spirits. One primitive brain conceived the idea that a bad spirit urged men to such anti-social acts as slaying or robbing within the tribe, while famine and pestilence were attributed to the ill-will of a super-human being. It was difficult to explain the good and evil forces in the world. Dread succeeded the animistic belief that man shared life with trees and rocks, and men began to quail at the voice of enraged gods when thunder reverberated among the hills. But the great spirit was not always wrathful. He gave the sunshine and shower and increase of the fruits of the earth; he shed joys and blessings, and men learned to adore as well as to fear.

From these beginnings sprang the great faiths of the world. Religion took morality into its protection, and until to-day it claims to be the source of moral aspiration and rectitude of conduct. It is with the morality of Christian theologians that we are at