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T.H. Huxley: The Agnostic

Esther Belyeu

T. H. HUXLEY: THE AGNOSTIC

by

Esther Belyeu

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

HUXLEY'S WORLD

The world into which Thomas Henry Huxley was born was in a state of stir and agitation caused by a restless shifting of ideas and ideals. There have been two rival interpretations of the character of life that have existed side by side in continuous hostility since the dawn of conscious thought. And naturalism, the philosophy upon which science is based, has ever been a powerful foe of supernaturalism, the philosophy of religion. The conflict between these two schools of thought in the 19th century was brought to the surface by two particular movements.[1]

The Industrial Revolution, which had its beginning in the previous century, had created two new classes of people--the wealthy factory owners and their employees, the industrial workers--whose interest in democracy threatened the authority of both the government and the church. Accompanying the Industrial Revolution was a new and powerful instrument of change and progress, the

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[1] Robert Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 6. Hereinafter cited as Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism.

scientific movement, which undermined tradition and authority wherever it existed.[2]

These two movements threatened the position of the Tory government by increasing the popularity of the doctrine of democracy. The Tory philosophy, based on the principles promoted by Burke during the 18th century, held that reason, as a guide to society, was less workable than tradition. That philosophy was challenged by the radicals within the Whig party who advocated Jeremy Bentham's theory of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," the basic principle of Utilitarianism, which promoted freedom and equality of all men and equality in the conduct of government.[3]

The Englishmen was finding it harder to believe that social inequality is of divine ordination and began to reject the authority of the church.[4] The dissenter found the advocate for and defender of his freedom in the young scientist and educator, T. H. Huxley, who believed that inequality was man-made, and who dedicated his life to the erasure of artificial class barriers, and authority.

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[2]John Wilson Bowyer and John Lee Brooks (eds.), The Victorian Age: Prose, Poetry, and Drama (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1954), pp. 13-16. Hereinafter cited as Bowyer and Brooks, The Victorian Age.

[3]Ibid., pp. 2, 9.

[4]Ibid., p. 3.

For good reason Huxley considered the clergymen of his day to be the enemies of science and of the people. The clerics used the Infallible Book, upon which Protestantism was founded,[5] as the source of truth upon which they based their preachments that the lowly station and the poor physical conditions of the masses were ordained by God, and to rebel against the inequality which they suffered was to rebel against God and His Word. Huxley assessed the clergymen to be a peddler of dogma, of the most damaging sort.[6] In order to discredit such teachings, Huxley struck at the source of their authority, the Bible.

Because he discovered in the Bible no foundation for the dogmatic theology of his day, Huxley set out to destroy the influence of religious teachings which were detrimental to the advancement of science and to a better way of life for the oppressed masses of 19th century England.[7]

The times dealt Huxley an ace. For whatever was the condition of England at mid-century, she was terribly unready for Darwin's The Origin of the Species. "Evolution

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[5]Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism, p. 13.

[6]E. H. Kemper McComb (ed.), Thomas Henry Huxley: Autobiography and Selected Essays from Lay Sermons (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), pp. 17, 35.

[7]Thomas Henry Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition Essays (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896). Passim. Hereinafter cited as Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition.

rose before the national mind like a Banquo's ghost terminating the long banquet scene of the Exposition decade."[8] Science rumblings had been heard off and on for a long time without causing the church too great a concern, but evolution was the border line where science and religion met. The theory of evolution by its very nature put the Church on the defensive; evolution threatened the theory of Divine Origin. To question Divine Origin was to question the authority of the Bible. But evolution stood to be heard, and Huxley used it as an instrument to further undermine the false teachings of the clergymen.

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[8] William Irvine, Apes, Angels, and Victorians (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 107.

CHAPTER II

DEFENDER OF EVOLUTION

Though the name of T. H. Huxley has become synonymous with "Darwin's Bulldog," Huxley did not at first accept Darwin's theory of evolution as gospel fact. Before he was willing to become the chief protagonist of evolution, he subjected the theory to his own very thorough investigation, employing to the best of his skill his own method of scientific discovery of fact. When he was satisfied that the theory was based on truth, he delivered a series of lectures propounding evolution and converted his lectures into essays which appeared in leading publications. The essays were later compiled in a volume called Man's Place in Nature. Huxley's works said what even the Origin had not stated outright; they left no doubt in even the dullest mind as to Huxley's opinion of the evolution of man.[9]

In preparing his lectures on evolution he found it impossible to avoid the responsibility of stating the

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[9] T. H. Huxley, Man's Place in Nature (Akron: The Werner Company, n.d.), entire volume.

position of the human species in zoological classification. The lecture which brought the greatest outcry was "The Relation of Man to the Rest of the Animal Kingdom."[10] There was wide-spread opposition to anyone who, through the exposition of his scientific research, tended to break down the barrier between man and the rest of the animal kingdom. However, Huxley was not to be deterred.

Huxley's lectures were well-attended, and his essays were widely read.[11] After the publication of his book on the evolution of man--beginning with the man-like ape, proceeding through relation of man to lower animals, based on tedious study and careful examination of ape skeletons and fossil remains of man--Huxley could not conceive man's failure to accept his interpretations of his findings on physical evolution, and on similarities of emotions, of degrees of intelligence, and of habits of the lower animals to those of man.[12]

To the people's cry of disbelief that anyone could place man in the proximity of the brute,[13] he expounded

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[10]Leonard Huxley, Life and Letter of Thomas Henry Huxley (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), I, 206. Hereinafter cited as Huxley, Life and Letters.

[11]Ibid., pp. 205, 212.

[12]Ibid., p. 207.

[13]Ibid., p. 208.

the agnostic view on evolution in his answer to mankind. He tried to show that no absolute line of demarcation, wider than that between animals which immediately precede man on the scale, could be drawn between the animal world and Homo sapiens; and he added the expression of his belief that the attempt to draw a psychical distinction was equally futile, that even the highest faculties of feeling and of intellect begin to germinate in the lower forms of life.[14]

As an appeasement, perhaps, he went on to say that no one more than he was convinced of the vastness of the gulf between civilized man and the brutes; or was more certain that whether from them or not, he was assuredly not of them.

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[14]Huxley, Life and Letters, p. 207.

CHAPTER III

ORIGIN OF HIS FAITH AND ITS NAME

Huxley's life as a scientist and his interest in humanity and the world he lived in combined with his special doubting nature led him to become an agnostic during the age in which he found cause for his lack of faith in the creeds abound in England. He sifted through every creed known to him and found that his own particular faith was not defined among them. Out of necessity he had to select a name for his faith; the times demanded it. He hit upon the term agnosticism--which came to be understood to mean doubt.

The agnostic who said, "I cannot find good evidence that so and so is true," had been brought up in the strictest school of evangelical orthodoxy; and when he was old enough to think for himself, he started upon a journey of inquiry with little doubt about the general truth of what he had been taught.[15] Looking back over his life, Huxley could see himself as a boy whose education had been interrupted and who, intellectually, was left for some years

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[15]Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition, pp. 228, 229.

altogether to his own devices; a boy who was a voracious and omnivorous reader; a dreamer and speculator well endowed with that splendid courage in attacking any and every subject, which, he said, is the blessed compensation of youth and inexperience. Among the books and essays, on all sorts of topics from metaphysics to heraldry, which he read at that time, two had left indelible impressions on his mind. One was Guizot's History of Civilization, and the other was Sir William Hamilton's essay "On the Philosophy of the Unconditioned." The latter was certainly "strange reading" for a boy, who could not possibly have understood a great deal of it. Yet, he said, he must have laid hold of the pith of the matter, for, many years afterwards, when Dean Mansel's Bampton Lectures were published, it seemed to him that he already knew all the eminently agnostic thinker had to tell him. Nevertheless, he devoured the essay with avidity, and it stamped upon his mind the strong conviction that, on even the most solemn and important of questions, men are apt to take cunning phrases for answers; and that the limitation of human faculties renders real answers to some questions not merely actually impossible, but theoretically inconceivable.[16] When he reached intellectual maturity and began to ask himself whether he was an atheist, a theist,

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[16]Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition, pp. 235, 236.

or a pantheist; a materialist or an idealist; a Christian or a freethinker; he found that the more he learned and reflected, the less ready was the answer; until, at last, he came to the conclusion that he had neither art nor part with any of those denominations, except the last. The one thing in which most of these good people were agreed was the one thing in which he differed from them. They were quite sure they had attained a certain "gnosis," --had, more or less successfully, solved the problem of existence; while Huxley was quite sure that he had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insoluble. And with Hume and Kant on his side, he could not think himself presumptuous in holding fast by that opinion.[17]

That was Huxley's position when he was invited to join strange company. It was his good fortune to find a place among the members of a remarkable brotherhood of antagonists, the Metaphysical Society, which was to be the "necessity" to his "invention." Every variety of philosophical and theological opinion was represented there, and expressed itself with entire openness. Most of Huxley's colleagues were -ists of one sort or another; and however kind and friendly they might be, he, the man "without a rag of a label to cover himself with," could not fail to have

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[17]Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition, pp. 237, 238.

some of the uneasy feelings which must have beset the historical fox when, after leaving the trap in which his tail remained, he presented himself to his normally elongated companions. So Huxley took thought, and invented what he conceived to be the appropriate title of "agnostic." It had come into his head as suggestively antithetic to the "gnostic" of Church history, who professed to know so much about the very things of which he was ignorant; and he took the earliest opportunity of parading it at the Society, to show that he, too, had a tail, like the other foxes. To his great satisfaction, the term took; and when the Spectator stood godfather to it, any suspicion in the minds of respectable people that a knowledge of its parentage might have awakened was, of course, completely lulled.[18]

However, when the Spectator and other publications used the word, they did not always adhere strictly to the definition given it by its inventor, nor did they attach the solemnity to it which the word should have commanded if it were to be accepted as the name of a particular faith.

The Spectator, with obvious derisive intent, called Huxley a great and severe agnostic who goes around exhorting all men to know how little they know, and later, with mock sincerity, admonished the public that they were not to use

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[18]Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition, p. 239.

nicknames for the philosophy of agnosticism, because Professor Huxley demanded the name Agnostic for those who disclaimed atheism and believed with him in an unknown and unknowable God. Demand or not, Mivart, a distinguished biologist and Catholic who was excommunicated for the repudiation of ecclesiastical authority, referred to Huxley and his adherents as "our modern Sophists--the Agnostics--who deny we have any knowledge, save of phenomena." Whether he meant this derogatively or not one cannot tell from the statement as it stands. And the Saturday Review also failed to honor the Professor's demand by scornfully judging agnosticism to be, in nine cases out of ten, nothing more than old atheism "writ large."[19]

The 19th century Englishman in general, along with Bishop Fraser, found it rather hard to believe that anyone could suspend his judgment half way between yea and nay; and the Bishop concluded that the agnostic who said that he neither denied nor affirmed God, had merely put him aside. However, Carlyle, who hated Huxley, probably attacked agnosticism more viciously than any other person had done. He declared that "the agnostic doctrines were to appearance like the finest flour, from which you might expect the most excellent bread; but when you came to feed

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[19]"Agnostic," The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933), I, 186.

on it, you found you had been eating the deadliest poison."[20]

Such is the way with words and with doctrines: Each new invention lends itself to interpretations which add to, take away from, or completely change the meaning of the original intent. The importance of 19th century England's leading agnostic was not to be lessened by any deriding application of, or reference made to, the word he had selected as descriptive of his faith. He was to take his place among the most eminent thinkers of his age.

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[20]"Agnostic," The Oxford English Dictionary, I, 186.

CHAPTER IV

THE EXPOSITION OF THE AGNOSTIC PHILOSOPHY

Before Huxley had occasion to name or define his agnostic philosophy, he had become England's recognized leader of science. His exposition of evolution and promotion of scientific education and research had spread his fame at home and abroad. The churchmen of England considered Huxley to be an honest man who stood adamantly for what he believed to be truth, and they feared his influence on the common man because he felt a moral obligation to teach the workingman the scientific evidence that life could be made better, not through the doctrines of the church, but through scientific knowledge.

In the year 1860, Huxley, under extreme circumstances, attempted a genuine analysis of his beliefs. However, for a complete history of his scientific approach to life one must follow the evolution of his faith and his theories which are almost completely reversed from 1860 until his death in 1895.

In a letter to Charles Kingsley, an English clergyman, Huxley made his first written statements of his beliefs and disbeliefs that became the foundation of his

agnostic philosophy of life and immortality. Kingsley had written a long letter of sympathy to the Huxleys after the death of their little son, in the fall of 1860. In the letter he set forth his philosophy on immortality, thinking perhaps the recipient might somehow find consolation if he could bring himself to believe it. In answer to the letter Huxley thanked Kingsley graciously for trying to comfort him, but said he had found consolation in his own beliefs.[21]

The Agnostic did not deny or affirm the immortality of man. He saw no reason for believing it, nor saw any way to disprove it. From his investigation of the Bible Huxley concluded that one could not determine, according to the teachings of the Apostles, who would attain immortality and who would not. He assumed that no one before Christ, by the requirements set forth in the New Testament and by the current theologians, could have become immortal. No Jew who ate pork could attain immortality; yet, at the same time, any Gentile, except those who ate meats which had been sacrificed to idols, might eat whatever else he chose and if he believed in Christ, could attain everlasting life. The list of those who were and those who were not eligible to become immortal, according to Huxley's deductions after intensive research, was quite lengthy.

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[21]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 233.

He had concluded that 19th century teachings did not adhere at all to the original teachings found in the Bible on ways and means of admittance into the unknown realm, and yet the teachers insisted that the Bible was infallible.[22] One can understand how the naturally skeptic might have had trouble believing, especially when he could not determine what to believe. The agnostic needed evidence to allow him to believe anything, and his convictions were such that he could not accept a doctrine based on probabilities,[23] as Huxley knew that Newman had.

Newman, the leader of the Oxford Movement, and whose works Huxley knew quite well, had dedicated his life to the renewal of a living Christianity.[24] He knew the development of the English thought and evaluated that the forces of naturalistic views, brought about through the progress of science, had caused religion to suffer temporary banishment from educated minds.[25] Newman's certainty of man's spiritual nature and destiny went beyond the comprehension of his contemporaries. Huxley could not understand how a man of Newman's brilliance could base his beliefs on

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[22]Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition, pp. 287, 290.

[23]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 234.

[24]Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism, p. 70.

[25]Ibid., p. 72.

grounds of probability.[26] However, Newman believed that more truths were revealed to the religious mind than to a non-believer, and to him conscience was the voice of God--speaking to the individual as an ultimate authority which he will disobey at his own peril, behind which he cannot go.[27] He asserted the supremacy of the ideal and emphasized its abiding reality in contrast to the impermanence of the material.[28]

Huxley, whose beliefs were in direct opposition to Newman's, could not conceive his personality as a thing apart from the phenomena of his life. When he tried he wound up in a word jumble and a string of hypotheses which altered nothing, so that he was no more or less eternal than when he started. There was no reason that he could see to place faith in immortality simply because of man's high aspirations. That way of reasoning to Huxley seemed to be asking him to believe something only because he liked the idea. Science had taught him a different lesson. Science had warned him to be particularly careful when evidence seemed too ready to support his preconceptions. He was more wary of such evidence than of that which supported

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[26]Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism, pp. 74, 82.

[27]Ibid., p. 82.

[28]"John Henry Newman," Encyclopedia Americana, 1960 edition, XX, 284.

a view to which he was hostile. His business was to make his aspirations conform to fact, not to try to make fact agree with his aspirations[29]--a scientific approach to fact-finding his friend Herbert Spencer never bothered to learn.

However, Spencer, a most eminent agnostic and philosopher, was the one of Huxley's friends who most nearly agreed with him on things of importance. Though their thinking was not always parallel, Spencer advocated the scientific, or naturalistic, view of the world against supernaturalism and urged the importance of examining social phenomena in a scientific way. But when he tried to apply the theory of evolution to social phenomena, Huxley knew that only by misapplication of terms could Spencer arrive at a logical conclusion. And when Huxley said that Spencer's idea of a tragedy was "a deduction killed by a fact," he was calling attention to the system-building feature of his friend's work which led him to look for what confirmed his theories and to ignore or to reinterpret what conflicted with them, an unscientific approach to truth which Huxley opposed most energetically.[30] And when Huxley applied his own method of investigation to the question of immortality, he concluded that speculation

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[29]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 235.

[30]"Herbert Spencer," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1961 edition, XXI, 202, 203.

on the hereafter was beyond the realm of human reasoning and intelligence.[31]

There was an argument used in favor of immortality which Huxley deemed dangerous and misleading: the notion that the moral government of the world is imperfect without a system of future rewards and punishments.[32] The cleric held that should the system of future rewards and punishments fail, the bonds of human society would dissolve and mankind would lapse into savagery. The scientific analyst contended that there was no intelligent basis for such a belief. The bonds of human society were formed without the aid of such a belief; it was even possible, Huxley contended, that the bonds of society had been weakened rather than strengthened by a good deal of the theology that was being taught. Greek science, Greek art, the ethics of old Israel, and the social organization of old Rome contrived to come into being, Huxley pointed out, without the help of anyone who believed in a single distinctive article of the simplest of the Christian creeds. The science, the art, the jurisprudence, the chief political and social theories of the modern world have grown out of those of Greece and Rome--not by favor of, but in the teeth of, the fundamental teachings of early Christianity, to

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[31] Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 234.

[32] Ibid., I, 236.

which science, art, and any serious occupation with the things of this world, were alike despicable. Huxley concluded that the causes which have led to the development of morality in mankind, which have guided or impelled us all the way from savage to the civilized state, will not cease to operate because a number of ecclesiastical hypotheses turn out to be baseless.[33]

The more Huxley learned of the lives of men, he said, the surer he was that the wicked did not flourish nor the righteous suffer punishment. But what most men failed to see was that the rewards of life are dependent upon obedience to both physical and moral laws, and moral obedience could not atone for physical sin, or vice versa. His conviction was that a certain conformity to the surrounding universe is necessary, and conformity involves a certain amount of happiness in excess of pain. Briefly said, we are paid for living as we live.[34]

The absolute justice of the system of things was as clear to Huxley as a scientific fact. He was as sure of the gravitation of sin to sorrow as he was of that of the earth to the sun. And the seeking of future rewards and expectations of punishment beyond this life, Huxley felt, led to ignorance of the fact that man's inevitable

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[33]Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition, pp. 315, 316.

[34]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 236.

punishments are here. He contended if expectation of hell hereafter could not keep man from doing evil, surely with stronger reason, the certainty of hell now would do so. He felt that man could be led to a better way of life by being impressed with the belief that stealing, for instance, would damage him as much as swallowing poison. And surely the dissuasive force of that belief would be greater than any based on future expectations.[35]

Huxley did not base his theory of dissuasive force on observation of his fellow man. His own life had not always been so exemplary of the good life as it was in 1860. He said that in his youth he had tasted sin in all its many flavors and had only come to his senses in time to save himself from utter destruction.[36] Just how seriously that should be taken, one can only guess. Huxley had a puritanical streak in him which possibly caused him to rebuke himself harshly for any sin he might have committed. However, from the advice he gave a young man many years later, one can assume that he had indulged excessively in alcohol. A Mr. Collings had written to ask Huxley what he thought of alcohol as a stimulant to the brain in mental work. Huxley answered that he could only speak for himself, but that he had just as soon take a dose of arsenic as he

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[35]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 236.

[36]Ibid., 237.

would of alcohol under such circumstances. In fact, he thought arsenic might be safer, less likely to lead to physical and moral degradation; that it would be better to die outright than to be alcoholized before death. He went on to tell Mr. Collings that in his life he had experienced all sorts of conditions in regard to alcohol, from total abstinence to nearly the other end of the scale, and his conviction was, the less the better. But that did not mean that he was called upon to give up the cheering and comforting effects of a little.[37]

Not only did Huxley take comfort in a little alcohol, he also found comfort in his tobacco, despite the fact that he had dyspepsia which he complained of from his youth up, and probably because the Church had placed a stigma on the use of tabacco, which made it all the more attractive to him. However, Huxley delighted in parading his worldliness before his favorite enemy, Mr. Gladstone. In a published essay he wrote that since he believed Mr. Gladstone objected to the use of tobacco, he was quite willing to smoke for both.[38]

From all the degradation of his youth, Huxley said, he had spent many years slowly and painfully climbing toward better things. And he attributed the change

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[37]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 247.

[38]Huxley, Science and Christian Tradition, p. 367.

in his life to three things: First, Sartor Resartus had led him to know that a deep sense of religion was compatible with the entire absence of theology. Second, science and her methods gave him a resting-place independent of authority and tradition. And third, love had opened to him a view of the sanctity of human nature and impressed him with a deep sense of responsibility. These three things he had learned from life, a life during which he had found rewards at the time he was living it.[39]

Huxley felt that science taught the great truths which were embodied in the Christian conception of complete surrender to the will of God. He had learned that one must sit down before fact, completely stripped of any preconceived notions, and follow wherever nature led, or one would never learn truth. It was only after he had learned this that he had found contentment and peace of mind.[40]

Not only can one learn from nature the means to a better life, materially, but she teaches also those things needful for the welfare of man. Huxley said, "I say that natural knowledge, seeking to satisfy natural wants, has found the ideas which can alone still spiritual cravings. I say that natural knowledge, in desiring to

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[39]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 237.

[40]Ibid., 235.

ascertain the laws of comfort, has been driven to discover those of conduct, and to lay the foundations of a new morality."[41] The agnostic says, "Intelligent work is the only acceptable worship." And he absolutely refuses to acknowledge authority, as such. For him, skepticism is the highest duty; blind faith the one unpardonable sin.[42]

Huxley felt that science could furnish moral precepts which would teach man the basis for conduct. In a letter to Dr. Dyster, a rising naturalist, he enclosed a prospectus of a lecture he was preparing. To the younger man he explained: "I want the working classes to understand that Science and her ways are great facts for them--that physical virtue is the base of all other, and that they are to be clean and temperate and all the rest--not because fellows in black with white ties tell them so, but because these are plain and patent laws of nature which they must obey 'under penalties.'"[43] He also affirms his belief that "the Divine Government is wholly just." But the more he learned of the lives of other men, the more he believed that the "wicked does not flourish nor is the righteous punished."[44] The student of science

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[41] Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism, p. 145.

[42] Ibid., p. 146.

[43] Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 149.

[44] Ibid., 236.

learns the "foundation of morality is to have done, once and for all, with lying; to give up pretending to believe that for which there is no evidence, and repeating unintelligible propositions about things beyond the possibility of knowledge." And he promoted his own creed to fill the place of the dispossessed theological creed, "a real and living belief in that fixed order of nature which sends social disorganization upon the track of immorality, as surely as it sends physical disease after physical trespasses."[45]

On the other hand, Huxley did not believe that the course of evolution was bringing about a perfect society inhabited by perfect men, such as was prophesied by Herbert Spencer. He said it was an error to imagine that evolution indicates a constant tendency to increased perfection; that process involves a constant remodeling of the organism in adaptation to new conditions; but it depends on the nature of those conditions whether the directions of the modifications effected shall be upward or downward. Retrogressive is as practical as progressive metamorphosis.[46] The idea that the doctrine of evolution could furnish a foundation for morals was due to ambiguity of the term "fittest" in survival of the fittest. Evolution does not

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[45] Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism, p. 147.

[46] Bowyer and Brooks, The Victorian Age, p. 432.

prove "survival of the fittest," if one persists in construing "fittest" to mean "best," as was assumed by some of the outstanding minds of the age. The "fittest" which survive in the struggle for existence may be ethically the worst.[47] On this point Huxley disagreed completely with Herbert Spencer, who identified natural fitness with moral excellence.[48]

Contrary to his conclusions in the 1860's, Huxley learned through the years that there was every reason to believe that nature was not just; that the wicked did flourish and that the righteous were punished. He had come to the conclusion that his theory of the benevolence of nature had not withstood the test of his researches. His conclusion was "of moral purpose I see no trace in Nature."[49] Viewing the whole of nature, one can readily see that in the animal world the wolf is endowed with bodily mechanism to inflict suffering, while the deer is endowed with the mechanism of escape. Under the dry light of science both are alike admirable. Yet the deer, which inflicts no suffering, himself suffers, while the wolf is rewarded for inflicting that suffering. If we carry this analogy into the society of man, we find that nature does

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[47] Huxley, Life and Letters, II, 284.

[48] Ibid., 285.

[49] Ibid.

not teach the moral truths which Huxley first attributed to her. Huxley concluded that nature is neither moral or immoral, but nonmoral.[50] Therefore, for society, which is definitely a moral subject, it is necessary to distinguish between Nature and human nature. "If we desire to represent the course of nature in terms of human thought, we must say that its governing principle is intellectual and not moral; that it is a materialized logical process, accompanied by pleasure and pains, the incidence of which, in the majority of cases has not the slightest reference to moral desert."[51] The ideal of the ethical man is to limit his freedom of action to a sphere in which he does not interfere with the freedom of others. The struggle for existence in human society, Huxley concluded, has ever been an underlying, or perhaps a major, cause of warfare which has limited the freedom of man, as well as imposed upon the freedom of others. To know the ethical principles upon which society must be based, we then must turn to an intellectual analysis of history. And to understand Huxley's turn of mind we must assume that his scientific approach to life at last came to include the social sciences as well as the natural sciences. Society, Huxley felt, is stable when the wants of its members obtain as much satisfaction

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[50] Bowyer and Brooks, The Victorian Age, pp. 431, 432.

[51] Ibid., p. 433.

as common sense and experience show may be reasonably expected. Intelligence, knowledge and skill are conditions of success which must be backed up by honesty, energy, good will, and all the physical and moral faculties that go to the making of manhood. Where would one look for the intelligent guidance to the organization of a stable moral society? In the 1888 analysis, Huxley concluded there is only one source of records of the successes and failures of mankind--history,[52] the source recommended by one of his earliest heroes, Carlyle, who never forgave the publication of Man's Place in Nature.[53] However, much Huxley disagreed with Carlyle's philosophy, and Carlyle with his, he never lost his respect for the older man who had attacked the scientific side of society in an imaginative and highly emotional manner, who denounced logic mills, and warned us away from literature; and who habitually subordinated discipline of the intelligence to the passionate assertion of the will.[54] To Carlyle, man is a depraved thing and the one thing needful to uplift his nature is for him to bow down before the hero in a worshipful attitude. Carlyle's England was corrupt with fox-hunting

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[52]Bowyer and Brooks, The Victorian Age, pp. 434, 437.

[53]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 297.

[54]John Viscount Morley, Critical Miscellanies (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1923), p. 70. Hereinafter cited as Morley, Critical Miscellanies.

dilettantes and Mammon-worshippers. She should renew her reverence for the past--for history, for the heroes of history. In spite of Carlyle's respect for individual potentialities, he distrusted the masses, scorned the machinery of democracy, and defended the strong man as the maker of history.[55] Thus Huxley and Carlyle diverged: Huxley turned his compassion and concern to the masses while Carlyle rejected them with "Ah, you do not know that damned race!"[56]

Though Huxley did not agree with Carlyle's theories on the application of history, he agreed that history has the proper source for moral guidance. And he retained his regard for the older man even when he too was rejected in much the same manner as the "damned race." When Carlyle was quite aged, Huxley, touched by the solitary appearance of his former hero, crossed the street to speak to him. Carlyle merely remarked, "You're Huxley, aren't you? the man that says we are all descended from monkeys," and went on his way.[57]

Substituting history for nature as the source for moral guidance did not stay the problem. In face, the

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[55]"Thomas Carlyle," Homer A. Watt and William W. Watt, A Dictionary of English Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1957), p. 56.

[56]Morley, Critical Miscellanies, p. 110.

[57]Huxley, Life and Letters, I, 297.

problem of the basis for morality and conduct would not rest. In 1892 Huxley, proving that he continued to work at it, summarized his latest conclusions in a letter to a Mr. Clayton. "Moral duty consists in the observance of those rules of conduct which contribute to the welfare of society, and by implication, of the individuals who compose it." The goal of society is peace and mutual protection. The individual must be given a chance to reach the fullest and highest life attainable. The rules of conduct which enable him to attain his goal are discoverable like the other so-called laws of Nature, by observation and experiment. Historical records afford us the benefit of a thousand years of such experience upon which we base our moral precepts that stealing and murder, for example, are inconsistent with the ends of society. That these same precepts are a part of the Laws of Moses, Huxley studiously avoids mentioning. However, the development of a moral sense is a very complex affair--"dependent in part upon associations of pleasure and pain, approbation and disapprobation formed by education in early youth, but in part also on an innate sense of moral beauty and ugliness (how originated need not be discussed), which is possessed by some people in great strength, while some are totally devoid of it. . . ." For this last sort of people "there is no reason why they should discharge any moral

duty, except from fear of punishment in all its grades." The duty of society is to see that they live under wholesome fear of such punishment, short, sharp, and decisive.[58] For people who have a keen innate sense of moral beauty there is no need of any other motive. They need only the knowledge of the things they must do and the things they must leave undone. Huxley avoids the one word, conscience, which would link his beliefs to teachings clearly propounded in the Bible and by such men as Newman.

Those who possess moral inner sense in the greatest strength must steer those in whom it is weak. People who overlook the fact that the strong do lead the weak, said Huxley, overlook the fact that they have attended neither to their history nor to that which goes on about them. And the strong in this case does not necessarily imply the best. Huxley pointed out that Benjamin Franklin had been of excellent character, yet he had failed to lead his nation to attain the moral virtues which he practiced and advocated; while George Fox, founder of Quakerism, whom Huxley described as the very antithesis of Franklin, had moved the world of his day. Hardly any of us will ever be able to fulfill the moral law, if Huxley assumed correctly, and some, at the other end of the pole, are such moral "cripples and idiots," they will not be kept straight

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[58] Huxley, Life and Letters, II, 324.

even by punishment.[59] Huxley directly refutes his old theory that the knowledge of immediate punishment would be a greater deterrent to sin than expectation of future punishment. He now concludes that punishment in some instances is not effective as a hindrance to crime. However, he asserts that the morally strong are obligated to lead those who are capable of being led to a better application of the moral law. And he recognized the disadvantage of the agnostic in becoming the leader. He conceded that the "generality of mankind will not be satisfied to be told that there are some topics about which we know nothing now, and do not seem likely ever to be able to know more; and, consequently, that in the long-run the world will turn to those who profess to have conclusions." But for himself, he felt it better to have a millstone tied round his neck and be thrown into the sea than "to share the enterprises of those to whom the world has turned, and will turn, because they minister to its weaknesses and cover up the awful realities which it shudders to look at."[60] In not too subtle manner Huxley gave his evaluation of the clergy and the teachings of the Church in the latter part of the 19th century.

It seems just possible, however unwilling he was

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[59] Huxley, Life and Letters, II, 325.

[60] Ibid., 323.

to admit it, that Huxley had at last discovered that a purely naturalistic interpretation of human life is an impossibility. His life also proves that Newman was right when he wrote his description of the agnostic, over a decade before the term agnosticism had been invented: "He will begin, as many so far have done before him, by laying it down as if a position which approves itself to the reason, immediately that it is fairly examined--which is of so axiomatic a character as to have a claim to be treated as a first principle, and is firm and steady enough to bear a large superstructure upon it--that Religion is not the subject-matter of a science."[61] Whether Newman was singling out Huxley or not, it is impossible to know. But he fairly well predicted Huxley's conclusions, and he also predicted Huxley's preoccupation with the subject of religion when he wrote: ". . .upon no subject whatever has the intellect of man been fastened so intensely as upon Religion. And the misery is, that, if once we allow it to engage our attention, we are in a circle from which we never shall be able to extricate ourselves."[62] Whether one would assess Huxley to have been miserable would be a matter of opinion. He gave every indication of deep concern for religion, but resignation

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[61] Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism, p. 72.

[62] Ibid., p. 73.

seems to more accurately describe his state of mind than does miserable.

Resignation is further confirmed in the three lines which he requested to be inscribed upon his tombstone. The lines were from a poem his wife had written--"lines inspired by his own robust conviction that, all question of the future apart, this life as it can be lived, pain, sorrow, and evil notwithstanding, is worth--and well worth--living."

> Be not afraid, ye waiting hearts that weep;
> For still He giveth His beloved sleep,
> And if an endless sleep He wills, so best.[63]

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[63]Huxley, Life and Letters, II, 426.

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