

The Basis of Morality

The question asked by Goldwin Smith
as the caption of his criticism of Herbert
Spencer's "data of Ethics" "Has science
found a new basis for morality?" seems to
me not to be well put. If science has
made any great in this direction at all—
and we may assume that her Spencer's
"data of Ethics" is a scientific work—that great
has been to find the basis for morality, and
not a new basis. The thought involved in the
question is that morality is a thing that may
be taken up from the basis which has
served as its support, its foundation, and
bodily transferred to some other basis, founda-
tion or support prepared for it by the

purely efforts of man - as Cleopatra's Needle
was removed from its base in Egypt and
transferred to a new base in New York

We might also imagine that the great
Pyramid of Egypt ~~might~~ could be removed
from its present base or support and
transferred to the center of the Great Sahara
desert - and there mounted upon a new
base or foundation sunk so deep in the
sands as to make it permanent - and
lay down specific rules which could not
part of the accomplishment - of our object -
provided sufficient funds were available

But - the finding of a new basis for morality
is a matter entirely out of the reach of Science
Metaphysics - Theology or the reasoning

powers of man simply because morality is
a part of man. We might just as well
make the effort to find a new basis for digestion.
Digestion is a phenomenon of our animal
existence. Morality is a phenomenon of
our mental existence. Man cannot
live very long without the exercise of digestion
in some form. Neither can it be asserted
that man has lived long without the
exercise of morality or immorality for
each is the exercise of the same function of mind
and we class an act as moral or immoral
according as we determine it to be good or
bad. The Red man who slips up behind
an enemy of his tribe and crushes in
his skull with his tomahawk scalps

him and successfully returns to his tribe
with his prize has, in the thought of his
tribe, done a worthy deed, and with him
it is a moral act - Such an act performed
by a graduate of Yale College would ^{horribly} ~~be~~
immoral - Man is a gregarious ~~mammal~~
Mammal and Morality is a necessary
element of his gregarious nature

Acts, prompted, by this gregarious
propensity, toward his fellow man
are moral or immoral as they are approved
or condemned by the ~~the~~ ~~Community~~
~~Conscience~~ Conscience - Not the Conscience
of the single individual but the dictates
of the assembled Conscience of the
Community -

Conscience then is the ultimate judge
of morality - Moral or immoral acts
are necessary to association with other
beings of our kind provided such
association be coupled with that faculty
or force or exercise of mind which
we designate as conscience

Or in other words if we associate together
then must be associate acts and
thoughts and ^{if} in connection with these
acts or thoughts we exercise conscience
they must become moral or immoral
as ~~such~~ they are approved or disapproved

Hence morality - has its basis in
the structure of the human mind
and no other basis can logically be found

for it - consequently a new basis for
Morality - is simply impossible