1. The Period — (B) Moral Philosophy

Deism died as a movement against faith, but left its spirit in the moral philosophy of the age. The ethical aspect of deism — its humanistic emphasis, its stress on individual conscience rather than on the received law — survived in the moral philosophy of the 18th century. Locke had recognized the over-all importance of moral philosophy —

"morality is the proper science and business of mankind in general . . .: as several arts, conversant about several parts of nature, are the lot and private talent of particular men, for the common use of human life . . ."1

Deism, we have seen, by reducing religion essentially to a life of moral conduct, made a significant contribution to the moral thought of the age. The attempt to find for morality a foundation independent of theology resulted in the development of the moral philosophy of the 18th century, which philosophy greatly influenced the thought of the age, and particularly the thought of Sterne.

The separation of metaphysics from positive religion is clearly seen in Locke's Essay. In the very beginning of his Essay, Locke points out that it is

"worth while to search out the bounds between opinion and knowledge; and examine by what measures, in things whereof we have no certain knowledge, we ought to regulate our assent and moderate our persuasion".2

While faith should be reasonable and not 'enthusiastic', it is necessary to know the boundaries of faith and reason; for reason cannot fully explain faith, which is 'above reason'.3 While morality is one of the 'sciences capable of demonstration'.


The point of interest in the metaphysical investigations shifted to the psychological domain. The very aim of his *Essay* - Locke says - is to cast the light of 'understanding' upon the human mind itself. In the philosophy as well as literature of the 18th century, we accordingly find a greater preoccupation of man with himself, his feelings and motives. The individualism of the Renaissance reasserted itself in the 18th century, by the weakening of dogma and tradition, and the glorification of man's natural life. This individualism helped humanism, for the individual's association with the wider life was sought to be explained from the holiness of the individual instinct, from the individual perceptive experience - as, for example, Uncle Toby's, when he released the disturbing fly, saying -

"Go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee? This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me".?

This brings out the importance of the ethical thought in the age, for ethical life was regarded as something inseparable from the natural essence of the individual.

The development of individuality, and the idea of the goodness and divinity of nature may be mentioned among the chief characteristics of the Renaissance. The Middle Ages had stressed the importance of the 'universal'. The growth of individuality was hampered by the adherence to tradition. Individual experience in the formulation of general truth finds a place in the work of the Renaissance humanists. The object of Montaigne's *Essays* is self-portrayal; "myself am the groundwork of my book" - says he. Erasmus's *Polly* says that her 'discourse' is "hasty and
unpremeditated, but so much the more natural" for it.

The growth of individuality in the Renaissance brought the discredit of tradition, and the liberation of instincts which had been suppressed by the Schoolmen and theologians in the Middle Ages. Rabelais held custom, rule, and authority, to ridicule, and saw the perfection of education in the liberation of the instincts. Montaigne upheld nature, or the natural impulse of man, as against authority and received tradition. Real understanding comes from nature.

"Whatsoever cometh contrary to nature's course may be cumbersome, but what comes according to her should ever please. All things are to be accepted good, that are done according to nature ... Nature is a gentle guide; yet, not more gentle than prudent and just".10

These Renaissance concepts of the importance of the individual, and the holiness of the natural instinct or feeling, provide the basis of the moral philosophy of the 18th century. Of the important elements that enter into this moral thought of the age, and that are relevant to our purpose, we may mention the following; for they provide vital clues to the thought of Sterne.

(a) Rejection of scholasticism and asceticism:

Rejection of scholasticism is one of the distinguishing characteristics of 17th and 18th century thought. In the Middle Ages the Church dominated the State and society. Theology was supreme, and it governed all knowledge. The ideal was conformity to tradition and to authority. The rule of theology, and with it scholasticism, weakened in the Renaissance, with the end of the supremacy of the Church, and the growth of science and humanism. Life became more important than books, humanity than learning.
In his Essays Montaigne often ridicules pedantism, and declares the supremacy of individual judgment over the rule of authority (Vide essays, Of Pedantism, Of the Institution and Education of Children, An Apology of Raymond Sebond, Of the Art of Conferring Of the Lame or Cripple, Of Physiognomy, Of Experience, and so on). Scholasticism finds little favour in the 17th century, which was marked by a distaste for authority, by a certain individualism and independence in philosophical and religious thought. Robert Burton, though a scholar and Churchman, holds conscience above theology -

("'a good conscience is a continual feast' ... Our conscience ... is a great ledger-book"12), humanity above dogma, happiness above melancholy.

"In the multitude of wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth wisdom increaseth sorrow ... These acute and subtle sophisters, so much honoured, have as much need of hellebore as others".13

Hooker places humanity above learning; he foresees a time when "three words uttered with charity and meekness shall receive a far more blessed reward than three thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit".14

The urge for freedom from the bondage of tradition and authority is expressed in various ways, in Milton and Bunyan, in the birth..."
of the Royal Society, in the rigid exclusion of ancient quotations by Hobbes and Locke in their Leviathan and Essay concerning Human Understanding respectively - the two outstanding philosophical works of 17th century England. Hobbes had a definite bias against scholastic tradition;

"there is nothing so absurd, that the old philosophers ... have not some of them maintained".15

At the end of his book, Hobbes lists eight reasons as to why he has

"neglected the ornament of quoting ancient poets, orators, and philosophers, contrary to the custom of later time".16

Locke, by tracing all knowledge to individual perception, undermined the basis of scholasticism, which accepted the universal truths and from these deduced the particular. Locke rejects syllogisms - the scholastic means of arriving at truth -

"no syllogistic reasoning can be right and conclusive, but what has at least one general proposition in it. As if we could not reason and have knowledge about particulars: whereas, in truth, the matter rightly considered, the immediate object of all our reasoning and knowledge is nothing but particulars. Every man's reasoning and knowledge is only about the ideas existing in his own mind; which are truly, every one of them, particular existences: and our knowledge and reason about other things is only as they correspond with those our particular ideas".17

Young people - Locke says elsewhere - receive 'little advantage' 18 by the study of rhetoric and logic. "Right reasoning", he adds, "is founded on something else than the predicaments and predicables, and does not consist in talking in mode and figure itself".

The 18th century carried the process of the decline of scholasticism still further. Addison, at the head of the century,
explaining his aim in the Spectator essays, said that as Socrates "brought philosophy down from heaven" to earth, so he, too, (Addison) would aim at bringing it out of the select places of scholars ('closets and libraries, schools and colleges') "to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses". Addison dismisses medieval scholasticism as 'monkish ignorance'. His watchword is humanity, which he calls 'the ornament of our nature'.

Swift, too, is no friend of scholasticism. Gulliver's 'Voyage to Laputa' is a huge joke on it. The Laputans are so much immersed in learning and speculative thought, that they have to be restored to earthly consciousness by artificial methods — by flapping their mouths and ears with blown bladders filled with little pebbles; they can neither speak nor hear without this contrivance. Even their food is 'learned'; for their 'shoulder of mutton' is "cut into an equilateral triangle; a piece of beef into a rhomboid; and a pudding into a cycloid". Their bread is cut into "cones, cylinders, parallelograms, and several other mathematical figures".

Their learning has made the Laputans misfits in the business of life; they are — we are told — a most 'awkward and unhandy people', who never enjoy 'a minute's peace of mind'. Learning is also ridiculed in a Section of the Tale of a Tub, where the stern comedian equates it to the wind, to sound and fury, signifying nothing. The wind is the source of learning; because "learning puffeth men up: and secondly, they proved it by the following syllogism: Words are but wind; and learning is nothing but words; ergo, learning is nothing but wind ...".

The shift from dry learning to life, and to humanity, is clearly seen in the 18th century. David Hume, an outstanding
and representative philosopher of the age, throughout exalts imago-
nation and feeling over dry reason and intellectualism, in his
Treatise of Human Nature (1739–40). He says that:

"all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are
derived from nothing but custom; and that belief is
more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the
cogitative part of our natures". 27

Hume holds 'imagination' to be the 'ultimate judge of all the
systems of philosophy'. He considers the 'opinions of the anci-
ent philosophers, their fictions of substance and accident, and
their reasonings concerning substantial forms and occult quali-
ties' to be mere

"spectres in the dark, and ... derived from principles,
which, however common, are neither universal nor un-
avoidable in human nature". 29

The 'modern philosophy' - Hume points out - is 'entirely free
from this defect'; for it is based on 'the solid, permanent, and
consistent principles of the imagination'. Dr. Johnson, though he
did not share Hume's faith in the 'sensitive part of our nature',
decried scholasticism and syllogistic reasoning -

"'Books', says Bacon, 'can never teach the use of books'.
The student must learn by commerce with mankind to re-
duce his speculations to practice and accommodate his
knowledge to the purposes of life". 30

Dr. Johnson considers it 'angelic counsel' for a man to "withdraw
his mind from idle speculations" and employ it upon 'nearer and
more interesting objects'.

Asceticism had been the ethical ideal of the Middle
Ages. Along with scholasticism, it too fell into disfavour, with
the diminishing credit of theology and tradition, in the age of
Enlightenment. Asceticism was based on the suppression of the na-
tural faculties, which were thought to be sinful. It fostered a
gloomy view of life. With the restoration of faith in humanity and in natural instinct, faith in asceticism waned. The first considerable Renaissance protest against it is heard in Rabelais. His Gargantua and Pantagruel is an eloquent expression of his faith in the holiness of instinct, and of his happy view of life. In the Abbey of Theleme, built by Gargantua, things were very different from what they were in other monasteries and nunneries. In Theleme,

"In all their rule and strictest tie of their order, there was but this one clause to be observed: 'Do What Thou Wilt'. Because men that are free, well-born well-bred, and conversant in honest companies, have naturally an instinct and spur that prompteth them unto virtuous actions, and withdraws them from vice, which (i.e., instinct) is called honour. Those same men, when by base subjection and constraint they are brought under and kept down, turn aside from that noble disposition, by which they formerly were inclined to virtue ...".32

Since nature is good, and we derive our faculties and our virtue from her, they can develop best, unhindered by ascetic restraint, or by the bonds of blind tradition. Virtue grows in freedom, in the fulfilment of the natural impulse; and vice breeds in bondage. Nature calls us to be happy —

"One dram of mirth will sooner mend thy crasis, Than twenty bitter draughts, with scurvy faces".33

So Erasmus pleads for freedom from Stoical discipline and control of the passions, which they (the Stoics) look upon 'as the infection and malady of the soul'; and yet, these passions

"are not only our tutors to instruct us towards the attainment of wisdom, but even embolden us likewise, and spur us on to a quicker dispatch of all our undertakings".34

Life is not hindered, but advanced, by the indulgence of the natural instincts and passions. Erasmus severely indicts
asceticism and 'foppish ceremonies' of medieval Christianity, and interprets the religion of Christ in terms of 'love and charity'. Montaigne says, too, that the "laws of nature teach us what is just and fit for us". Nature is an unerring guide —

"We cannot err in following nature ... the sovereign document is for a man to conform himself to her".38

There is a repeated emphasis, in Montaigne's essays, on the virtue of nature or natural instinct. He saw man's fulfilment, not in conformity with any rule of conduct imposed from without, but with the laws and constitution of man himself. The laws that seek to correct us derive their currency not so much from their inherent justice, as from established authority or power that in most cases thrives on our superstition and fear —

"Laws are now maintained in credit, not because they are essentially just, but because they are laws. It is the mystical foundation of their authority; they have none other".39

Our best laws are we ourselves, our own minds and inherent nature. Therefore, Montaigne says that he studies himself 'more than any other subject'. Man has a natural tendency to happiness, aversion to sorrow. His fulfilment lies in the rejection of the mournful attitude to life as represented by Heraclitus, and in acceptance of the laughing and comic attitude represented by Democritus. Robert Burton, too, upholds the gaiety of Democritus as against the 'weeping' philosophy of Heraclitus.

In Shaftesbury, the philosopher of Taste, whom the poet Thomson hailed as

"... the friend of man,
Who scanned his nature with a brother's eye,
His weakness prompt to shade, to raise his aim,
To touch the finer movements of the mind,
And with the moral beauty charm the heart".42,
the movement for the freedom of humanity from scholasticism and asceticism finds the sanctity of an aesthetic creed.

"To philosophize, in a just signification, is but to carry Good-breeding a step higher. For the accomplishment of breeding is, To learn whatever is decent in company, or beautiful in arts; and the sum of philosophy is, To learn what is just in society, and beautiful in nature, and the order of the world. 'Tis not Wit merely, but a Temper which must form the Well-bred Man. In the same manner, 'tis not a Head merely, but a Heart and Resolution which must complete the real Philosopher. Both characters aim at what is excellent, aspire to a just Taste, and carry in view the model of what is beautiful and becoming ... the Taste of beauty and the relish of what is decent, just, and amiable, perfects the character of the Gentleman, and the Philosopher. And the study of such a Taste or Relish will, as we suppose, be ever the great employment and concern of him, who covets as well to be wise and good, as agreeable and polite".43

Shaftesbury prescribes 'good humour' as 'the best foundation of piety and true religion'. He even recommends banter over zeal. 'Ill-humour' is incompatible with piety and with true devotion to God. So Thomson associates devotion with 'gladness' of heart. He refers to man as one

"... who not from servile fear,
By rites for some weak tyrant incense fit,
The God of Love adores, but from a heart
Exfusing gladness".46

We find Fielding, as well as Sterne, holding Roman Catholicism to ridicule, for its distrust of man's instincts, and recommendation of self-mortification. Fielding says of the "sour Popish recluse, who buries all his social faculties, and starves his belly while he well lashes his back".47

The monastic negation of life, and disapproval of the natural feelings in man, evoke the humanist Sterne's comic laughter. He makes fun of Walter Shandy, because, among other things, Mr. Shandy, like the old anchorites, regarded the amorous passion as a
temptation of the Devil, and sought to subdue it by fasts and 'flagellations'.

This positive faith in life, in happiness, sprung from a belief in the essential goodness of man and in the active and wholesome power of the heart.

(b) The primacy of feeling:

The primacy of feeling is central to the moral philosophy of the 18th century. Lord Shaftesbury may be said to have initiated the case for feeling in the 18th century. He considered a man of just sentiment to be a man of virtue —

"... no animal can be said properly to act, otherwise than through affections or passions, such as are proper to an animal". 49

'Affections', or 'passions' supply the motive-power of all action. According to Shaftesbury, affections are of three kinds — the "natural affections, which lead to the good of the public", the "self-affections, which lead only to the good of the private", and the 'unnatural affections', which tend neither to public good nor to private. Virtue depends on maintaining a proper balance between the first two — the second ('self-affections') being under the control of the first ('natural affections').

The nature of man — it was increasingly realized in the 18th century — exists in his feeling, in his instincts and emotions. Moral judgments ensue from sentiments. The Spectator papers stood for reason, but stressed also the value of warmth of feeling. Steele, for example, refers to the naturalness of human affections, and says that the hardness of reason should be softened by the sentiment of fellowship. He says again, that
"a man of a warm and well-disposed heart with a small capacity is highly superior in human society to him, who with the greatest talents is cold and languid in his affections".52

Modesty is set up as the prime virtue. It "heightens all the virtues which it accompanies; like the shades in paintings, it raises and rounds every figure and makes the colours more beautiful".54

This 'modesty' is 'a kind of quick and delicate feeling ... an exquisite sensibility'. We are reminded of Uncle Toby.

The case for feeling was taken up vigorously by Francis Hutcheson. In his System of Moral Philosophy (1755) he stresses feeling as the source of morality. He held that affections which are natural to man are of two kinds - private and social.

Affections "have their natural use either to the animal itself, or to the system of which it is a part".55

'Moral goodness' lies in the latter affections, that is, in the 'social and kind affections carrying us beyond ourselves'. There is 'a natural subserviency' of the private affections to the social; and this natural correlation between the two leads to the good of both - the 'individual' and 'the system'. The private, or selfish, affections should be 'kept within certain bounds'; for "The selfish passions when too strong are miserable". The kind affection is self-operating, and had existed 'in the soul previous to all desires and intentions of cultivating it'. The moral sense, according to Hutcheson, is innate in man; it is 'a constant settled determination in the soul itself'. Reason is 'only a subservient power' to it. The moral sense is not only innate, but it is a supreme all-governing principle, that regulates and controls 'all our powers'; it also brings order into them - "By means of it, all is capable of harmony".
The ethical ideal, thus, is antecedent to the religious one, and leads to it, instead of being derived from it. In the consideration of what affections and duty are incumbent on us toward the Deity ... our moral faculty is of the highest use.

The same general tendency appears in Bishop Butler, according to whom

"Our nature, i.e., the voice of God within us, carries us to the exercise of charity and benevolence in the way of compassion or mercy."

The 'principle of benevolence' is 'natural' in man. Pope, the acknowledged advocate of reason, admitted the potency of feeling, saying that men's actions "can never proceed immediately from reason", and that "the passions are to the mind as the winds to a ship". While Pope knew the use and power of reason, he declared the supremacy of the passions over reason, as a motive-power of human action —

"the actions of men follow their passions as naturally as Light does Heat, or as any other effect flows from its cause; reason must be employed in adjusting the passions, but they must ever remain the principles of action."

The same idea is put, later, more beautifully by Sterne —

"The fact is, mankind are not always in a humour to be convinced, — and so long as the pre-engagement with our passions subsists, it is not argumentation which can do the business."

The primacy of passions is also acknowledged by Burke, who called them 'the organs of the mind'; and by Lord Chesterfield who, referring to 'our understandings' and 'our hearts', said that "the surest way to the former is through the latter". Fielding regarded the 'passions' as 'the managers and directors of this theatre' of life.
The formulation of the philosophy of feeling, however, found its ablest exponent, in England, in David Hume. Hume declared the impotency of reason, both in science and conduct. The 'motive to any action of the will' can never be 'reason alone'; and reason "can never oppose passion in the direction of the will". Intellectual qualities are neutral, and indifferent to public good; they become useful, when guided by the qualities of the heart, by the kind passions -

"They (i.e., the intellectual qualities) are indifferent in themselves to the interests of society, and have a tendency to the good or ill of mankind, according as they are directed by these other passions".70

Not reason, but feeling determines character. Hume considers 'passion' as 'an original existence', and reason as 'the slave of the passions'. Our passions, or feelings, guide our reason; because

"all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation".72

Reason, therefore, is less important than the instinct by which we live.

Adam Smith considers moral faculties as 'the supreme arbiters of all our actions'. Sterne likewise regarded the moral faculties as holding the key to understanding; that is why

"lessons of wisdom have never such power over us, as when they are wrought into the heart".74

Sterne considered feeling, 'some kindly and gentle sensation', as a safer guide than reason. He says, as the 'sentimental traveller', that he was

"never able to conquer any one single bad sensation in my heart so decidedly, as by beating up as fast as I could for some kindly and gentle sensation to fight it upon its own ground".75
This is in line with the moral thought of the age, as voiced by Hume in these words -

"Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse".76

The most basic and natural instinct in man is 'sympathy', or communication of like feelings. 'Sympathy' is an active, universal principle, which works 'through the whole animal creation'. Our concern for the society, our moral considerations, all arise from this instinct of sympathy. Our Creator - says Steele - has planted this faculty in us; it is 'an emanation from him'; and by its operation we realize and fulfill ourselves. From this natural foundation springs charity or compassion - 'that noble spark of Celestial Fire', which draws us to all mankind ('opens our bosoms and extends our arms to embrace all mankind'). The 'sentiments of sympathy' - Hume says - bring grace and glory to life; they

"brighten up the very face of sorrow, and operate like the sun, which shining on a dusky cloud or falling rain paints on them the most glorious colours which are to be found in the whole circle of nature".80

Sympathy, according to Hutcheson, is an all-pervasive and overpowering feeling; it extends to 'all our affections and passions', and is the key to 'universal happiness'. The instinct of sympathy - Adam Smith says - interests a man

"in the fortune of others, and render(s) their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it".83

Now, whatever pleases us, or has a 'tendency to produce an end that is agreeable', is beautiful. 'Sympathy', therefore, is not only the chief source of moral distinctions; it also awakens - as Hume points out - our sense of beauty. This active, universal
principle of sympathy becomes Sterne's 'Sensibility', which he invokes as the 'Eternal fountain of our feelings', the 'source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows', the "great, great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation".86

It is this new importance of feeling as the chief source of virtue, and of understanding, that brought about the decline of the epical concept of honour in the 18th century. Honour or greatness, was now believed to consist not in a violent deed of conquest, but in a feeling heart. True heroism is kindness of heart. Richardson roundly condemns the Trojan War on grounds of humanity. He decries the 'prejudice of thousands of years' in favour of the Iliad, and says that "this poem, noble as it truly is, has done infinite mischief for a series of ages; since to it, and its copy the Eneid, is owing, in a great measure, the savage spirit that has actuated, from the earliest ages to this time, the fighting fellows that, worse than lions or tigers, have ravaged the earth, and made it a field of blood".87

Swift notes cowardice in the much-advertised glory of war. His Gulliver "found how the world had been misled by prostitute writers, to ascribe the greatest exploits in war to cowards".88

Edward Young, the poet, said - "A sword undrawn, makes mighty Caesars mean". Addison and Steele, we have noted, upheld the glory of feeling and warm heart. Sir Roger's prime virtue is his warmth of sentiment. Even Captain Sentry's character is distinguished by modesty. In his Christian Hero, Steele says - "Meekness is to the mind, what a good mien is to the body".91
Forgiveness is set up as the chief virtue of the Christian Hero;—

"a coward has often fought, a coward has often conquered, but a coward never forgave".92

Following Steele, Sterne says in his sermon, Joseph's History Considered—

"The brave know only how to forgive; — it is the most refined and generous pitch of virtue, human nature can arrive at".93

(Sterne here even mentions the Christian Hero in a foot-note). My Uncle Toby's character, in Tristram Shandy, is conceived in this spirit. Young Le.Fever's chief recommendation, as man and tutor, is his 'good heart'; and as corporal Trim points out his(Le Fe­ver's) 'brave heart' as an additional qualification, his master Toby reminds him that the "best hearts ... are ever the bravest". This emphasis on the moral ideal in Sterne's time was brought about by the new credit of feeling, of human sentiments. The advocates of feeling turned the code of honour and virtue inward, to the conscience of man.

(c) Conscience and the cult of benevolence:

The importance of conscience arose with Renaissance humanism, which discarded original sin.

"Our glory is the testimony of our conscience" — declared Montaigne. The concept of conscience acquires a new significance in the 18th century, in which morality was regarded higher than, or at least as important as, faith. Conscience is the innate 'moral sense' of the moral philosophers, the inward 'light of nature' of the deists.

Hobbes had held that the moral sense, instead of being innate in man, came from the institution of the commonwealth.
He believed that 'the laws of nature, as justice, equity, modesty, mercy', generosity, and so on, were 'contrary to our natural passions'. Hobbes, therefore, considered the idea of every man being a 'judge of good and evil actions' as a 'seditious doctrine'.

Locke too - for a different reason though - did not believe in the moral sense to be innate; for he repudiated the very doctrine of innate ideas. The "true ground of morality", according to him, "can only be the will and law of a God, who sees men in the dark, has in his hand rewards and punishments, and power enough to call to account the proudest offender".

Thus, while Locke attached supreme importance to moral sentiments, he believed that our moral sense was derived from God, that is, from a source beyond us.

In opposition to such views, Shaftesbury held that our moral ideas are innate - "The notions and principles of fair, just and honest, with the rest of these ideas, are innate".

Conscience is this 'innate' moral sense of Shaftesbury, who defined it as follows - "To have the reflection in his(i.e., man's) mind of any unjust action or behaviour which he knows to be naturally odious and ill-deserving - this is alone properly called conscience".

By 'innate' Shaftesbury meant instinctive; and 'instinct' is 'that at which Nature teaches'. Our moral sense is instinctive, and its operation immediate. Hutcheson points out that the 'dignity and commanding nature' of the moral sense is "we are immediately conscious of, as we are conscious of the power itself".

Bishop Butler further develops the concept of Conscience as an original motivating principle. It is, as we have mentioned earlier, (p.34 ante) the very 'voice of God within us'. Conscience, with...
Butler, is not a mere emotional principle, but 'a superior principle of reflection' within us. It is by this natural faculty that man becomes "a moral agent, that he is a law to himself". Butler declares the supremacy of Conscience over other instincts or faculties. It is "supreme over all others, and ... bears its own authority of being so". 106

To Butler, it is the guiding principle of will, belief and action. The principle of action is thus put within man himself, and not to any exterior agency - God's will, or the civil law. This idea forms the basis of the moral thought and the humanism of the 18th century.

In the Spectator papers, too, we note this emphasis on the authority of Conscience and man's innate good nature.

"A man's first care should be to avoid the reproaches of his own heart ... Good nature is generally born within us: health, prosperity, and kind treatment from the world are great cherishers of it where they find it, but nothing is capable of forcing it up where it does not grow of itself ... education may improve, but not produce (it)". 107

Thus Addison. So Henry Grove considered 'kind and benevolent propensions' to be 'the original growth of the heart of man'. Adam Smith considered Conscience - 'this judge within' - as a self-acting supreme principle, guiding human relationships. The deistic emphasis on natural reason - the natural faculty of 'forming various ideas or perceptions of things' - for testing religious faith, is an acknowledgment of the same truth of the wholesomeness of man's innate nature. We find fine expression, in Sterne, of this idea of the basic goodness in man - "Nature never made an unkind creature - ill usage and bad habits have deformed a fair and lovely creation". //
"... universally and deeply the seeds of this virtue of compassion are planted in the heart of man". 112

The authority of Conscience derives from this basic goodness in man. Our conscience thus inevitably leads us to benevolence. Self-love is subsidiary to altruism, much as a part of the body is to the whole body. A limb is separate, but its value or importance is in its relationship to the whole body; so is

"the relation which each particular person in society has to other particular persons and to the whole society". 113

Self-love is fulfilled in altruism. Henry Grove compares self-love to the earth's diurnal motion, and altruism or universal benevolence to the earth's rotatory motion round the sun.

Conscience vitalizes humanity, which is the ruling concept of 18th century literature (Vide chap. VIII). Sterne's emphasis on conscience, on feeling and humanity, is central to his thought.