

## The Conservation Continues...

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### Moral Laws in Borden P. Bowne's *Principles of Ethics*

Edgar S. Brightman (1884-1953) was the foremost interpreter of Bownean Personalism. He made major contributions in the areas of axiology and philosophy of religion. He was more creative and courageous than his contemporaries who shared in the development of Personalism after the death of Borden P. Bowne (1847-1910), the father of American Personalism. For example, Brightman was led to propose the controversial hypothesis of a **finite-infinite** God. The crux of Brightman's theory is that God is not merely self-limited as a result of human freedom and laws in nature, but the power of God's will is limited by eternal, uncreated, internal non-rational given factors.<sup>1</sup> The power of God's will is limited, though sufficient to attain God's purposes in the world. God's goodness, love, justice, on the other hand, are unlimited.

Brightman's major contribution to value theory is his book, *Moral Laws* (1933). Here he developed a dynamic system of moral laws or principles, comprised of three major categories (9, 29, 94).<sup>2</sup> The Formal Laws are the most abstract: Logical Law and Law of Autonomy. These are followed by a more concrete set of Laws, viz., the Axiological Laws: Axiological Law, Law of Consequences, Law of the Best Possible, Law of Specification, Law of the Most Inclusive End, and the Law of Ideal of Control. The most concrete set of Laws are the Personalistic Laws: Law of Individualism, Law of Altruism, and the Law of the Ideal of Personality. Since it is a dynamic system

of laws, Brightman left the door open to the possibility of adding more laws (94). Several Brightmanians did just that.<sup>3</sup>

Brightman's book, *Moral Laws*, does not make explicit reference to the influence of Bowne's ethical writings, and the fact that much of Bowne's text, *Principles of Ethics* (1892), anticipates the later moral law system. The purpose of my essay is not to speculate on why Brightman fails to mention the influence of Bowne's text, but to identify some (not all) of the numerous passages therein that point to moral laws.

The term "moral law" appears numerous times in Bowne's book,<sup>4</sup> and essentially means the same for him as Brightman. Moral laws are universal laws. However, Bowne nowhere says that his purpose is to present a "system of moral laws." This, however, is an explicit task of Brightman's book.<sup>5</sup>

We find in Bowne's book many passages which anticipate the later appearance of Brightman's moral law system. Interestingly, Bowne's wording and that of Brightman's regarding the description of a particular law are strikingly similar at some points. I will highlight some of these passages.

### Moral Laws in Bowne

A mere cursory reading of chapters four and five of *Principles of Ethics*, "Subjective Ethics" and "Development in Morals," respectively, will reveal that in one form or another Bowne appeals to at least ten of the moral laws that appear in *Moral Laws*. In addition, he points to a law not included in Brightman's system, viz., the Law of the Ideal of Community. L. Harold DeWolf and Walter G. Muelder later added this law to Brightman's system. As noted previously, Brightman constructed the moral law system so that it would be possible to add more laws. In *Moral Laws* he writes that "the laws here defined can and will be improved" (94). This may mean that the meaning and character of the laws may be refined and

enriched through adding more empirical data. This is essentially what Peter A. Bertocci and Richard Millard do in their massive text, *Personality and the Good* (1963). On the other hand, it could mean that further clarification of the moral law system may come by expanding the original system beyond itself by developing new laws. Muelder (*Moral Law in Christian Social Ethics*, 1966), DeWolf (*Responsible Freedom*, 1971), and Paul Deats (*The Boston Personalist Tradition*, 1986) have made significant contributions in this regard, though it is questionable as to whether the laws Deats introduces (Law of Conflict and Reconciliation, Law of Fallibility and Corrigibility) are nuclear to the system of moral laws. In addition, and in corroboration with Muelder, I want to suggest another law, viz., the Law of Development, that might have been included with Brightman's Axiological Laws. I consider this briefly near the end of this essay.

In any event, the laws that we observe in some form in chapters four and five of *Principles of Ethics* include: The Law of Consequences, Ideal of Control, Axiological, Specification, Autonomy, Individualism, Altruism, Best Possible, Ideal of Personality. Also, the Logical Law is implicit throughout *Principles of Ethics*. As noted earlier, there is passing reference to language which points to what Muelder would later call The Law of the Ideal of Community. There are two points worth noting. First, Bowne does not introduce the laws we detect in *Principles of Ethics* in any set order. Second, unlike Brightman's system there is no indication that these Laws necessarily follow or precede each other. However, I think it safe to say that since Bowne believed good will to be at the center of the moral life he, like Brightman, began with formal laws. Like Brightman's Law of Autonomy, good will is, for Bowne, an absolute disposition for the moral life. I shall now list the laws as they appear in Brightman's system (*Moral Laws*), though we find no such order in *Principles of Ethics*. I will identify relevant passages in *Principles of Ethics* that point to each law.

## Logical Law

The aim of ethics, according to Bowne (*Principles of Ethics*), is to impose reason on nature (231). Bowne makes much of the need to consider and calculate the consequences of moral acts. The impartial work of reason is needed here and in the application of good will. What we see here is an implicit call for the Logical Law. Calling for an "alert and critical" intellect, Bowne writes: "The great need of our time in practical ethics is the serious and thoughtful application of our intellect and our knowledge to the problems of conduct" (152, 307).

## Law of Autonomy

According to Brightman, this law, which says that self-imposed ideals are obligatory, is absolute as a disposition. Yet this law cannot tell us what to do in concrete situations. Bowne suggests the same regarding good will. He described it as "an absolute duty as a disposition; but the best forms of its realization are not always manifest" (vii, 137, 206).

In pointing to the need for an "inner law" or ideal conception to interpret meanings of terms like "the good," "pleasure," "happiness," etc., Bowne refers to "the law which the moral subject imposes on himself" (98). This is the nature of the "inner law." It is a self-imposed law. In addition, moral obligation is attached to this notion of imposing law upon the self. Our idea of moral obligation exists within the mind itself. Therefore, the idea of moral obligation "has no external origin." The mind experiences obligation only when it imposes duty upon itself. "The free spirit thus imposing duty upon itself gives us the only meaning and experience of moral obligation" (102, 100, 103).

The emphasis is upon autonomy, not heteronomy. The latter is based on external authority; the former on internal authority.

“And without this autonomy, we have no proper moral life, but only a subjection to appetite, balanced by external authority with its machinery of rewards and penalties” (103).

An absolute disposition in ethics, neither Brightman’s Law of Autonomy nor Bowne’s principle of good will is sufficient in itself. There must be means of determining what to do and how to do it. For Brightman this calls for the Axiological Laws. Bowne’s emphasis on the idea of development in the moral life anticipates these laws. In the process of moral development Bowne stresses the “application of moral principles to life....” (133).

### Axiological Law

Walter G. Muelder, a former student of Brightman’s, contends that “Bowne’s ethics is in many ways a comprehensive commentary on what Brightman was to call the Axiological Law, since Bowne was interested in the actualization of value potential in the human being.” There is indication of this throughout *Principles of Ethics*. Bowne contends that the aim of ethics is to raise the natural to the moral or spiritual plane. In Brightman’s language we can say that Bowne was interested in the person moving from empirical value (or value potential) to ideal or true value. This is possible, according to Bowne, only through free self-determination and intentionality (125, 133, 159).

For both Bowne and Brightman the moral life grows out of our actual desires at any given moment. Brightman contends that “all ideal values either must be found among or must grow out of the empirical values” (*Moral* 129). In other words, true value is the ideal form of empirical value. This is not different from Bowne’s position that “the moral life is only the ideal form of the natural” (*Principles* 178). Bowne’s view of the moral, like Brightman’s view of ideal value, is that it does not happen automatically. Rather, Bowne emphasizes development, which is a slow process that requires

constant effort of will and the creative use of reason. The spiritual (ideal) emerges from the natural (empirical) not automatically, but by development, as good will works on the given factors in the march to perfection (Ch. V). Implicit in this is the Law of the Ideal of Personality and the Law of the Ideal of Control (131, 133, 152, 157).

In a conversation with Walter Muelder regarding the theme of this essay he commented:

The means (values) of the moral life are close at hand in the two major contexts of human life, the natural constitutional stuff of heredity (all the bodily endowments and drives) and the social setting of personal existence. The natural comes first, then the spiritual.

This insight is consistent with Bowne's view in *Principles of Ethics*. Persons do the work of ethics in the natural realm. Any moralization that occurs takes place here. At birth we are but candidates for humanity, for rationality, for morality, etc. (124-125). Yet in order to develop each of these as fully as we can, we are endowed with "given" rational and nonrational factors. In addition, we are born into an already existing society with values, disvalues, etc., with which we must contend.

The nonrational given aspects of the self, e.g., impulses, desires, appetites, etc., comprise the natural form of life upon which the developing moral and rational activity works to achieve the moral life. Bowne writes that the nonrational given factors "lie back of all volition as expressions of our nature itself," and "give our life a certain form and direction on their own account" (*Principles* 125). Imposing reason and good will on the nonrational givens in order to raise them to the moral plane is the goal of ethics. This is consistent with Brightman's characterization of the Axiological Law and the movement from empirical value to ideal value (*Moral Laws* 129).

Just as Brightman's Axiological Law stresses the need for harmonious values, we see the same emphasis in *Principles of Ethics*. Bowne saw the need for laws with content, or the need to move beyond formal to concrete laws. Important as formal ideas of duty and obligation, they do not tell us what to do in terms of conduct (105, 55, 132, 139).

### Law of Consequences

In order to get to concrete and specific duty in ethical life it is necessary to consider or calculate consequences (*Principles of Ethics* 135, 146). Bowne was greatly influenced by the British utilitarians in this regard, but also by pragmatists, e.g., William James. By emphasizing the calculating of consequences, Bowne anticipates Brightman's Law of Consequences, which requires the work of reason or intellect.

There are some striking passages in *Principles of Ethics* that point to this law. For example, Bowne writes that in realizing good will it is necessary to consider consequences (46). In further support of this position, Bowne suggests the need to judge consequences by the good will. He asks, for example: "Can we completely determine our judgments of right and wrong by what we know or anticipate of consequences, or must we also have recourse to some inner standard by which consequences must be judged" (81)? Bowne points to the need to link good will with the calculating of consequences. Though there is evidence in *Principles of Ethics* of connecting some of the implied moral laws, Bowne was not as intentional about this as Brightman. What is important for our purpose is Bowne's reference to the need to consider consequences. The development of a moral code for life "must be inspired by good will, and guided by experience of consequences" (135).

### Law of the Best Possible

There are no less than a half dozen references in *Principles of Ethics* to the significance of doing one's best to achieve ideal value and the recognition that this is not a static principle, but one that is dynamic and open to improvement. One can see in Bowne the idea, which is more fully developed in Brightman, that though we are always obligated to do our best today, it is conceivable that we can do a

better best on tomorrow. This suggests that we can never quite rest at any level of moral achievement. A reading of Brightman's treatment of the Law of the Best Possible reveals wording very similar to that of Bowne's. According to Brightman, the Law of the Best Possible "means constant improvement, wherever improvement is possible, and so it might be called the Melioristic Law" (*Moral Laws* 156). We find similar passages in *Principles of Ethics*:

While a better is in sight, we can rest in no good; and the refusal to move onward is to be a traitor to the highest, and so, finally, to the good itself. The notion is further complicated with the theistic implications of the notion of the type. The refusal to move on to the best is to decline the end the Creator intended, and to transgress his will. (120-121)

Again notice:

The ideal as such lies beyond actual attainment. ...On the one hand, it seems to be a moral axiom that no one can be to blame for what cannot be helped, and that no one is bound to do what is impossible. On the other hand, we condemn ourselves in a certain way even for unavoidable imperfection. (122)

And then we find in a very striking passage:

Moreover, the ideal itself grows, and always keeps in advance. It is this fact which provides for indefinite moral progress, and forbids us ever to find satisfaction in any actual attainment, or actual obedience. (122)

It is not difficult to see the similarity in the wording regarding the Law of the Best Possible. We are, in any moment, obligated to our best and continual improvement.

Both Bowne and Brightman stress the idea that our obligation is not to the impossible, but to the possible. We get a good indication of this in the chapter in *Principles of Ethics* on "Moral Responsibility, Merit and Demerit." Bowne writes that "the virtuous choice..., necessarily presupposes that the good in question is attainable. A duty to aim at the impossible would be absurd" (172-173). Bowne also reminds us of a basic theme in his book, viz., that morality begins on the natural plane and only slowly moves to the spiritual. In addition, we are admonished that humans cannot expect to

achieve perfect goodness, though progress in this direction is unlimited (177). As we can see, then, there is much in Bowne's ethics that lends itself to what Brightman refers to as the Law of the Best Possible.

It is instructive to note that in the chapter in *Principles of Ethics* on "Development in Morals" Bowne indicates in at least two places the characteristics of a *teleological developmental ethics*. His description of how development occurs in social ethics seem to anticipate several of the moral laws in Brightman's system. There are three stages in moral development: 1) Unfolding of the moral ideal and the strengthening of the sense of duty; 2) Application of principles to concrete problems and the formation of moral codes; 3) Extension of the moral field. The latter stage has two forms: Bringing more and more of our acts under the head of duty; and the recognition that we owe duties to persons and groups (as well as nature) that have heretofore been excluded from our ethical sphere (132). These three forms of development correspond to the Law of Autonomy, the Axiological Law, and the Law of the Most Inclusive End in Brightman's system. It also appears that the Law of Ideal Control is implied in Bowne's emphasis on "the extension of the moral field." This principle illustrates the need in ethics both to extend the moral field, and to control empirical values by true or ideal values (to use Brightman's language).

Also in the chapter on "Development in Morals," Bowne discusses the tendency of moral codes and concrete actions to change in light of changing socio-historical developments. Pointing out that the good person of today may find many things to be his or her duty that were otherwise regarded in some distant past, Bowne further describes what may be viewed as a teleological developmental ethic (139). Here we have an anticipation of The Law of Consequences; the Axiological Law; the Law of Ideal Control (or possibly Personality); and the Law of the Ideal of Community.

### Law of Specification

This law is implied in Bowne's statement that "universal moral ideas must take their concrete form from the specific nature and circumstances of the moral agent" (*Principles* 139). Here the concrete ethical situation takes on meaning. One implication of this is that every specific moral situation will have values unique to it, and we cannot know in an a priori sense what the specific values will be. In addition, we cannot expect to find our answer in the law of good will. We get our clues only on the natural plane, since it is here that ethics must find its field. Persons cannot develop life from abstract moral ideas. Bowne's aim, of course, is to moralize the natural order.

There is illustration of the need for the Law of Specification, i. e., a situational law, in Bowne's discussion of the importance of truth-telling. He indicates the absolute duty involved in this regard, but then he qualifies it. "In the moral intercourse of a normal life, truthfulness is an absolute duty; and to the truth we have a right. Let your yea be yea, and your nay be nay. This is the ideal of social intercourse" (*Principles* 221). Had Bowne stopped at this point there would be no evidence of the need for the law in question, but he proceeds.

At the same time, it is manifest that a right to the truth presupposes the existence of a normal moral order. [Notice, "a normal moral order."] In time of war, the enemy has no right to be informed as to our purposes. The conventions of society are for the time suspended, and craft and deceit are allowed. Of course, even military enemies may meet in purely human relations, or they may agree upon something; and then the agreement should be regarded; but in general they understand that they have to use their craft and cunning, and that they believe at their own risk. In a similar manner in society, no one has a right to an answer to every prying or malicious question. No one has a right to information of which he proposes to make an evil use. (222)

Here Bowne contends against the Kantian view, which would not allow lying under any circumstance (223). Both Bowne and Brightman are troubled by such a stance, though Bowne points out that

there is no unanimity of thought regarding the issue of truthfulness in all situations. However, the weight of tradition seems to be in the direction that "truth-telling lies within the realm where others have a right to the truth" (223). The important point in all of this is Bowne's recognition of the need for a situational law.

### Law of the Most Inclusive End

The clearest reference to this law in *Principles of Ethics* is found in the chapter on "Development of Morals." Here Bowne explicitly refers to "the extension of the moral field." What he seems to have in mind is little different from Brightman's discussion of the Law of the Most Inclusive End in *Moral Laws*. Pointing out how this law goes beyond the Axiological Law's emphasis on coherent values, Brightman writes: "The Law of the Most Inclusive End goes much further and specifies both a coherent life—a plan for growth and development—is the aim of the good man and also that such a life should include the greatest variety compatible with that plan" (183). Similarly, Bowne contends: "Men in general need a higher ideal and a stronger sense of duty. They also need more wisdom in the application of moral principles to practical life; and finally, they need to give a moral form to their entire life and to bring all human beings within the moral area where mutual rights and duties are recognized" (*Principles* 133).

### Law of Ideal Control

In Brightman's description of this law we find there is need to control empirical values by ideal values. Bowne desired that everything in the natural realm be controlled by the good will. Ethics is not merely concerned about value, but best possible or ideal values. Remember, Bowne's emphasis in *Principles of Ethics* is on raising

the natural to the moral-spiritual plane, which implies controlling the natural with reason and good will. He writes that since "the aim is to develop ideal life, we have carefully to study the bearing of our action upon this end..." (136). Bowne contends further that the moral nature (what Brightman refers to as the Logical Laws) does not demand concrete action of us. It does, however, provide "the spirit from which action should spring." It is from life that we learn what these actions should be, but Bowne implied that these must be controlled by good will. Accordingly, morality has both a subjective and objective side. The former is concerned with the good will or "the spirit of the agent." The latter is concerned with outward concrete actions and their consequences. The outward acts are controlled or guided by the inner disposition or good will. And if one is not able to do this on his or her own volition Bowne appeals to civil law. In such cases "the constable takes the place of conscience." For Bowne the ideal may be reached only when "the pure motive is joined to the right act..." (145). Those persons who have problems achieving moral self-control may be helped by the police (143). Bowne applies the Law of Ideal Control, though there is no explicit reference to it.

### Law of Individualism

Each of Brightman's Personalistic Laws (Individualism, Altruism, Ideal of Personality) is appealed to or applied in *Principles of Ethics*. Bowne's ethics center attention on the role of the concrete individual taken as a whole, in contrast to the abstractions of mere good will or some aspect of value taken in isolation from the whole person. This emphasis is indication of the seriousness with which he takes the Personalistic Law. Good will and values exist in and for persons. What Bowne says about freedom in *Metaphysics* (1898) applies here as well. Abstract freedom has no meaning. Freedom that means anything is the power of self-direction we find in actual men and women (405).

Bowne refused to sacrifice the individual to society and held that persons "may never be regarded as fuel for warming society. ...In our zeal against our native selfishness, we must not overlook the fact that the individual has rights against all others...and that in a moral universe provision must be made for maintaining them. This is the abiding truth in egoism" (*Principles* 199). Bowne emphasizes the essential worth and good of the individual. "A complete law of duty for us must include both a human ideal [individualism] and also a law of social interaction [altruism, ideal of personality, ideal of community]" (111). We find in Bowne an unmistakable emphasis on duties to the self and respect for the humanity in the self. "The humanity which I respect in others, I must respect in myself." The moral ideal binds the individual in both social relations and self-regarding interests (113). The individual, then, is the moral unit, and has intrinsic value (208, 209). In addition to pointing to the good of the individual Bowne implies that others are potential achievers of value, which would seem to point to the Law of Altruism in *Moral Laws*. Writing about the significance of the individual, Brightman contends that "the individual person is the moral unit," and that "if the individual does not achieve value, society will not achieve value" (204, 212).

Bowne indicates the sense in which duties to self have primacy in ethics.

No one is or can be responsible for others as for himself. Every one must be a moral object for himself, and an object of supreme importance; for he is not simply the particular person, A or B, he is also a bearer of the ideal of humanity, and its realization depends pre-eminently upon himself. ...Every one, then, must have a sacredness for himself as well as for others; and whatever one does for others must be conditioned by what is due, not to his own egoistic impulses, but by his essential humanity. This is the most important aspect of duties to self. (*Principles* 209)

Bowne makes it clear that duties to self necessarily imply duties to others, and vice versa. The idea of duties to self "has as much social as individual reference" (210). We are made aware of the impor-

tance of shared values that can only be realized by the individual in cooperation with others (*Moral* 225). In another passage in *Principles of Ethics* we find:

There is no need to further treat of duties to self in distinction from duties to others, as they so largely run together. The chief and best part of our own moral development arises only in and through our social activities. Here it is preeminently true that he that saveth his life shall lose it. (210)

The first duty of a person "is that of mutual good will and the implied recognition of the sacredness of both life and liberty, and in this sense a right to both" (216-217). Human beings are of "divine parentage and divine destiny," and therefore have "an inextinguishable claim to our reverence" (203).

### Law of Altruism

Bowne indicates in those passages that point to Brightman's Law of Individualism that only in the sense that the individual has absolute value can it be expected that there would be an entire community of such persons. He is clear about the need for both a human ideal and a law of social interaction (*Principles* 208, 211). The latter seems to point both to the Law of Altruism in Brightman's system, and to Bowne's awareness that though the individual is the moral unit he or she develops most fully on the moral plane only in and through communal relations with others (*Principles* 210). More specifically, the following passages in *Principles of Ethics* imply the Law of Altruism in *Moral Laws*.

For man the good is perfectly realizable only in and through the co-working of the community; indeed, the good exists mainly in a social form. Hence virtue itself largely takes on the form of working for the common good. (69)

I think we also see in this passage the germ of the Law of the Ideal of Personality and the Law of Community. Since Bowne's approach in *Principles of Ethics* is different from that of Brightman's he is not as

precise in the descriptions we find of some of the laws that appear in embryonic form in his text. In addition, Bowne does not give specific names of laws. Rather, he applies the idea or concept that the laws represent.

One further passage will serve to illustrate the presence of the Law of Altruism in *Principles of Ethics*.

Given this conditioning conception, we may say that the law of love, or good will, includes all duties of man to his neighbor, or that it is the ideal social law. It expresses the spirit which should rule our lives, and the principle from which action should spring. If, then, we are told that the law of love is the only basal moral law, we assent to this extent: The law of love is the only strictly universal moral law for all normal social action. (111)

We see in Bowne an awareness that something like the Law of Altruism is solidly connected with or follows any discussion of duties to self. We find a similar view in *Moral Laws*. "The Law of Altruism follows from an impartial generalization of The Law of Individualism; for, if each person ought to respect himself as a realizer of value, then each person ought to respect all others as realizers of value and so as ends in themselves" (*Moral* 225).

### Law of the Ideal of Personality

In Brightman's system this law is the summary law of the entire moral law system. It is, for him, the fullest, most concrete of all the laws. We see evidence of this law in several places in *Principles of Ethics*. Bowne writes that "the law of good will itself is conditioned by some ideal of humanity" (111). The reference here could easily be to either the Law of the Ideal Personality, or the law introduced by DeWolf and Muelder, viz., the Law of the Ideal of Community. Bowne states that "our morality involves not merely the law of love, but also an ideal of humanity which conditions its application" (114, 118). What is needed to give form to good will is "an ideal of humanity." The ideal conditions the application of good will, and

“without the ideal the law would be compatible with the most degrading interpretations” (208). Brightman characterizes the Logical Law in a similar way. It has to do only with will or intent, not with concrete acts of applying will. One may therefore entertain both the idea of willing to kill an innocent person, and not willing to kill him or her. The Logical Law only requires consistency and the elimination of contradictions. It does not tell us what is wrong with planned actions.

### Law of the Ideal of Community

The evidence we find in Bowne regarding this law is instructive, since he did not consider himself a social ethicist, and therefore does not develop a systematic social ethic. Yet we see repeated references to the importance of communal living and the impossibility of the individual moral agent developing the moral life in any full sense apart from the community. We see such references in numerous places. A revealing passage that occurs early in *Principles of Ethics* follows.

The ideal good is conscious life in the full development of all its normal possibilities; and the actual good is greater or less as this ideal is more or less approximated. For man the attainment of this good involves the perfection of individual life and of social relations. For man the good is perfectly realizable only in and through the co-working of the community; indeed, the good exists mainly in a social form. Hence virtue itself largely takes on the form of working for the common good; and unselfishness is often set forth as the chief if not the sole virtue. (69)

What is of interest here is that a law of community, while implicit in Brightman's summary law (the Law of the Ideal of Personality), does not even receive as much attention as the communal element in Bowne's ethics. “The true ethical aim,” Bowne writes, “is to realize the common good...” (97).

Defining the good will as "the will to produce well being," Bowne goes on to write: "Love would have no meaning in a world where mutual influence is impossible" (*Principles* 107). We see another reference to the significance of achieving values in community in one of his discussions on social ethics.

For social ethics, good will is indeed the spring and the common good the aim, but the ethics of the person is not exhausted therein. The moral ideal binds the individual not only in his social relations, but also in his self-regarding activities and thoughts." (113)

There is further evidence of the Law of the Ideal of Community in *Principles of Ethics*. "This development of moral principles into a comprehensive code for life is all the more necessary from the fact, that social development has largely gone on without reference to moral ideas" (135). Contending against the absence of a social conscience in many of his contemporaries, Bowne writes: "There is not thought enough to see that the social order is the only thing which makes individual development possible, and that in its support every one should bear his part" (139). This appears to be evidence of the Law of the Ideal of Community in germ. Bowne seems to have a good sense that the individual moral agent can develop most effectively through the community, and as the community grows. Bowne is always pointing to the need for ethics to "minister to the common good in the most effective way" (254), and to the importance of considering both the level of development in the individual and society when seeking ethical solutions to problems. In all of these instances we see signs of a communitarian law in Bowne's ethics, though to be sure, in the case of this and other laws implied in *Principles of Ethics* he does not give systematic development in the sense of showing the interrelatedness of the principles. But unlike Brightman, this was not his task. Also, Bowne's utilitarianism was just as a thoroughgoing personalists' should be. He stressed, not the greatest good for the greatest number, but for all persons in society (198).

It is important to point out that there are weaknesses in Bowne's ethics that may cause one to question whether his communitarian ethic is soundly established. First, there is little evidence in *Principles of Ethics* of genuine grappling with the nature of the moral agent. Second, there is a recurring ambivalence between the role of laws and institutions (i.e., their moral roles) and the role of individuals. Finally, Bowne has no method of social criticism, the absence of which causes him to trust too much in intuition. Such weaknesses cause Muelder to conclude that Bowne's ethics are "pre-communitarian." However, Muelder agrees that there are numerous passages in *Principles of Ethics* that imply a communitarian ethic. In this sense it can be said that the communitarian laws developed by DeWolf and Muelder (third generation personalists) are present in germinal form in Bowne's ethics.

### Law of Development?

The principle of development is more explicit and prominent in Bowne than in Brightman. The latter seems to assume it, however, especially in the Law of the Best Possible, with its emphasis on continued improvement and growth. The Law of the Best Possible "means constant improvement, wherever improvement is possible\_\_\_\_" (*Moral Laws* 156). This suggests development and dynamism, and that the ideal is never completed. As the moral agent grows and matures the best he or she can do today may be surpassed on tomorrow. The principle of development is not only evident throughout *Principles of Ethics*, but Bowne devotes an entire chapter to it, "Development in Morals," where he discusses three directions of moral development (noted earlier).

Since what we have seen up to this point supports the thesis of this essay, viz., that there are moral laws in *Principles of Ethics*, which implies strong Bownean influence in Brightman's system of moral laws, it is conceivable that Brightman could have included an

additional law in the axiological category: the Law of Development. Such an hypothesis needs to be fleshed out, but for now it is important to note that my former teacher, Walter G. Muelder, actually suggested the idea during our study of *Principles of Ethics* the summer of 1989.

Bowne extended the idea of the development of the moral life to include all the world, e.g., persons and nature. In all areas much remains unmoralized, and "the complete moralization of life is a long way off in the future" (*Principles* 151). This suggests unlimited room for improvement and development as far as extending the control of reason and good will in the self, other persons, and all areas of society and nature. Bowne was quite clear about the inclusion of nature, the plant and animal kingdoms in the process of development (150). Our treatment of self, the neighbor, and all of nature is dependent upon our estimate of the worth of persons and nature (161). If we have a low conception of humanity and nature we are likely to treat them with disrespect and abuse. On the other hand, a high estimate of all of creation will likely translate into more favorable behavior.

This is a very suggestive philosophical principle with strong ethical implications, for in it we get a strong clue as to why racism, classism, sexism, and violation of the environment are so prevalent today. The clear-cut implication is that people today have very low conceptions of persons and nature. "Apart from some high ideal of the worth of man [and nature], there will be no high effort for his improvement, and no inviolable sacredness in his rights" (*Principles* 193). Though Bowne had a high estimate of both persons and nature, thoroughgoing personalism does not allow placing these on the exact same level of worth. The objects in nature exist for persons, though not for their irresponsible use and random destruction. According to Bowne our entire life and all of nature is subject to development, "and we come only gradually to ourselves" (117). As candidates for humanity, rationality, and morality at birth, the actual achievement of these is a slow, intentional process.

Earlier in this essay I commented that Brightman nowhere indicates explicitly that Bowne's *Principles of Ethics* influenced the development of his (Brightman's) system of moral laws. Though it is possible that Brightman may not have depended heavily upon *Principles of Ethics*, this essay shows conclusively that it is in many ways an anticipation of Brightman's *Moral Laws*. In 1921 Brightman wrote a two-part essay entitled, "The Tasks Confronting A Personalistic Philosophy." In Part One he makes a statement which may very well have some bearing on his failure to credit Bowne's text on ethics as a major contribution to his system of moral laws. What Brightman suggests in that article is that the ideas in a school of thought belong to the members of that school (162-164). Those who may be troubled by Brightman's failure to acknowledge Bowne's influence may wish to ponder this. Though not an answer in itself, it is at least suggestive.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Brightman, "Religion As Truth," I:57, 76-77; Brightman, *The Problem of God, The Finding of God, A Philosophy of Religion* (1940), especially chapters 8-10, for systematic development of the hypothesis of the *finite-infinite* God.

<sup>2</sup>On these and other pages Brightman uses the term "principle" rather than "law," which would seem to suggest that he found the latter term to be problematic. This may have been the case because his whole system is dynamic, while the term "law" has an air of permanence or unchangeability about it. Yet, as we can see from the title of the book he finally settles on the term "law." L. Harold DeWolf, following the suggestion of Peter A. Bertocci and Richard M. Millard, opts for the term "principle" in his own rendition of the moral laws. Of Bertocci and Millard he writes: "These authors speak of the formulas as 'principles' rather than laws, and the change is a salutary one" (*Responsible Freedom* 144).

<sup>3</sup>See DeWolf, *Responsible Freedom*; Muelder, *Moral Law in Christian Social Ethics*; Deats, "Conflict and Reconciliation"; Bertocci and Millard primarily follow Brightman's original system, though they fill-out each law with more concrete illustrations and bring to bear much psychological data. See their text, *Personality and the Good*, Part IV.

<sup>4</sup>Bowne, *Principles of Ethics*; 77, 105, 164, 196, 197, 201, 255.

<sup>5</sup>See *Moral Laws IV*, especially 86-89, 94, 107.

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