



Ethics without Morality

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and similarly American art in France. The variations in national prestige have produced only minor fluctuations in the applicability of this statement. In no field have national characteristics been more prominent than in opera, yet French opera has been so popular in this country that the Metropolitan Opera House was once known as the *Faustspielhaus*; and the popularity of American opera in France has not lagged appreciably behind its popularity in its own country. Going farther afield, Oriental art is appreciated in the West, and Occidental art in the East. A possible exception to this may be found in music, for Oriental music has never received much acceptance in the West. Again, however, this appears to be due to the real superiority of Western instruments and techniques, for Occidental music has been enthusiastically adopted in the Orient, even, in the case of Japan, when it was in the face of governmental opposition.

It is possible to carry this analysis still further, for it can be shown¹ that we have weighty evidence of the average aesthetic tastes of many birds and insects, and that this taste is completely in accord with usual and average human tastes. Thus it seems clear that there is no increased divergence in taste with increased divergence in hereditary and environmental factors. A factor of the widest possible extension is present, and one which is normatively controlling. Thus this semi-statistical method of investigating the nature of aesthetic experience produces evidence in favor of the objectivity of an aesthetic element, and of the objectivity of beauty.

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ETHICS WITHOUT MORALITY

IN morality, as in art or in any other human enterprise, the attempt has often been made to reduce the multiplicity of characteristics to a single formula. Thus good and bad have been reduced to liking and disliking, or to customary norms, or to directives for conduct based on experience, or to rules of conduct applicable to specific people at specific times but often falsely eternalized. Now obviously morality cannot be reduced to any single one of these distinctions, but rather comprehends them all and more besides. But "morality" is a curious word and even in ordinary usage often tends to be identified with one par-

¹ See Lafleur, "Biological Evidence in Aesthetics," *Philosophical Review*, Vol. LI (November 1942), pp. 587-595.

ticular strand of its meanings, sexuality for example. Its fate is in many ways analogous to that of "virtue," which at the present time has become a well-nigh unusable term, except for purposes of history or of satire. The purpose of this article is to get hold of one of the chief meanings of "morality" and to show that the factors it designates present a *misfunction*. Whether one will then find the term morality further usable will depend on the extent to which one believes the current use of "morality" to be identified with that misfunction.

It is to Nietzsche particularly that we owe an explicit statement of the relativity of morals. His genealogy of morals made it possible to think of moral systems as time-bound and even suggested that yesterday's evil might be transvaluated into today's good. My purpose here is to go one step beyond Nietzsche (though he half did it himself) and to show that traditional moralities are not simply relative to their time and place, but contain an ingredient which represents a considerable misfunction. I will call this ingredient *moralistic*.

The moralistic reaction can be described as the reaction to a reality subjectively constructed by the self, rather than to reality as it really (objectively ascertainably) is. The history of thought is full of such constructed realities. The Platonic heaven, for instance, is an ideal projected into actuality. The moralistic construction of reality represents a distortion dominated primarily by the negative emotions. The moralistic reality is a sort of *Zwischenwelt* (picturesquely represented in the mythical conception of witches, demons, sorcerers, and other spirits). Action then must not only take account of the exigencies of the real situation but must in part be determined by the threats and commands emanating from that other world. Moralistic action cannot directly respond to the opportunities of the situation but is in part guided by a pseudo-situation.

This pseudo-situation takes on varying characters. It may take the shape of conscience ("which makes cowards of us all") or the image of a censoring public opinion ("one" does not do that) or of alleged religious sanctions. It presents exaggerations of the possible reactions of other people, their intentions towards us, their hostilities, dangerousness, or even their interest in us. The beginnings of these often fabulous conceptions are indeed founded in reality. The child, for instance, finds himself quite realistically in a world in which parents and other adults are experienced as "giants in the nursery." To these adults omnipotence is easily ascribed, and their bad temper readily suggests ominous threats. Thus there are at hand, both in the experiences

of childhood and in those of later life, conceptions that can form the material for a distorted notion of reality. These conceptions are utilized and the moralistic reaction is formed just in the degree to which, in Spinoza's terms, one's capacity to affect the environment and be affected by it is interfered with. It is not the interference as such which is decisive, but the fact that the formation of restriction is usually not harmonious with the formation of desire. It is particularly true that the social world often secretly stimulates the very desires it officially negates. The antagonism of desire and prohibition leads to an emotional dialectic which eventuates in such rationalizations as those of an ominous world or of a guilty self. In the moralistic attitude, powerlessness, lack of capacity to affect and be affected by the environment, becomes enclosed in the magic circle of symbolic victories and defeats and remains barred from the real supports of the real world.

The symbolistic, as contrasted with the realistic, control implicit in the moralistic attitude is particularly well expressed in the mechanism of *praise* and *blame*. Ordinary morality, even ordinary talk, is preoccupied with censure. Obviously, of course, one function of praising and blaming is to let other people know what our desires and interests are in order to insure better coöperation (or submission). But praise and blame aim at more than frank expression of interest. They are meant to be objective, saying, for instance, "This is odious," not simply "I hate." Now the interesting thing about this supposed objectivity is that praise or censure usually pays only insufficient attention to the etiology, motivation, and control of actions. Usually praise and blame imply an exaggerated conception of human freedom. Attention is shifted from causes and conditions to *will*. No doubt one of the roots of this shift is an anthropomorphic desire to locate the cause of events in the apparently familiar human being rather than in other factors that are opaque and often as yet unknown.

But one must not seek the true dynamism of praise and blame either in the attempt at rational control or at rational comprehension of the world. Praise and blame in many, though of course not all, of their manifestations spring not from the desire for realistic control, but from the inability to control. There is thus (1) a strong compensating factor in praise and blame. The freedom that is imputed to human will is asserted precisely in the face of a felt powerlessness. The *will* to move mountains is invoked just in those situations in which *instruments* do not yet exist to perform the job. A false ascription of freedom and the criticisms it justifies can (2) provide a very welcome relief from one's own sense of insufficiency by dwelling on the shortcomings

of others. But verbal outlets are usually quite unsatisfactory. The sense of powerlessness demands its kind of action and, for reasons that need not be given here, this tends to be destructive action. The ascription of guilt thus (3) furnishes a pretext for the expression of destructive emotion, whether in the more dramatic instance of "holy wars" or in the everyday punishments and penalties we inflict upon one another. The censorious attitude is often most subjective when it makes the strongest pretense of objectivity.

The consequence of the false conception of will implicit in praise and blame is a very underdeveloped conception of the realistic starting points of remedial action, whether in the physical, psychological, or social spheres. Usually the moralist's blaming adds only insult to the injury, just as his praise is often felt as empty flattery by those whose action springs from genuine desire. When Socrates asserts that it cannot be the part of a good man to make a bad man worse, his saying applies with particular force to moralistic censure. For the moralist drives both himself and his victim further into a world of magical freedom, imaginary guilt, and real suffering for which there is no realistic account. But in shifting attention to a man's guilt, rather than to his power, the moralist, as has been indicated, frequently wishes not to remedy, but to save whatever he may of his own sense of power. It is in the moralistic spirit to shudder before the maxim "tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner." For the moralist often refuses to understand so that he will not have to forgive.

What has been said in this article is consistent with the investigations of social psychologists. One particular recent study has found a strong correlation of authoritarian character trends with the moralizing attitude. The moralistic attitude has pervaded our entire language, particularly in the emotional undertones with which many words are used. The dualism of good and evil ranges all the way from metaphysics to slang. But we are perhaps at the beginning of a revolutionary change in attitude, and hence in language, in regard to this dualism. This is not to assert that people will not continue to be emotionally affected by and responsive to the sort of actions we now call good and evil, courageous and cowardly. Quite the contrary is the case. But change in the quality of these emotions will be determined increasingly by the realization that moralistic exhortation, apart from yielding certain outward conformism, bears almost as little relation to change in attitude as drum-beating to the making of rain. There will then be fewer "heroes" and "cowards" in the world.

Moralism, with all its pretense of being concerned with the

inner man, actually misses just in regard to the inner man; for it has an inadequate conception both of human freedom and human desire. Hence it creates false "heroes" and humiliates other men as "cowards." The hero-coward distinction is perhaps one to be overcome anyway; for human beings always do the *best* they are *able to* in the light of their knowledge and the control of impulse they have been able to achieve. Moralism misses just by not adequately recognizing that human power and impulse can be molded neither by decree nor sermon, though they can of course be deflected, for the worse usually, by them.

The ethics that is here envisaged is in a sense the fulfillment of one strand in the classical ethical tradition. Socrates' identification of virtue with knowledge in many ways prefigures it. But Socrates' identification must, of course, not be understood as a denial of emotions in favor of reason, but rather as an indication of the instrumental function of reason in re-directing the emotions. Similarly there is Spinoza's magnificent insight that true understanding of the determinants of human action teaches us "to hate no one, to despise no one, to mock no one, to be angry with no one, and to envy no one." Here again the accent is not on the suppression of emotions, even negative ones as they spontaneously arise, but on indicating the kind of understanding that will be effective in action.

The criticism of morality, or of its moralistic ingredient, here presented must not be misunderstood to deny the more generous and ideal impulses that are often meant to be recognized under the name of morality. The criticism of "morality" here presented may be taken as analogous and related to a possible criticism of the concept of the "superego." That concept describes a misfunction of a necessary process, that of internalization, and hence the diseased aspects of a vital function, not the function itself. Similarly one can envisage an ethics that will say "folly" instead of "sin," and will substitute help for reproach. In short, it is possible to envisage an ethics without morality.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Feeling and Form; a Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key. SUSANNE K. LANGER. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953. xvi, 431 pp. \$7.00.

Feeling and Form exhibits (without demonstrating) a remarkably intimate and assured familiarity both with a wide sweep of