



Evaluating the Emotions

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suffice to answer is the very different question, What conditions are imposed by practical reason on what I may do? Davidson's premise is true: the reasons that bear on what we are to do are irreducibly multiple. And his conclusion follows from it: in human praxis generally, conflicts of reasons for acting are inescapable. But, since not all practical principles are moral principles, practical conflicts are not necessarily moral conflicts; and rationalists maintain that they never are.

The argument of this paper is simply that the rationalist position that moral obligations never collide has not been shown to be false and that the prevalent impression that it has been springs from three sources: confusion of practical conflict generally with moral conflict; overlooking the distinction between moral conflict *simpliciter* and moral conflict *secundum quid*; and neglect of the casuistical resources of the various rationalist ethical traditions. I do not contend that any rationalist theory of morality yet produced is completely acceptable either morally or logically; but I do contend both that several such theories (among which I number those of Aquinas and Kant) are, in essence, serious options for moralists, and also that, if they should prove inconsistent, their inconsistency will turn out to result from corrigible blemishes rather than from radical incoherence.

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EVALUATING THE EMOTIONS

I will be concerned here with what it is to characterize and evaluate our emotions. But in arguing for what I take a satisfactory account of this to be, I will also be concerned to challenge certain fundamental philosophical assumptions regarding evaluation as such. The assumptions I have in mind seem to be central not only to every theory of evaluation currently taken seriously, but, for most philosophers, to any possible rival we might consider as well. That is, philosophers who turn to questions of value tend, I think, to assume a certain general picture of what a philosophical theory of evaluation must be *like* if it is to be philosophically respectable.

This picture I will argue is false; it is not wrong over some detail; it is wrongheaded in orientation. In the end, I believe it rests on no more than certain philosophical prejudices, prejudices we seem unable to shake off despite our being condemned to all sorts of impasses so long as we are in their grip. Traditional conceptions of evaluation, and so our picture of how particular evaluative judgments may be justified, arise I think largely in response to a challenge that turns out to be misconceived from the start.

I

I want to approach this point by beginning with some of the models philosophers appeal to when attempting to account for the evaluation of emotions and emotional states. I use these terms precisely in order to embrace a wide range of phenomena, which extends from particular emotions felt on particular occasions to the more enduring expressions of psychological qualities that these particular emotions are often said to betoken. A natural place to begin any inquiry into the emotions is with what is surely one of the more genuine advances in modern philosophy's treatment of them, what we may call the *proposition-object* view. On this view—and it is familiar enough, I think, to need little in the way of elaboration—our emotions are said to be given by their propositional content. This content is invariably characterized by the agent's beliefs—beliefs about the agent's relation to some object on one hand, beliefs about the nature of that object on the other.¹ And only if certain kinds of belief claims about such objects are in place can we be said, logically, to have any particular emotion. Thus, to be said to feel fear, for example, the agent must believe he is in the presence or about to be in the presence of that which can harm him. To be said to feel pride, he must believe he has done or owns something worth doing or owning. Of course, people can have all sorts of false beliefs about all sorts of objects in virtue of which they take on all sorts of properties: an Inca may understandably fear a mountain held to be the home of the gods. But this sort of qualification only underscores the point: what he fears—loss of life or fortune—is an injury, and to say he is afraid of the mountain or the gods is precisely to say he believes this injury may befall him. What is important is that fear (or pride or anger and so forth) is not to be seen as constituted by some kinesthetic tremor, some logically private sensation, or by some unconstrained decision to assert some pos-

¹ See J. R. Wilson, *Emotion and Object* (New York: Cambridge, 1972); Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (New York: Humanities, 1973); Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs," in her *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1978).

ture, but, rather, by a set of claims about the world. And these claims must be of a certain *type* for him to be said to experience fear, another for him to be said to experience pride, and so forth.

Thus, roughly, the nature of our emotions. How then are they evaluated? Unsurprisingly, given the logical tie between emotion and belief, much the same way beliefs are. That is, the key terms of assessment turn out to be 'rational', 'appropriate', and the like. Your emotion is rational just in case your beliefs about its object are plausible or true, irrational if it persists when they are known to be implausible or false.

Certainly there is something right here: we often speak of people as "irrational" where this means not that they freeze up before syllogisms but that their feelings or responses persist in the face of circumstances known (either by us or by the agent) to fail to underwrite them in any convincing way. But although 'irrational' does function as a genuine term of criticism, it is not, I think, uninteresting or unimportant that its converse almost never functions as a term of praise. Very rarely do we actually call those emotions or emotional postures we find praiseworthy "rational." If we are asked to elaborate upon why we admire Cordelia or Jane Eyre, Gandhi or Oscar Wilde, for the emotions they tend to have, 'rational' is one of the last predicates it would ever occur to us to apply. Does this mean that we see such emotions as *irrational*? Hardly. But it does suggest that before those cases in which anything like a rich evaluative interest arises, the concepts of rationality or correctness cease to apply with any clear point or intelligibility. Further, it also suggests that it is other, more elusive accomplishments we attend to here. I will be in a position to say more about the second of these suggestions later; I now want to pursue the first by looking more closely at the proposition-object view.

II

The view I have called the "proposition-object view" is clearly an improvement over its Humean or Sartrean rivals, but it is also, equally clearly, quite inadequate for an important range of cases. Let us assume that the entire range of our emotional life *did* conform to the proposition-object model. There are then some extremely counterintuitive results. Our affective consciousness now becomes simply a stream of (we hope, rational) beliefs about various objects in the world. And if this were so, it is now puzzling that they vary across rational individuals in the way they do, i.e., in the way straightforward beliefs about the nature of bits of world do not, or, in what is a related point, why they could not in principle

be wholly integrated into one another. More important, problems emerge when we try to account for the way emotions excite or distress us as they do. This may seem a peculiar criticism: the proposition-object conception places a high premium on seeming to deliver just this kind of explanation: we become distressed precisely because we believe we are in danger or satisfied because we believe we have done or own something genuinely worthy. Perhaps there is no difficulty before examples like these; but what are we to say of, for example, our happiness at having been generous or our distress at having been too obsequious? Does the former amount to being pleased about having had the "correct belief" about someone else being in need, the latter to anger over our having held some false claim either about our superior's power over us or about his enjoyment of obsequious behavior? I do not think so. What we find impressive about generosity or irritating about obsequiousness cannot be the rationality—or lack thereof—in the claims these postures are said to embody; indeed, the mean-spirited or obsequious man probably holds no false beliefs at all. Rather, it must have something to do with the *way* these claims come to be acted on or instantiated. If the generous gesture "gets something right" that the mean-spirited gesture does not, this "something" cannot be a fact about the world. One is tempted to say it must, at least in part, be precisely because generosity or self-composure cannot be seen *merely* as a reflection of rational beliefs that we can begin to think of them as able to elicit the kind of attention and admiration they do. And certainly nothing could be a more everyday phenomenon than our feeling in essentially identical circumstances on one occasion generous and on another mean, where we are by no means inclined to explain this shift as a change in what we think true of our emotion's object. If that is so for these emotions, clearly no appeal to rationality or truth can hope to explain the ineradicable differences there are in the evaluations we make of them.

III

So far the argument has been only negative. But it may seem even at this extremely early stage to point toward certain familiar—and unsatisfactory—alternatives. If appeal to considerations of rationality cannot account for evaluations of emotion, at least in the sort of case described above, are we then faced with some version of emotivism? Such emotivism might be of a Sartrean kind (where each agent is an independent and logically inscrutable arbiter over which "ways" such claims become embodied as emotion are good, and which are bad) or of a Humean kind, where consensus over assessment is a contingent function of general "agreeableness."

There is of course another, initially more promising, prong to the Humean assessment of emotions, utility, and some have thought utility can succeed as a criterion where rationality failed. But it is easy to show that utility as a criterion of assessment comes to grief in just the same way rationality does. The utility of two emotional responses can be identical, or what is more likely, impossible to differentiate or measure in any meaningful way in the first place, yet the emotions unhesitatingly evaluated in quite opposite directions. Consider again obsequiousness and proper pride. It simply cannot be that their use, either to the agent or to others, differs consistently as sharply as our assessments of them do. Attempts to circumvent this result generate only wholly circular conceptions of utility or rationality to begin with, and we leave mysterious precisely what needs to be explained: why that which is in no clear way more "rational" or "useful" than its converse consistently figures so differently in our assessment. And, if assessments of emotion and emotional response cannot be said to be discoveries of rationality or utility, are we, to repeat the question before us, then left with no alternative to some variant of emotivism? This challenge, when understood in a sufficiently general way, extends I think far beyond the confines of the particular issue before us. As I see it, the task in all value theory is to accept something like the emotivist's skepticism toward the claim that judgments of value can be assimilated to questions of fact (be these facts couched in terms of rationality, utility, or what have you) without embracing anything like the emotivist conception of what evaluation *is*. Indeed, it is frequently pointed out that the consistent emotivist cannot really make sense of criticism at all, as opposed simply to "response." It is less frequently noted that a comparable point can be made against most of the rivals to emotivism as well.

Consider the two nonemotivist approaches to evaluation of emotion mentioned so far: those where rationality or utility is the criterion of assessment. I want to link these together because they are both what I will call "externalist" conceptions of value. By an *externalist conception of value* I mean a conception according to which (1) the criterion of assessment (rationality, utility) is elucidated in terms wholly independent of the context at hand (here the emotions), (2) goodness in this context is always a matter of delivering this further external good, and (3) whether or not this further good is delivered is, barring peculiar borderline cases, at some point always a matter of fact. I have already criticized these conceptions because they must, I think, always be either incomplete or empty. But I also think it is worth stressing how peculiar they are

as *projects*; that is, if either of these conceptions *were* true, how peculiar things would be for the practice of criticism. As under emotivism, we would find ourselves having to turn criticism into something other than what it is if we are to be consistent. In one case, criticism becomes a procedure in which we flesh out and "match" some factual claim against some bit of the world, discovering how well they fit. In the other, criticism becomes a procedure in which we measure some objective quality known as "utility" (whatever that is). No one, I think, would recognize in these descriptions anything like what we actually do when we undertake to produce a just assessment of say Gandhi's compassion, Lear's pride, or Wilde's bemusement, any more than we would be able to recognize criticism in the "assessment" a consistent emotivist would give. In each case, criticism, assessment, has been turned into something other than what it is. It is no wonder that in that form we find it unsatisfactory.

This raises a point about philosophical strategy. When *X* is the sort of thing we do criticize (where by this I mean that it is a natural part of our relation to *X* that we take an interest in it and that this interest is expressed in criticism), then philosophers should worry a bit over whether their account of *X* squares with the kind of criticism we normally give. If not, some rather convincing explanations of our previous deception or the legitimacy of the adjustment ought to be forthcoming. In general, before accounts of emotion at least, this worry is largely absent. What usually happens is that what is undeniably an aspect of emotional lives—e.g., that certain factual claims are made or assumed, that our affective consciousness comes into play, that emotions are sometimes means by which we gain or lose extra-emotional goods—is seized on and made to stand for what an (all) emotion *is*. The picture of criticism this description would commit us to is either ignored or swallowed whole. The result is a deep, if by now numbingly familiar, artificiality in the philosophical conceptions we employ. I want to proceed in the opposite direction. I want to take the criticism of the emotions we normally engage in as more or less fixed and attempt to make clear what I think must be the case for this practice to occur. An explanation explains nothing if it works only by violating the phenomenon it is supposed to explain.

IV

Before we proceed, however, an objection must be faced. Some will argue that I have unjustifiably shifted the ground of our inquiry. It might be said that something like generosity or obsequiousness is not really an emotion to begin with, at least not in the way fear is,

but is instead a character trait or disposition. It is certainly true that generosity and obsequiousness are character traits (though that doesn't mean that to experience them is necessarily to experience them characterologically), but it is precisely for that reason that they need to be introduced into our discussion. For it is a further feature of the proposition-object view of emotion that it leaves out or, more precisely, fails to include in the right way, what is the most important part: the person. Of course it is persons who have emotions. No one ever forgets this. But emotions are not the sort of thing, like judgments or sensations, that we take time off to make or have and then get on with the business of living. Our emotional life is deeply intertwined with our history as persons, with the tenor of our consciousness itself. This fact must be adequately mirrored. We are interested in the emotions of Bernard Shaw or Dorothea Brooke not, or not only, because we are interested in how true certain claims about certain objects are, but because we are interested in these people. That is, our emotions are in the deepest sense of the term "self-expressive," and they understandably absorb us under that heading.

Now clearly this last remark cannot stand as a claim true to all occasions of emotion. It is no way part of my thesis to deny that we have many emotions on many occasions that are in no significant sense self-expressive. Indeed, it is just here that the sort of example much loved by the proposition-object thesis springs to mind: almost everyone will respond more or less identically to the sudden appearance of a vicious dog, for example, and what response is here will be, I think, essentially what the proposition-object view says it is: the acknowledgment of certain facts that, given certain other facts of human nature, are in turn inseparable from what it is to be afraid. Here our emotions *are* furthest removed from our character, and, not coincidentally, it is also here that they may be most plausibly seen essentially as beliefs, as straightforward claims about what in fact is before us. But this is not the kind of case I am much interested in, precisely because it is not the kind of case before which much in the way of evaluative interest can arise. And as we turn to *that* kind of case, to cases where a fairly rich evaluative interest *can* arise, we also turn to the kind of case where our emotions are all but inseparable from our character. Indeed, I want to argue that we can have no adequate account of our evaluative assessment of emotion, character, or action so long as we proceed as if they could be separated from one another to any great degree.

To divide here is not to conquer but to confuse. Our characters are given by our actions and emotions. But our actions and emo-

tions often cannot be correctly described in the first place unless they are seen as characterological, as expressions of a certain character state. To say we *have* certain emotions or *perform* certain actions suggests (particularly in discussion of actions) that we are somehow separate from the emotions we go on to have or the actions we go on to perform—and again, sometimes this is so. But often it is not, and it is this case I am concerned with. Talking loudly and incessantly about oneself in the presence of others is not some logically discreet action externally related to the person who takes it up—it is insecure behavior, and by calling it that we also say it expresses something about the nature of the person whose behavior it is. And of course to say that this is a person's nature is also to say something about the feelings and attitudes this person now has. A word of caution: to give this reading: '*A* behaved insecurely', is not to be committed to saying that this is an ever-present or even stable feature of *A*. It is only to see the behavior as revealing an aspect of the person's character or personality now present or salient. In other words, it is only to insist that *A*'s behavior, *A*'s character, and *A*'s feelings enjoy an internal or logical relation to one another. It says nothing about the enduring nature of any of them. And if our actions, characters, and emotions are all logically interwoven in the narrative that is our life, it is inevitable and by no means illegitimate to focus on terms that bridge whatever wedge we might seek to introduce between feelings and qualities of character—such as generosity, obsequiousness, insecurity, loyalty, and so on—in our discussion of emotion.

v

Does their introduction advance our inquiry? Is there any clear sense in which this shift of focus, from terms like 'fear' where the emotion is understood to bear no logical relation to the person who has it, to a term like 'insecurity' where such a logical relation does hold, moves us any closer to a satisfactory account of evaluation? It might seem to, superficially. We do not ordinarily champion the virtues of insecurity or dwell on the horrors of compassion. But attempting to say why this is so only seems to reintroduce the unsatisfactory alternatives we have already seen. The "externalist" will say these things are genuinely good or bad only because they are in accord with or produce some further thing, such as rationality or utility. If we reject this route, but still wish to maintain the "inescapability" of the evaluation, we seem faced with some version of intuitionism: the goodness of compassion is "intrinsic," something we "just see," and so forth. Intuitionism is manifestly unsatisfactory if only in that it reduces us to silence precisely at the

moment we ought to be most articulate, i.e., before the question, *Why do we judge or assess as we do?*

At this stage, one imagines the adherents of a fourth view, naturalism, growing quite restless. Many philosophers have been attracted by a naturalist or Aristotelian line precisely because it seems to deliver a clear sense of evaluative objectivity in a way that does not appear to incur the difficulties of intuitionism or of what I have called "externalism."² The appeal of naturalism is understandable. But at bottom I believe naturalism commits exactly the same error as its rivals. It too turns criticism into something else. But explaining why this is so with naturalism provides us with a departure point for the view I think correct. What I shall argue for is not an alternative view so much as alternative account of what evaluation is like.

VI

In its classic form at least (cf. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*), the naturalist argument goes roughly as follows: the indisputable goodness of certain qualities follows from the kind of thing we are speaking about, where the kind of thing we have is given in turn by that thing's characteristic function or purpose. Thus, for example, accuracy is a good quality in that instrument which has as its function telling time, sharpness in that which cuts, and so on. Shifting to persons, the analogy immediately encounters some strain, in that persons are not *made* or *used* for certain purposes the way an object is, but rather *have* or *take up* various goals and ambitions. With this in mind, the naturalist then goes on to say that there is a set of such goals or ambitions that persons have—or ought to have if they are "complete"—and the qualities of character that we find good are so in virtue of their enabling us to instantiate or achieve those goals. Thus, to say that someone is mature or generous is not only both to describe and evaluate him, it is to do so in such a way that the evaluation is as objective as the description, precisely because it *is* a description—i.e., it describes the person as endowed with those qualities of character which enable him to fulfill or instantiate the characteristic excellence of persons.

But it is just this last claim that strikes such a distinctively hollow note. Nor is this an accidental weakness. It arises because the naturalist, like so many others, is trying to turn evaluation into something it is not. I will say more about this below. To return to

² See, for example, the writings of Philippa Foot, *op. cit.*; P. T. Geach, "Good and Evil," in Foot, ed., *Theories of Ethics* (New York: Oxford, 1966); and most recently, Alastair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University Press, 1981), on this point.

the specific point at hand, certainly any attempt to spell out just what this characteristic function of persons is supposed to be is likely to be met with justified derision. And this is for reasons not unconnected with the earlier point about what it is for a person to have a purpose in the first place. Persons are not artifacts fashioned for some stipulated end, and so they cannot be defined functionally. To say that persons have purposes or ends is to say they *choose* them, and to say that they are real or full persons only if they take up certain ends over others is absurd. Not only does history and our own experience provide a vast range of competing and mutually exclusive ends put forward as crucial and with it, irreconcilable differences over "what counts in life" (consider romantic love or political activity, for example, as candidates for ends "no one can be without and remain a full person"); we are, I think, deeply suspicious wherever there is any claim to the contrary. Should large numbers of people in fact agree about "the only ends appropriate to persons," we tend to feel (rightly) that this kind of consensus could be sustained only by some kind of artificial orthodoxy in the background. And whatever explains how this claim comes to be made, certainly it cannot hold up upon reflection.

VII

I believe these considerations against the teleological claim are decisive. But I want to take as my starting point what would be left of naturalism should this aspect of it be set aside. What would be left, I think, would be the following two claims: (1) certain features of persons are in fact genuinely good or bad, and so certain terms refer to genuinely good or bad qualities in persons; (2) the presence of these features is governed by criteria in fairly clear ways (which is only to say there are clear cases of correct and incorrect usage of these terms). Yet, and here I introduce a new requirement for evaluative theory: (3) such ascriptions are not either (1) objectively evaluative or (2) criteria-governed *in virtue of* their reference to some further thing, be it goodness, rationality, utility, "what one needs to instantiate the characteristic excellence of persons," or what have you. (Naturalism, a bit more subtly than other views perhaps but no less decisively, cheats on just this last point: evaluations are "rendered objective"—nailed down as real *evaluations* as it were—by being cashed out as descriptions of some further thing. As with rationality or utility, it should be no surprise that the account we have of this further thing, "the excellence of persons," is inevitably either inadequate or vacuous.) But if these qualities are not linked to some further condition or state of affairs, in what sense can they yield genuine evaluations? How can the claim that certain features

of persons are genuinely good (claim 1) be made out? On my view, this question (or the claim that (1)-(3) above are incompatible requirements) contains an enormous category mistake regarding evaluation. Traditionally, philosophers seem to have proceeded in the grip of a fork: one side argues that (a) ordinary evaluative terms are genuinely objective (b) in virtue of their being linked to some further quality, relation, entity, or state of affairs (the externalist, the naturalist, the intuitionist); the other side argues that (c) there is no such further quality or, if that is not the problem (as it is not with, e.g., rationality), then no satisfactory account of its linkage to evaluative terms can be given, and (d) *therefore* such ordinary evaluative terms cannot be genuinely objective (the emotivist). I want to "deconstruct" this long-standing fork and argue that (a) and (c) are both true, but that the twin claims that (a) can be true only because of (b) and that (c) entails (d) are false. To hold *either* ((a), (b)) or ((c), (d)) is, I will argue, to misunderstand what evaluation really is (or how evaluative language really operates) in the first place. Certainly, we find a peculiar—if by now all too familiar—combination of unsatisfactoriness and plausibility whichever of these alternative pairs we choose, and this suggests there is something seriously wrong with the very structure of the problem. Unsurprisingly, when we see how this fork may be rejected and traditional couplings pried apart, we will first be able to account for the power and inadequacy that attends each of the traditional rival theories. But this last point will occupy us later. I now want to pursue the claim that theories of evaluation, including negative or skeptical theories of evaluation such as emotivism, have all been the victim of a category mistake.

What I mean by this accusation is more or less what I take Gilbert Ryle to mean when he argues that we do not need to see mental predicates as naming things, either mental things or physical things, in order to see them as meaningful. On Ryle's view, the mental is but a way of seeing, sorting, and talking about persons, a way which persons manifestly answer to, but not because of some background mental object. Whether the analysis of mental concepts that Ryle goes on to give is correct is not my concern. (Clearly it is not.) I want to say only that evaluative language operates in just the same way. Evaluative language does not pick out a thing, not even an evaluative thing. Rather, we simply have *a way of talking about* certain things in the world, a set of interests, that the world shows itself to answer to. There are evaluative concepts, and these concepts mean *exactly* what they say they do. They do not need to be "cashed out" in some further description, some "evalu-

ative object." Indeed, any attempt in that direction only undermines the integrity these concepts have in their own right. We simply come to understand, identify, and take an interest in the things they point to. When the naturalist claims that a concept like 'insecure', provides "a description and an evaluation in one and the same breath," there is obviously *something* in this remark. The error the naturalist makes, the category mistake, lies in treating this predicate as simultaneously doing *two* things, on a logical par, as if there were two descriptions of two entities. The evaluation is seen as but another *kind* of description, the two types here, happily enough, bolted together by linguistic convention. And once this move is made, confusion and acrimony inevitably ensue. The critic then says: "but this is but a verbal trick. I can see that in calling someone insecure I am saying, descriptively, that conditions (a) (b) (c) apply. But what am I saying in this second mode, "evaluatively"? Where is this evaluative *thing* I am allegedly naming?" The naturalist (for example) regrettably rises to the bait and answers by intoning solemnly about the proper or characteristic function of persons and so forth. The critic, be he of emotivist or utilitarian stripe, sees there is no descriptive referent—we can be naming evaluatively no further "evaluative object" (at least not one that holds up under analysis)—and concludes that all there is is our personal approval or general satisfaction. The dispute, I think, is misconceived from the start. Evaluation is descriptive only in the sense that evaluative concepts are used coherently in a world we all share. When I say *A*'s behavior is "insecure," I am not doing two things, describing and evaluating, at least not in the sense that renders the question, What further state of affairs do I refer to when I use the word 'insecure' evaluatively? coherent. I am "describing and evaluating" only in the sense that I am using a concept *correctly*, or at least meaningfully, and that *this is an evaluative concept*. What then do I say when I say that *A*'s behavior is insecure? That it is irrational? That it is unpleasant? That I don't like it? That *A* fails to instantiate the characteristic excellence of persons? None of these. I am saying that it is a certain kind of weak, ignoble behavior. That's just the kind of behavior or person it is. Learning the use of critical concepts is learning their *internal* coherence. There is no thing known as goodness, however that claim is to be understood. There is just evaluative language, a form of life, in which a certain kind of interest is expressed before a world that can be intelligibly characterized in terms of those interests.

VIII

I want to elaborate this claim via a brief look at the nature of evaluative concepts in aesthetic contexts. But this is no digression. I want to argue that aesthetics can play more than a heuristic role here, for in my view there are no significant differences when we move from the logic of evaluative concepts in aesthetic contexts to what are usually called "moral" contexts. And so I believe that what are usually called "philosophers of value" ought to look more closely at the logic of aesthetic concepts than they do. (The *concepts* differ of course, and so the interest and urgency with which they are applied will differ, but that is a separate point.) Ironically, aesthetics is often characterized as a bit of a philosophical slum, and in a sense it is. There are virtually no systematic theories of aesthetic value that enjoy any currency whatsoever today. But in fact the relative independence that on-going critical assessment enjoys from philosophical theorizing of that kind is one reason why our sense of evaluation is so much less neurotic in aesthetics. Indeed, I believe we can see what evaluation really is far more clearly when we turn to aesthetics, precisely because we do not tend to carry much in the way of ideological baggage here.

Before art, if not in most moral philosophy, I am tempted to say that evaluation simply is what it is. We know what we are doing, and we simply proceed to judge. No one feels there is some further thing either missing or there but yet to be named, which we need for this enterprise to be in good order. Let me explain. Imagine more or less everyday informed critical discourse. People talk about whether works are, e.g., boring, engaging, original, expressive, sentimental, exploitive, mature, insightful, and so forth. This list is hardly exhaustive, but it will do for a start. When we say that The Queen of the Night's aria in *Der Zauberflote* is "expressive," what are we saying? My view is that we are saying that that's the *kind* of accomplishment this aria is and so it brings the kind of involvement it does. This is not to be "cashed out" in terms of some other thing, just as the mental concept of intelligence refers to a kind of behavior and not to some further unseen thing "behind" it. But if we answered this question along the lines offered by traditional moral theories, we would have: (1) there is this nonnatural property called "expressiveness" (or "beauty," or what have you) of which this is an instance, and that is why it is good; (2) it is good because it mirrors some extra-aesthetic fact correctly, such as how people do feel; (3) it is good because it has one of those qualities by which a piece of music achieves that excellence which follows from

the very concept or characteristic function of music itself; (4) finally, we like it, or it pleases us. Each of these answers is not only wrong but wrongheaded. That is, it is an error to give this *kind* of answer in the first place, for expressiveness is not some other thing in addition to being what it is. That doesn't mean there isn't some truth in each of these remarks; there is, but what these remarks get right is not what this judgment "expressive" *means*. For example, it is certainly true that in explaining this accomplishment to someone who hadn't yet grasped it, we might well draw on certain descriptions of how people might act when in a rage. But a route of elucidation is hardly identity, and it most assuredly is not the case that when we say that *X* is expressive, we mean that it is an act of correct reporting. Moving to (3), this excellence or accomplishment is indeed a musical (or aesthetic) one, and I do not see how it could be grasped apart from some understanding of music or art, but the kind of involvement it brings or attention it merits hardly follows from any "definition" of music as such. Nor could we simply be expressing approval, since our judgment is made, correctly, in virtue of the sort of piece it is, though the *point* of this judgment is clearly bound up with the kind of engagement such things bring. Similarly for the judgments: 'original', 'perceptive', 'mature', and so forth. We come through experience to learn how to use these concepts skillfully, and this goes hand in hand with coming to learn the point of doing so, but only a philistine thinks that in using these concepts before art he either must be naming some further descriptive relation or phenomenon or else is talking nonsense. These just are the kinds of things that may be true of art. They are not simply "grasped" or "intuited"—in the usual case we can say why we find *X* sentimental or *Y* original. We can correct their use against appropriate criteria or paradigms. But these concepts are not identical with any particular explanatory route either. A piece of music may be deeply expressive because it is in a minor key, but 'expressive' hardly *means* "being in a minor key." And we may feel that certain works in having these qualities embody paradigms of these genres—just as certain people in virtue of possessing certain qualities may seem to embody paradigm expressions of what a person may be—but the nature of this excellence does not *follow from* some definition. Beethoven's greatness does not follow from the definition of music any more than Socrates' follows from the definition of persons, though both may indeed seem in moments of uncritical enthusiasm to merit being called "what music really is" or "what a person really is." As these examples suggest, I think this is exactly what holds for persons and their emotions as

well. We are mature, perceptive, kind, generous, neurotic, self-absorbed, limited, expansive, dogmatic, and so forth, where these are simply the kinds of things we are. The traditional views each get something right that is very important, but each errs in claiming that evaluative language is not rendered either clear or objective until it refers to some further background description:

(1) The naturalist is right to see evaluative concepts as logically tied to what they are applied to. These concepts point to accomplishments or failures of *persons*, and understanding the kind of accomplishment or failure we have, why we take an interest in it, must go hand in hand with some grasp of what persons are. The naturalist goes wrong in thinking that only a definitional or functionalist link will render these evaluations coherent or objective, and so he posits the requisite background philosophical fictions which are said to anchor the use and point of these concepts.

(2) The view I have called "externalist" is right insofar as the application of evaluative concepts may sometimes be linked to that which may be elucidated independently of the context at hand (e.g., rationality, utility), and so we may, in giving an account of these concepts or of their use in a particular case, draw upon such connections. But the externalist goes wrong in thinking that for the use of these evaluative concepts to be coherent or objective, they must be cashed out in terms of these further states or relations, and so the account of these states or relations we have is invariably vacuous, gerrymandered as it is to conform to a wide range of evaluative judgments which are perfectly in order on their own.

(3) The intuitionist is right to resist any substitute for these evaluative concepts. There is none. But the intuitionist is as gripped by a certain model of what counts as objectivity as the rest, and this, plus the first thesis, forces him into a terrible corner. Like the externalist and the naturalist, the intuitionist agrees that evaluative terms must refer to *some* further state of affairs, and so there is no alternative but for these terms to become Platonized, rendering their relation to criteria and their point of application wholly obscure.

(4) The emotivist is right to see all these strategies as unsatisfactory, or: (c) is true. But he too accepts this model of evaluative objectivity as entirely correct, or, if you will, as giving us the only possible account of what evaluative objectivity can be. Thus our failure to produce an account in compliance with it must leave us with nothing but "mere assertion." But this background model is wholly artificial. Strategies that arise in response to it address a task that is misconceived to begin with. Once the (a,b) or (c,d) fork

is rejected, the truth of (c) no longer requires a purely emotivist analysis of evaluative concepts before persons any more than before art.

IX

Our evaluative concepts when applied to persons or emotions make clear then the kind of person or emotion pointed to. To say that someone has, e.g., *generous* emotions is simply to tell us the kind of emotion he or she has. If someone asks, But what makes generous emotions good?, I want to know just what he is asking for. I can *elucidate* the concept; I can spell out the kind of accomplishment generosity is, and it may well be that I draw on all kinds of descriptions in doing so, for example, the degree to which the person is responsive to another's plight, the absence of manipulation or self-serving ambitions in the offered gesture, the tact or maturity here displayed, and so forth. This is a kind of impressiveness or excellence, no doubt of that. But it is not so in virtue of its embodying true beliefs, promoting more benefit than its converse, or instantiating what a person is. Its impressiveness doesn't *follow from* anything in addition to the description I just gave.

The identical point holds for, e.g., insecurity. I can spell out the nature of the criticism; I can speak of the unfortunate narcissism, the lack of any clear sense of self, the absence of integrity in his or her opinions, and so on, and understanding the concept involves understanding these things. But there is no further fact this person gets wrong. Nor does *this* mean that my criticism does no more than vent a general sense of disliking. Again, it means simply that there is this kind of failure or, in the case of generosity, this kind of accomplishment, in a person, just as 'original' or 'overdone' means there is this kind of accomplishment or this kind of failure before art.

Now, a much discussed problem before these concepts, and so with any view that stresses their centrality, is their alleged "relativity." Certainly some version of pluralism must be true if only in the sense mentioned earlier à propos the failure of the teleologist to give a convincing account of some one characteristic excellence of persons. Indeed, there are many kinds of accomplishments and many kinds of failures. And in some cases, we may well debate, before persons as with art, whether such and such is to be seen as one or the other. But this is not a problem for *philosophy*. These disputes, exactly as they are, are *already* meaningful. They are not *either* meaningful-only-if-we-can-find-some-one-thing-they-are-about or "meaningless." And to say they are meaningful debates, in perfectly good order, is not to say that they can or must be settled. Philosophers have often spoken as

if that was exactly what a meaningful or coherent debate must be; but again, to say this is to be in the grip of an artificial picture of criticism. Debates, for example, about whether it is better to overlook small insults, to be generous, or better to assert oneself in return and risk being a bit rude are not debates about which course of action is more rational or more useful. They are debates in which the pitfalls and accomplishments of each way of living are elucidated and compared. But the comparison here between *a*, *b*, and *c*, on one hand, and *d*, *e*, and *f*, on the other, does not need some third thing—pleasure, rationality, the definition of man, or what have you—to occur. We simply go back and forth, supporting our view by subjecting both strategies to critical scrutiny.

And with persons as with art, we can distinguish intelligent criticism from whimsy. Not anything can be intelligibly termed an accomplishment in the first place. No description of the sow's ear of blatant insecurity turns it into the silk purse of integrity. And I see no reason why it should be termed a "problem" that we may quite comprehensibly come to value some accomplishments over others, that our priorities may shift as a function of our own maturity or where we are in history and so on. For certain accomplishments just will understandably come to matter more than others as our sense of what is most urgent shifts, and this sense in turn is understandably influenced by the forms of social and personal life available to us. For example, ours is an era characterized by a certain kind of impersonal, fragmented politics and a deeply manipulative and unsatisfying popular culture on one hand, by enormous self-consciousness and stress on intimate relations on the other. Compare this to Victorian Britain. Is it any wonder that unflinching loyalty to a social code will be seen as a far more worthy accomplishment in the second context, a sense of irony and mature romantic passion a more worthy one in the first? As with art, persons have a history, and in part because of this history, certain postures emerge as impressive, others as dangers to be avoided. But it is no accident that we do not have to reinvent our evaluative vocabulary anew with every generation. The accomplishments of sensibilities different from ours remain recognizable as accomplishments. And that means they remain recognizably human, examples of persons embodying a certain impressiveness, the nature of which we can elucidate. I have tried to argue here only that we must, in understanding this phenomenon, apply to persons something most of us have long known before art: this impressiveness takes many forms and so is usefully captured under many evaluative concepts, but never is it anything in addition to what that concept says it is. We

must resist the insidious temptation to believe that we have not in fact explained evaluation until we have turned it into something else. Just the opposite is the case. We understand evaluation when we show ourselves able to *use* and *defend* evaluative concepts. I have tried to argue that this is of a very different order—that it *must* be of a very different order—from *translating* them into some other thing.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Moral Relativism. PHILIPPA FOOT. The Lindley Lecture. Lawrence: The University of Kansas, 1978. 19 p. \$1.50.

Virtues and Vices, and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy. PHILIPPA FOOT. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. xiv, 207 p. Cloth \$22.95, paper \$5.95.

Virtues and Vices collects Philippa Foot's papers from two decades to 1978. Though only two of these essays are entirely new, Foot has revised one other for publication here and fitted out still others with significant new notes and afterwords. It is a great advantage, moreover, to have even the already familiar pieces together where one can easily read through them in sequence, noting changes in emphasis and doctrine, noting also some recurrent difficulties and the occasional loose end. Two themes to which Foot herself calls attention are her opposition to noncognitivism and "the thought that a sound moral philosophy should start from a theory of the virtues and vices" (xi); another likely to strike the reader is her persistent worry that morality, if not fraudulent in the way noncognitivism alleges, may nevertheless be surrounded by deep fictions about both the authority and the objectivity of its judgments. Her eventual, controversial conclusions about the authority of morality, about whether and how moral considerations provide reasons for acting, are spelled out in several related papers here (148-188). For her latest published views on objectivity and moral knowledge, however, one has to look at her Lindley Lecture, *Moral Relativism*, which I shall also take into account.* To keep this review within

* Page references prefaced by "MR" are to this essay. (Unprefaced page references are to *Virtues and Vices*.)