

MORAL STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

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PREFACE

There is a problem of liberal education today precisely because there is a problem of morality. What is characteristic of modern civilization is not that there is already established an adequate set of moral standards in conformity to which, because of some mysterious depravity of human nature, man is not living. Quite the contrary, modern man, except when he withdraws completely from the world, is attempting to live by several conflicting types of standards.

Modern man lives in a world in which there is almost no area of settled and secure moral knowledge. All institutions are in a process of transition and new social patterns are continuously vying with entrenched arrangements. Groups and individuals no longer know their "place" in society. The modern man does not, as his grandfather did, know what are the right and true relations between national states, between employers and employees, between husband and wife and parent and child, and between private control of the means of economic production and the publics which are affected by its activity or inactivity.

How does modern man achieve direction and guidance in the pursuit of his conflicting interests and concerns? What standard does he use to measure the moral worth of his goals and purposes? How does he go about judging the worth of a new proposal and upon what basis or bases does his criticism of existing conditions and institutions rest? In this respect modern man is not one person but many, for within his behavior there are operative several antagonistic ways of determining what purposes and interests should have his allegiance.

Basically the conflict of modern moral standards is between some form of the notion that moral knowledge already exists and its authority is absolute and the emergent notion that moral knowledge is made up on the basis of the requirements of living together in an experimental manner. The former includes almost the whole moral tradition of the Western world and is essentially authoritarian in its primary assumptions. The latter represents the emergent morality of democracy and rather than measuring behavior by an eternal or occult standard, it looks to the consequences of social action for a clue to its moral or social worth.

A study of how contemporary moral conflict arose has its proper beginning in primitive culture, for it is in primitive culture that the integral connection between morality, education, and the purposes of life is seen most clearly, and further, it was in the breaking up of primitive life that man had first to reflect and try to intellectualize the basis of morality.

Primitive man had no problem of education for he had no problem of morality. The moral standard was conformity. Conformity to what? To the whole static way of life of the group. The primitive child had one choice and that was to become a member of the group. Since conformity was the only avenue to participation, to self-development, the educational problem was simply that of using the self-evident pattern of custom for the purpose of moulding the capacities and energies of the child into a predetermined product, namely, a skillful, competent member of the group. The birth of a baby was no occasion for speculation upon the question of what should be "made" of him, for there was only one alternative, and that one was so obvious that no one bothered to wonder why it

was good. Among the Crow Indians of the Western Plains, the baby became a Crow, and this had definite meaning. Among the Ubangis of the Belgian Congo the child could look forward to an education with a moral standard "built in," i.e. conformity in every way to the customary activities, attitudes, and technological skills which all the adult Ubangis had taken on as a matter of course in their becoming full members. Conformity at once protected the community of interests and provided the opportunity for participation.

To ask a member of a primitive group "why" he behaved as he did in conformity to customary standards, or "what" made his way of life right would have been to ask an unintelligible question. Primitive man had neither the occasion nor the psychological and sociological insight required to give rational explanation. Such questions, insofar as they would have been understood at all, evoke answers involving reference to "ancestors," the "way of things" or in cases where a god was given the credit for inventing the way of life of the folk, the reference was to the god of the people.

But what is implicit in the primitive moral standard of conformity to custom? There is a community of interests, a range of common purposes, participation in which is equivalent to a full and rich life. Thus, primitive education, vital to the protection and perpetuation of the group no less than to the individual, has participation as its aim and justification. But it would be a strange thing to hear a primitive man say: "the purpose of conformity is to insure the fullest possible participation of all members in the way of life so that each may realize his optimum self-development."

The question arises, why did not primitive man retain his simple and adequate moral standard of conformity to the way of things? The answer is that conditions changed, and the way of things became modified. It is under such circumstances that conflicts of interest arise between those who identify their energies and interests with the maintenance of the old way of things and those who seek to gain status and recognition of new interests. Thus there arises conflicts within the culture pattern.

An example illustrative of this type of conflict is the contemporary one between the custom of religious freedom on the one hand and the protection of human life on the other, growing out of practices in certain religious cults of using poisonous snakes as part of the paraphernalia of worship. Or again, the conflict between the tradition of laissez faire in industrial and business administration and the desire to take away the power of corporations to exercise authoritarian control in social life; perhaps the history of railroad legislation illustrates this best. Another contemporary conflict of standards concerns mercy killing. The conflict here is between the concept of a mysterious soul and the traditional theological commandments concerning its disposition on the one hand, and the humane notion that when one becomes completely useless to himself and to his fellows and continued existence is equivalent to brutal and hopeless suffering, the administration of a permanent sedative is in order.

When custom no longer provides a self-evident avenue to self-development and when other alternatives for activity present themselves, conflicts of interests manifest themselves in the "bosom" of the individual as well as between groups and individuals. It is at this point that the

moral problem emerges. It is also at this point that the problem of liberal education arises. For if the function of liberal education is (1) to bring the youth into the community through participation, and at the same time (2) to provide youth with a method of making moral judgments, then the connection between education and the conflict of moral standards is obvious.

When custom no longer supplies a standard by which internal cultural conflict may be resolved, how must conflict be dealt with? The extreme Sophists of Ancient Greece, not clearly understanding the fallacy of setting the individual in opposition to society, established individual impulse as the standard for right and wrong. Plato, repudiating both individual impulse and custom as final authority maintained that moral authority is "built in" the universe in the form of a transcendental Mind and that a superior intellect may attain absolute moral knowledge by communication directly with this Mind.

Plato's external cosmic authority was incorporated in the early Christian movement and has served as the moral formula down to the present time.

Today the Christian theological moral method of appeal to external authority, however, is in direct opposition to what is known as secular or pragmatic morality. The latter moral method has its origin in the democratic notion that the purpose of morality is to expedite the process of living together. Therefore, when conflicts arise within the area of social living, the function of morality is to reconstitute a community of interests. With science and technology introducing new conditions in social life at all times with the resultant creation of new interests which

conflict with old interests, morality becomes whatever is necessary to provide the continuous widening of the area of shared interests. Thus morality has its origin and justification in the degree to which it promotes a way of life the conscious aim of which is to provide the conditions for the greatest possible development of the capacities and interests of individuals.

The contemporary confusion in education resulting from the conflict in the social heritage of authoritarian or pre-democratic moral standards and secular, democratic standards is pointed up in the movement to introduce religious education in the public schools. Traditionally the American arrangement has been the subordination of the church to the state. In accordance with this separation or subordination, the office of the churches has been to provide the opportunity for the individual to participate in a religious activity of his own choosing. The office of the state and other secular associations has been to provide organization for the resolution of conflict and to plan for common purposes and aims. Thus within the area of common concerns, the American tradition has been to rely upon cooperative inquiry in maintaining a common way of life. The matter of religion, in view of the wide differences in practice and belief, has been left to the area of private interests.

Although the American democratic tradition has developed side by side with authoritarian moral traditions, this conflict has never been intellectualized to any great extent. If the traditional separation of church and state is to be maintained, however, this conflict must be made clear. When made clear, the choice which modern man must make is whether he will appeal to the secular moral procedure or to authoritarian procedures.

With reference to education the choice made makes all the difference in the world. If in the present day confusion education decides to take the road leading to the past and its pre-democratic morality, it only remains to decide which dogma or creed is to provide the pattern. Indoctrination of the young in accordance with the selected dogma becomes the primary aim of education.

On the other hand if the school undertakes to protect and expand the democratic tradition, the primary aim of education becomes the clarifying of the moral issue, and the intellectualization of the social basis for morality. Thus each student, to have a liberal education, must have the opportunity to see clearly the social consequences of these two types of morality. In education, in whatever study or subject, no opportunity must be overlooked in the effort to assist the youth of today in straightening out his beliefs and deciding which road to moral truth he will take.

If the school accepts democracy as its philosophy, certain consequences follow. First, the school must be organized for the purpose of providing the opportunity for all youth to learn to participate on their capacity and interest level, in the community. Participation in a democracy implies the need for skills and attitudes which enable one to habitually contribute his utmost to the interests and concerns of his fellows and in so doing to gain the widest and deepest possible self-development. This abrogates the possibility of "teaching" democracy by precept. The school itself must be reorganized so that it becomes a democratic community in miniature.

Second, the major emphasis in education must be social conflict or social problems. But the intellectual analysis of social problems alone may be nothing more than a spectator-like exercise, or viewing superficially

the contemporary scene. What is indispensable here is constant reference to the conflict of standards. The intellectualization of the conflict of standards is the principal aim of education.

Finally, it must be recognized in education that the basic problem in education is the problem of morality. In our times the problem of morality, far from being one of conformity or non-conformity, is one of making the final decision as to which moral attitude or standard shall have the right of way in conflicts of social interests, the authoritarian standard, which is exemplified in orthodox Christian theology and notions of the law of nature, or the democratic, experimental standard.

What then becomes of the dualism of culture vs. vocation? Participation in a free culture requires the intelligent pursuit of one or more occupational interests. This is required in order to both supply the material basis of life and to provide for individual self-development. Therefore, education includes vocational, or occupational orientation from the social point of view. Not only has science as applied to technology placed almost all vocations upon a basis of intelligence and scientific method as against routine, rule-of-thumb apprenticeship, but it has become necessary that each participant in a vocation be intelligent as to the social bearing of his work and the work of his profession. In large measure it is as an agriculturist, a professor or teacher, a doctor, an engineer, a mariner, or as a forester that one is a citizen, for it is in these activities that his behavior has the most far-reaching social consequences. Thus vocational education must be framed with the conflict of standards as the basic reference point.

That tradition in education which provides a curriculum of the

"higher things" for the privileged youth or dilettante destined for a life of preferred social status or leisure, and which provides a dehumanized or desocialized apprenticeship or narrow technical training for those unable to or unwilling to take the "higher road" must be repudiated and education reorganized accordingly. Rather than promoting the continuous extension of common interests and concerns among men, this dualism is in practice perpetuating social stratification and has the effect of thwarting participation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The chief characteristic of the modern world, and especially the American world, is the conflict of moral standards. Ideas and institutions only a few decades ago considered ultimate and complete, at the very pinnacle of the evolutionary process, are now empty shells and the loci of deepseated conflict. In addition to the dislocation and disintegration of old culture patterns in the presence of social and technological revolution, an altogether new type of moral standard has emerged to vie for men's allegiance as against traditional formulae for standards. This, the habit of looking to the social consequences of behavior for a clue to its moral worth, has grown up side by side with established moral procedures. However, it has not been intellectualized, nor has its implications for a way of life been seen by many. The result is a sense of drift in conflict, and the absence of a unified sense of direction. Men use in their daily lives the whole range of possible standards, including custom, transcendental standards, and purely social standards.

There also is a problem of liberal education, and this is no mere coincidence. If the purpose of education is to (a) bring the youth into membership in the community, and (b) at the same time to provide youth with a method for making moral judgments, then the problem of liberal education follows the conflict of standards as the night the day.

While there is widespread agreement that the problem of education today is a moral problem, paths leading away from this juncture to plans and solutions diverge. Those who accept the formula of dualism find the

task to be simple because their search takes them out of this complex, confused contemporary world; it takes them out of the place where the problem really is and transports them into an ideal world where there is no conflict, no confusion, no demand that morality be utilitarian. Probably the most outspoken member of this camp has been Robert M. Hutchins. For Hutchins the problem of education is to withdraw from the contemporary scene, select those youths who are "educable," exercise the highest faculty of their souls, the intellect, and to leave the moral problem to take care of itself. As in the case of Aristotle, the function of education is to develop the intellect, the rational nature of man. Morality is not an aim in liberal education, for a polished intellect makes valid moral judgments under its own power. The only road to truth is through the exercise of a sharpened intellect in the process which might as well be termed "immediate insight" as any other.

Hutchins says; "Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same."¹ Education is the cultivation of the intellect, and

cultivation of the intellect is the same good for all men in all societies. It is, moreover, the good for which all other goods are only means. Material prosperity, peace and civil order, justice and the moral virtues are means to the cultivation of the intellect.²

After listing the various "faculties" of the mind, Hutchins says, "An intellect properly disciplined, an intellect properly habituated, is

¹Robert M. Hutchins, The Higher Learning in America, p. 66.

²Ibid., p. 67.

an intellect able to operate well in all fields." What is the specific content which must be utilized in implementing this formal discipline? The subject matter is a list of literary classics and these are permanent and eternal because they are "contemporary in every age." The purpose of this curriculum is "purely intellectual," whatever this is meant to signify.

Certainly four years is none too long for this experience. It is an experience which will, as I have said, serve as preparation for advanced study and as general education designed to help the student understand the world. It will develop habits of reading and standards of taste and criticism that will enable the adult, after his formal education is over, to think intelligently about the thought and movements of contemporary life. It will help him to share in the intellectual activity of his time.³

Thus Hutchins, ignoring the present conflict of standards, takes for granted an everlasting standard which he does not make explicit. Education for Hutchins has as its function the preparation of the youth to "look at" the world as a spectator would "look at" a baseball game. The rules already exist, it only remains to find them, and apply them.

All those general education schemes emerging from the contemporary confusion in education which find their solution in a "common body of subject matter" stem from this type of theory. For instance, the Report of the Harvard Committee, in looking to heritage for a clue to an adequate general education, states, "and certainly this impulse to mold students to a pattern sanctioned by the past can, in one form or another, never be absent from education,"⁴ and "it is certain that, like religious

³Ibid., p. 78.

⁴Report of the Harvard Committee on the Objectives of General Education in a Free Society, p. 44.

education, education in the great books is essentially an introduction of students to their heritage."⁵ The conception of democracy which the Harvard Report takes for granted makes necessary indoctrination. "To the degree that the implications of democracy are drawn forth and expounded, to that degree the long-standing impulse of education toward shaping students to a received ideal is still pursued."⁶

The remedy which the Harvard Report recommends for the present confusion in moral and social matters is to inculcate the idea of the dignity and responsibility of man by perpetuating the basic common beliefs of our culture, i.e. religion, the classics, and the tenets of democracy. The religion is the Hebrew-Christian religion, the classics are the so-called "revelations of the Western mind," and the democracy is the eighteenth century conception of inalienable rights. This body of tradition it must be the purpose of general education to inherit, adapt, and pass on. The fact that these elements in the cultural heritage are in conflict is ignored and the implication is that heritage supplies an everlasting standard within itself. The only problem is how to inculcate these conflicting standards in the young.

An analogous position is that of contemporary Christian philosophy. It likewise denies a conflict of standards by assuming a preestablished pattern.

From the Christian theological world view, the characteristic of the cosmos which most forcibly strikes him is the dependent nature of man. He has not within himself the answer to how and why he happens to be in the world in which he finds himself.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Therefore, the reason must be outside himself. He must be dependent or contingent upon the fiat of someone else. This someone else is an omniscient, omnipresent, personal god. God being the origin of man, it is to the maker of man that one must go to learn what he was made for, what his destiny is. Given such a supernatural framework, the pattern of the educative process becomes clear.⁷

In this alternative if education will see to it that more and more people will "get right" with God, the moral problem will automatically cease to exist. Just what the pattern is, just whose rendition of the everlasting is the right one is not clear. One thing is certain, actual moral decisions are left to make themselves and the result is that chance and accident take the place of an intelligent standard.

A way out of the contemporary conflict of moral standards is implicit in the democratic tradition, although it is not explicitly formulated. The great eighteenth century liberation of new forces and interests in the Western world was formulated in a contradiction. Thus early democracy, in theory and practice, sought a richer life for the individual, the abolition of privilege and artificial social status, freedom and equality of opportunity for all on the one hand, while moral standards were to secure their justification from the Law of Nature and God on the other. Rights were made "self-evident" and "inalienable" on the one hand, but the road was opened for alteration of these very same rights in the interests of community living on the other, through freedom of press and assembly and other safeguards. That human purposes and desires change, and that therefore morality must be geared to these Jefferson recognized in his reference to the necessity of each generation, by revolution if

⁷National Society for the Study of Education, Philosophies of Education, Forty-first Yearbook, Part I, p. 297.

necessary, to remake its social world.

The Founding Fathers recognized further that there can be a legitimate conflict of interests and their work manifests this realization.

As Bode says,

Instead of government by remote control, they demanded government 'with the consent of the governed,' which would automatically be a different kind of government. The reason for this demand was twofold: (a) to provide a hearing for all interests concerned in any proposed legislation, and (b) to secure legislation which would seek to harmonize or reconcile conflicting interests as far as possible in a common program.⁸

The meaning of this is that authority was held to be, with reference to the conflict of interests, implicit within the area of conflict.

Bode says further,

Implied in all this was the big idea that an ideal community is a community which makes the continuous extension of common interests and purposes its guiding principle and its test for progress. In such a community freedom and equality become identified with participation in maintaining and promoting a type of common life in which unity of purpose and diversity of interests and capacities go hand in hand. E Pluribus Unum.⁹

The separation of church and state, or the subordination of the church to the state in moral matters, implied further the belief that within the area of a common democratic life, standards are made up in the ordinary course of events, the Word of God to the contrary notwithstanding. Yet outside the area of common interests, the authoritarian moral formula, as exemplified in Christian theology and the theory of natural law, existed and continues to exist side by side with democratic standards.

⁸Boyd H. Bode, "Democracy in A Modern Age," The Educational Forum, XV (January, 1951), 141-44.

⁹Ibid., p. 147.

The average American led a double life, without being clearly aware that he was doing so. But this can not go on indefinitely. We need to know which standard to invoke in cases of conflict. One or the other of these standards must have final authority when it comes to a showdown.¹⁰

In making clear the basic moral issue of our times, it is not enough in the case of democracy to recount a heirarchy of rules or principles, for such would only be setting forth the letter of historical democracy and not its spirit, and this would be futile.

It must be made entirely clear that democracy has its own distinctive standard, which has nothing to do with creeds or dogmas, but is guided solely by the requirements of associated living. Democracy places exclusive reliance on empirical methods for determining standards, which is just another way of saying that democracy is a name, not for a set of political arrangements, but for a whole way of life. If we are to remain--or to become-- a democratic people, we must go all the way. The only alternative is to return to a past we thought we had left behind.¹¹

To "go all the way" is another way of saying that moral standards must be considered as experimental tools used to secure an associated life in which the maximum development of the interests and capacities of the individual is insured through participation in a common life. This common life must be one in which the standard for morality is the extent to which it promotes the continuous extension of common interests and purposes among men. Thus morality becomes completely scientific in procedure and a rich life on this earth becomes the purpose which must serve.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the conflict of standards by tracing out the origins of the present conflict and to set forth the

¹⁰Ibid., p. 144.

¹¹Ibid.

thesis that the way out of contemporary moral confusion, thus educational confusion, is the widespread intellectualization of the democratic, the experimental, conception of morality.

CHAPTER II

PRIMITIVE EDUCATION AND MORAL STANDARDS

Introduction

The absence of a problem of moral standards in primitive culture accounts for the absence of an educational problem. For the individual in primitive culture the key to participation, and thus self-development, lies in conformity to the fixed culture pattern. For the primitive child there is no avenue to human status except the progressive adaptation of his energies and capacities to the prevailing pattern of custom and practice which occupy the time and energies of the adult members of the group.

Morality in Primitive Culture

Dewey has stated concisely the moral problem in primitive society, and in doing so indicates why there is no general problem of moral education. Moral knowledge for the primitive group already exists; it is preestablished and sanctioned by the prestige of usage, the elders, and the ancestral gods.

When social life is stable, when custom rules, the problems of morals have to do with the adjustments which individuals make to the institutions in which they live, rather than with the moral quality of the institutions themselves. Men take their social relations for granted; they are what they are and, in being that, are what they should be. If anything is wrong it is due to the failure of individuals to do what social customs tell them to do.¹

Group morality, its origins in most cases long forgotten, is a fixed pattern of habit and custom including every phase of group life such as

¹John Dewey and James H. Tufts, Ethics, (Revised), p. 347.

government, family arrangements, crime and punishment, sex and religious activities. Custom is at once the origin and justification of the way of life of the group, and this way of life, considered as an integrated whole, is the center of religious feeling.

The old men, or the priests, or medicine men, or chiefs, or old women, may be the especial guardians of these customs. They modify details, or add new customs, or invent explanations for old ones. But the authority back of them is the group in the full sense. Not the group composed merely of visible and living members, but the larger group which includes the dead, and the kindred totemic or ancestral gods. Nor is it the group considered as a collection of individual persons. It is rather in a vague way the whole mental and social world. Regard for such a group becomes akin to religious reverence. The fact that most of the customs have no known date or origin makes them seem a part of the nature of things.²

The methods of securing in the young the growth of strict conformity to the almost absolute webwork of custom and habit are public approval, taboo, ritual, ceremony, physical force, and most important of all, the tendency of the young to participate directly and vicariously in the adult activities through imitation, play and useful work. These are the primitive educational system and children and adults alike are never unaware of these sanctions, nor do these ever cease to be the determining factors in the pattern by which the individual is directed in moments of doubt. The part of the individual is not to question the culture pattern, but merely to live by it.

The forces which make for rigid conformity to the customary pattern on the part of the child rule from the cradle to the grave. Nothing else could well be expected. Primitive man, with art and science developed just sufficiently to provide the minimum material and social requirements

²Ibid., p. 46.

for associated living, lived in fear of the contingencies of such a precarious existence. Accident, sickness, starvation, catastrophe, the fear of being separated or ostracized from the group without which he could have no social life at all, these unpredictables made for a merciless insistence upon the usual, the habitual, the customary. For primitive man, what was done once was done for all time. For those youths or adults who would attempt to peer into the meaning or rationale behind the established and authoritative, failure was the result. For instance, among the Bechuna,

as things were in the days of long ago, so they are today, so they must remain. That which is gone has gone. The wicked one is he who tries to get behind them. A man must do as his forebears did, speak as they spoke, and speak whatever it may be, even though it may be very wrong. Nor must any question be asked of the elders or any things new and strange said to them which might reveal their ignorance. To do so is Tshita--that is, to ask about or speak something too great for the younger generations. Things remain; they don't pass away; they don't change. As the parents found them, so will the children strike against them. As the saying is.... 'The unconquerable things have been ever since the beginning.'³

This attitude not only applies to social arrangements, or moral knowledge, it applies to all matters, including natural phenomena. For example, the Kafir children,

grow very puzzled when they see the moon in the daytime and run to ask their parents why it is visible. The only reply they receive is that the moon is in the sky because it is its duty to be there. This explanation is final and satisfying...., for they all say in resigned fashion, What is the use of puzzling about such things? The trees will grow as well without my troubling about the way they grow.⁴

³Nathan Miller, The Child in Primitive Society, p. 253.

⁴Ibid., p. 132.

Custom itself, however, even in a homogeneous, small group needs to be reenforced in order to secure its optimum effectiveness. Thus the adjustment of internal conflict and constraint of deviating members of the group, the occasions of crisis or danger to the whole group, and the education of the young all require the application of deliberate methods and techniques which are likewise customary. A brief survey of these conditions which require deliberate reenforcement of custom, with illustrations will make clear what is meant by the "rule of custom" in primitive culture.

Adjustment of Internal Conflict and Control of Social Deviates

Among the Crow Indians of the Western plains a firmly established method of resolving the conflict of personal interests was developed. The parties to conflict knew in advance, and were by habit willing to abide by, the tribal method. For example, "If two men become enraged, a pipe is thrust between them; to disobey this command to desist meant instant death..."⁵

There is generally at least one person in any primitive culture who tends to deviate in attitude or activity from the received way of things. Benedict found one such among the Dobuans. Since Dobuan virtues are almost the exact opposite of those which one would ordinarily term friendly and cooperative,

The individual in Dobu who was thoroughly disoriented was the man who was naturally friendly and found activity an end in itself. He was a pleasant fellow who did not seek to overthrow his fellows or to punish them. He worked for anyone who asked him, and he was tireless in carrying out their commands. He

⁵George P. Murdock, Our Primitive Contemporaries, p. 286.

was not filled with a terror of the dark like his fellows, and he did not, as they did, utterly inhibit simple public responses of friendliness toward women closely related, like a wife or a sister. He often patted them playfully in public. In any other Dobuan this was scandalous behavior, but in him it was regarded merely silly. The village treated him in a kindly enough fashion, not taking advantage of him or making a sport of ridiculing him, but he was definitely regarded as one who was outside the game.⁶

The force of public disapproval upon one who violates a custom or folkway is illustrated by the custom of the Crows.

Ridicule serves as a powerful regulative weapon, for no punishment is more real or severe to a Crow than to be made the laughing stock of his people. Derisive songs are sung in public at the expense of the perpetrator of injustice. A man who has violated a tribal custom becomes the butt of jokes and jeers... They may even cut off a lock of his hair--a terrible humiliation, which many would rather die than suffer.⁷

Custom and Group Crisis

Dewey and Tufts⁸ list the following typical occasions when special attention is required to reenforce custom and to preserve the values of the group; (1) birth, marriage, death; (2) seed time and harvest, or other seasons important for the maintenance of the group; (3) war; (4) hospitality. What is important here is that the whole group is vitally concerned. These are occasions for deliberate exercise and application of custom, and the result is a reenforcement of the meaning and force of custom.

⁶Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture, p. 239.

⁷Murdock, op. cit., p. 286.

⁸Dewey and Tufts, op. cit., p. 57.

Education and Custom in Primitive Culture

By far the most important phase of primitive culture for purposes of understanding the moral problem upon this level is that of bringing the young into full membership in the group. A notable characteristic of custom-ruled primitive culture is that children are not considered human beings in the full sense of the term. The "group" means the adult members who participate fully in the common life. The explanation is not difficult to find. An existence based upon an undeveloped technology, and upon habit and verbal tradition is precarious at the best, therefore, only adult, fully qualified individuals must be trusted with the cultural technology and then only after the elders have been convinced that the individuals are "prepared." Thus, in most primitive cultures, the immature are considered something less than real, less than human. The result is that very careful attention is given to the process of making of full members.

The child is considered a small, weak animal who must be moulded according to adult standards and practices. The child does not "belong." "The Winnebago Indian does not doubt for a moment that the early years of his life are identical with an unconscious condition occurring in mature life; that is to say, utterly futile, like sleep."⁹ Or, "to the West Australian, the uncircumcized (i.e. immature) boy is 'all the same dog or other animal.'¹⁰

After a brief early childhood of indoctrination and moulding by

⁹Miller, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁰Ibid.

imitation and vicarious participation in the adult life, the time comes to make the young full members. This induction is the primitive counterpart of the Ancient Greek induction of the freeman's son into the common life of the polis. Careful preparation and instruction precedes the induction. The adult members, led by the tribal elders, arrange an elaborate and vivid curriculum for the purpose of dramatizing the customary way of life and to insure the competence and responsibility of the new members. As Dewey says, the initiations are held,

for the purpose of inducting boys into the privileges of manhood and into the full life of the group. They are calculated at every step to impress upon the initiate his own ignorance and helplessness in contrast with the wisdom and power of the group; and as the mystery with which they are conducted imposes reverence for the elders and the authorities of the group, so the recital of the traditions and performances of the tribe, the long series of ritual acts, common participation in the mystic dance and song and decoration, serve to reenforce the ties that bind the tribe.¹¹

The initiation ceremonies mark the passage of the youth from social insignificance to membership. When an individual chooses not to become an adult or when he does not qualify, he is "out of the game." Thus,

The uncircumcized Kafir is regarded throughout his entire life as a boy, is ridiculed and despised by the women and is even considered 'dead' in the social sense, as he can take no part in the councils. Such a person cannot hold property nor be a soldier. A woman would not think of marrying the wretch.¹²

The Significance of Participation

It cannot be too greatly emphasized that in primitive society participation is the only avenue to self-development. The only alternatives

¹¹Dewey and Tufts, op. cit., pp. 51, 52.

¹²Miller, op. cit., p. 188.

to lending one's energies and capacities to the mould of customary attitudes, skills, and beliefs are ostracism, exile, or death. In either case the alternative to membership is arrested or terminated growth and the very antithesis of a full and rich life. To participate is all one with living. Therefore moral standards are identical with the pattern of activities which the child finds existing as the framework without which he could have no purposes, no interests, no self-realization. Whatever practices he finds existing are good, and no practices which are condoned by custom can be wrong.

The child is forced to be aware of this even if its consequences in the short run appear undesirable to the young. In Borneo, head-hunting, at first repulsive, is condoned later. The native argues that it is "ancient custom, bequeathed to us by our fathers and our father's fathers; it brings us blessings, plentiful harvests and keeps off sickness and pains."¹³

When the youth rebels temporarily at being forced to learn and accept a practice or a skill for which he does not understand the rationale, or which conflicts with attitudes he has already learned, the prestige of the custom coupled with the force of public conformity are the influences which make for his adjustment. He almost invariably perceives that his only opportunity for self-development, to be in the "game," lies in doing what is expected of him as a matter of form. Some customs are irrational, yet in many cases practices have high survival value and their purpose is to develop in the child essential qualities which under the circumstances

¹³Ibid., p. 254.

enhance his ability to participate in the group life. For instance, where it is held necessary to develop in the youth an attitude of unfeeling ferocity to strangers or traditional enemies, the methods of indoctrination sometimes require more than the mere natural tendency of the child to imitate. For example, the following description of the case of the Borneo child learning to draw blood and derive satisfaction from it is related by Miller.

My father, a very great warrior, and known and feared by the people of many, many rivers, wanted his sons to be as brave and fearless as he was himself. So one day he dragged out into the jungle old Ballo Lahing...and tied her fast to a tree by rattans on her wrists and ankles. She was a slave-woman...very old and weak and very thin and couldn't do any work because she was nearly blind. My father...told us...we must not be afraid to see blood, nor to hear screams...I couldn't bear the thought of hurting her...so I flatly refused to take a spear with me. But my father said I must; there was no harm in it; that it was right and I must take one; he pulled me by the arm, and I had to follow. Then I was afraid she might see me, so I sneaked around behind the tree and just pricked her with the point of the iron...I pricked her a little harder the next time to hear what she would say, but she only kept on shrieking...Then one of the other boys, smaller even than I, ran his spear through her thigh, like this, and the old people laughed and said that it was good...and after that, I never thought whether it was Ballo Lohing or not, I just watched the blood...Then my father praised us all loudly, and me in particular, and said we had been good boys, and had done well. How could I feel at all sorry then for the old thing? I thought only that I had obeyed my father and that I was a great warrior and could wear hornbills' feathers and tigercat's teeth. That's the way to become a Man...My father was right.¹⁴

An illustration of the acceptance of what appears to be a more irrational practice in order to become a full member will show the efficacy of public opinion in insuring participation.

in Rhodesia, the boy or girl who wavers before undergoing the rite of extraction of teeth is ridiculed unmercifully. The youth who has his teeth is the butt of the village. 'Beware

¹⁴Ibid., p. 165.

of the zebra, he bites' they call after him, and sooner than face the scoffing he submits.¹⁵

Participation vs. Isolation

An understanding of why the primitive child submits and conforms even at the peril of physical danger and impaired health is possible only if it be clearly seen that participation in some human group is the only method of developing one's interests and capacities. In simple terms participation means nothing more than the cultivation of ones ability to share by sharing, both directly and vicariously, in the actual activities of some human group. Since for the primitive child there is only one area of experience, only one pattern of conduct and activity available to him, the basis of the primitive moral conception, conformity, is obscured. If the primitive child had the opportunity to participate in interests and ways of living other than the prevailing pattern of culture of his group, he would no doubt in many cases, as is historically illustrated, do so. Then he would have a moral problem, for he would be the victim of conflict between alternative ways of living. But this is not ordinarily the case in primitive culture. In primitive culture there is, necessarily, considered only one right, natural way to live, and act and believe, and that is for the child predestined and pre-defined in the self-evident folkways and mores of the particular primitive group. What would be the alternative for the primitive child of learning to participate? If isolated the primitive child, as any other, would either die or become a beast. There would certainly be no hope that he would become human.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 259.

Anthropology and Feral (Wild) Children

Modern anthropology in its researches into the effect of isolation upon human infants has illustrated the alternative to growing into membership in a community of human interests and activities. This evidence makes clear also that the basic rationale underlying the primitive morality of conformity, which rationale the primitive himself does not intellectualize and recognize as such, is that the fullest life for all members is possible only when the whole range of the group's culture, i.e. its sex practices, its economic practices, its family arrangements, and the like, are thereby protected and perpetuated. Since this is, in reality, the basis of the almost fanatical protection of the cultural heritage, strict conformity to the customary pattern of life is immediately understandable. The purpose of conformity, the primitive moral standard, is the protection of the common interests and concerns held dear by the given primitive group.

That primitive man does not see the basic function of his morality is indicated, however, by the reason he gives for his standard, namely, that custom is right because it is custom; it is self-evident, and is its own justification.

What is the bearing of the modern anthropological evidence concerning the effect of isolation, or non-participation? First, freedom, or self-development, requires that the individual be in effective communication with a human community of interests and concerns. Human status is available only for those infants who are cared for, nurtured and encouraged to share in the purposes and interests of others. This is the only way in which the human individual may come to have interests and purposes of his

own. Such sharing does not necessarily provide the fullest possible degree of, or optimum, self-development. Even the slave is a member of a limited community of interests. It is to say, rather, that any degree of human development at all is dependent upon membership in the activities of some human group. Three selected cases will illustrate the effect of isolation upon the human infant. First, the case of Kaspar Houser will illustrate the permanent results of the extreme isolation of a child.

He (Kaspar Houser) is said to have been put into a dungeon at an early age and to have remained there for years with few or no social contacts. In 1828, when he was rescued and taken to Nuremberg, Bavaria, he was completely bewildered by his surroundings. He could not distinguish between material objects and human beings; his conduct was infantile and asocial. While he seems to have known a few words, he had no speech in the proper sense. On his death an autopsy of his brain showed it to be normal but undeveloped. While he has been the subject of much folk fiction, his mental and social retardation seems clearly to have been the result of long segregation from normal social contacts.¹⁶

A case more closely studied is that of two Hindu children, Kamala and Amala, found at ages eight and one and one-half years respectively in 1929 in a wolf den near Midnapore, India. They were discovered by Rev. J. A. L. Singh and others. Amala died within a few months following a period of almost no progress toward socialization.

At first Kamala would eat only raw meat. A few months after she had come into the care of Rev. and Mrs. Singh, Kamala found a dead chicken and ate it all and repeated this act with a live chicken six months later. Food given to her was eaten in canine fashion, and when fatigued and heated she panted with her tongue extended. Hearing and smell were extremely well developed and her eyes were dark adapted. She slept during

¹⁶Kimball Young, Sociology, p. 4.

the day and prowled about the compound at night. Her language consisted of grunts and growls and she was especially fond of baying and howling during the night.

Posture for Kamala was restricted to an all-fours stance using either feet and hands or hands and knees depending upon the speed which she desired to attain. Great callouses had developed on her knees. Kamala resented clothing, resisted being washed and avoided human contacts as much as possible.

The transition from wolf-life to human life was never completed for Kamala. Although some socialization was possible through the kindness and patience of Mrs. Singh, the adjustment to time schedules, verbal communication, ideas and skills, utensils, furniture, tools, etc., was almost beyond her power to make.

Only after ten months did Kamala take food from Mrs. Singh directly. She learned after a year and a half to extend her hand for food and to hold a dish in both hands while eating rice. After eighteen months Kamala learned to stand erect. Finally after sometime at the orphanage she began to anticipate the reaction of others to her, a sure sign of growing sense of self-hood. Gradually as the years passed, she came to take an interest in her clothes. As far as language was concerned, Kamala in four years developed a vocabulary of few words. Her comprehension of spoken words developed rapidly. In 1926, six years after being taken into the care of Rev. and Mrs. Singh, she was using thirty words, and a year later forty-five. In addition she was using two and three word sentences. After becoming somewhat better adapted to time schedules and organized human society while in the company of her human friends, Kamala

died in 1929 as the result of uremia.¹⁷

One other case will suffice. This is a more recent case involving a five year old child found in the upper room of a farmhouse in Pennsylvania in 1938. She lacked any ordinary characteristics of a socialized child of like age. She was removed to an old-folk's home and studied there by professional scholars. The account is briefly as follows: Anna was the second of two illegitimate children of a young woman in her twenties. To escape the wrath of her father, Anna's mother placed her in an upper room. She was fed almost entirely on a milk diet. She was not bathed, trained in personal habits, nor ever caressed nor even made the object of affection or attention. Most of her time was spent in a crib. Study showed some of the effects of this case of isolation from social contact to be that she reclined in a supine position, immobile, completely apathetic; she was indifferent to those around her and she appeared to be deaf and dumb. Her social contacts were purely perfunctory or openly antagonistic.

After several months of massage, good diet and kindly attention, Anna learned visual discrimination with reference to color, improved in posture and in motor coordination, including the ability to chew solid food.

After four months in the county home she had not learned to speak. Within six months she was making genuine progress in learning to walk, and she showed increasing interest in persons around her and had on occasion found pleasure in playmates. After about a year the child was placed in

¹⁷Arnold L. Gesell, Wolf Child and Human Child, passim.

the home of kind and understanding foster parents. In 1939 she was placed in a small school for defective children and while she had not by that time learned to talk, she had made tremendous improvement in her human-social relations.¹⁸

These cases seem to point up the following conclusions:

- (1) Becoming human is possible only in a human social context, a context of established common meanings and purposes.
- (2) Isolation thwarts self-development in direct proportion to the intensity of the isolation.
- (3) Continued isolation produces retardation, to a great degree permanent, in roughly direct proportion to the intensity of the isolation.
- (4) Self-development thrives best in a context where the purpose of association is self-development.
- (5) Becoming human is a cooperative process.

Implications for Primitive Morality

Primitive man, while he had the empirical, or customary key to as full and rich a life as possible under the circumstances, did not have the intellectual tool to maintain the community of shared interests when the conditions which made the operation of the traditional way of life, or social context, adequate changed. When custom became inadequate, primitive man did not realize that the basic rationale behind custom was self-development through sharing in a community of interests. Thus he did not realize that the purpose of morality is to provide the basis for

¹⁸Dingsley Davis, "The Extreme Isolation of a Child," American Journal of Sociology, VI (January, 1940), 554-565.

the continuous extension of common interests and purposes.

When custom no longer pointed the way to the maintenance of an effective community of interests, or when competing ways of living arose through internal invention, catastrophe or the proximity of a different culture pattern, or when trade and commerce or warfare open up new possibilities for interests and pursuits, the primitive man was in a quandary. If he had had a clear understanding why conformity to custom was good, he could have used his mind to inquire into the problem presented by new conditions and work out a new culture pattern for the purposes of reconstituting a community of purposes and shared interests. Unfortunately primitive man has had no such alternative open to him.

CHAPTER III
THE EMERGENCE OF THE MORAL PROBLEM

Introduction

The primitive conception of morality is superficial. It is so because primitive man has taken custom, established practices, beliefs and relations to be good in themselves. Under primitive conditions specific interests and purposes are inherently good and right. Long usage, tested efficacy, ignorance of the conditions under which given practices originated, a low level of science and technology, isolation from competing culture patterns, the crushing effect upon the child's thinking habits of having to become a member of an unreflective, unscientific group life, these have operated to perpetuate the notion that the practices and interests of the particular group are the only ones and being such are their own justification. They exist, therefore they are right. Therefore, primitive man has no effective control over his morality when new conditions render it inadequate to preserve a community of interests and purposes.

To the question why did not primitive man retain his simple moral method of conformity to established custom, it can only be answered that conditions changed and thereby rendered tradition inadequate as a framework for a common life in which the individual could grow and share and secure the basis for the fullest possible self-development. When the customary way of life ceases to be the only set of interests and concerns possible, when customary interests and beliefs stand in the way of new and different modes of behavior which the individual sees as the opportunity for a fuller self-development, the question arises, what makes an

activity or interest good or right. It is at this point that a moral problem emerges.

The Effect of Changed Conditions Upon Participation

As long as the primitive child sees no alternative to custom, he accepts it more or less voluntarily as the road to membership with all its opportunities and enrichments. But when an alternative presents itself, conflict ensues. For instance, when the whites came to Melanesia, the whole structure of custom began to disintegrate for the youth.

The sacred precincts were explored, the bull-roarers became the playthings of boys, and old men sat and wept over the profanation and loss of their power and prestige.¹

In the Gran-Chaco there is a story of an old Indian who sat by the fire relating the great exploits of antiquity and telling stories full of marvelous birds and animals.

He talked with his mouth, his eyes, hands, and feet. 'One by one the youthful listeners fell asleep while the ancient mumbled on to himself of the fox-god and the armadillo-god. This was truly symbolical;' The young listened for a while, but soon it bores them. They have new interests. They have begun to dance the great dance called civilization by the Christians, but which is mainly danced about the golden calf.²

An investigator in West Africa indicates the result of attempting to secure for certain youth of a tribe the alleviation of some of the cruelties of traditional initiation practices. In answer to a suggestion that certain irrational folkways be modified, the investigator reported,

They were terribly aroused, and swore, Never! Never! You can't change them! 'No, not I; but they will be changed?'

¹Nathan Miller, The Child in Primitive Society, p. 256.

²Ibid., p. 257.

'Never! who can or will do it?' 'Your own sons.' 'Then we will kill our own sons.'³

Conditions may change as the result of a wide variety of reasons. Climatic changes such as floods or droughts, epidemic disease, extinction of the primary source of food supply, the proximity of a competing pattern of culture, intercourse resulting from trade and commerce or warfare, the return of members of the group who have lived for a period of years outside the group, the rise of a dominant group within the culture, which to achieve its interests must violate or modify extant patterns, all these reveal to the individual that the traditional and customary are not the only possible ways of life. They open up new opportunities and necessities which are different from and in conflict with those sanctioned by custom. Thus conflicts of interests point up the inadequacy of custom and the individual is torn within himself between the new opportunities for self-development and the old.

Since under such circumstances it is impossible for the individual to conform to both custom and new opportunity, there emerges the question of what makes an interest or an activity good or bad. As soon as competing alternatives result in the inquiry into the competing alternatives, the moral problem emerges.

Greece and the Emergence of the Moral Problem

Perhaps the emergence of the moral problem is best illustrated by Greek experience in the fifth and fourth centuries B. C. Due to geographical factors and the debilitation of the land, certain Greek groups, among

³Ibid.

them the people of Attica, began to rely more upon trade and commerce as a means of subsistence. Trade and industry had for several centuries been modifying the way of life of the Greeks and the structure of society which had become customary in the fifth century B. C. was such that the "group" was restricted in number and held a position of dominance in the affairs of life. Thus in Athens, the citizen group was made up of an aristocracy of business and landed interests, a middle class and a lower class of artisans and farmers. These three classes of freemen depended upon the services, however, of a large number of slaves and foreigners who handled the heavy and tedious work of industry, farming, and business. It must be emphasized that this structure was bound up in custom and usage, and sanctified by the gods.

The period from the seventh to the fifth century was one of increased interaction amongst the peoples of the Aegean area.⁴ The result was the periodic threats of rebellion and violence within the group due to the inadequacy of custom. The inadequacy of custom however, was not admitted nor debated. A very simple device was used to cope with disintegrating customary patterns. This consisted of the parties to internal conflict giving the power to a lawgiver, or a tyrant, to restate or extend the meaning of extant custom. Thus there were a series of reinterpretations of custom ending in the early fifth century. Draco's Code (621 B. C.) reorganized legal arrangements and provided forfeiture of mortgages and enslavement for debt; Solon's Reforms (594 B. C.) designed to prevent violence and civil war, abolished land mortgages and debt slavery and made

⁴For a survey of changes in Greek society during this period, see James E. Swain, A History of World Civilization, Chapter V.

all citizens members of the assembly; Cleisthenes (502 B. C.) rearranged the whole social structure along territorial and tribal lines and provided the practice of ostracism in the case of tyrants who behaved in a manner contrary to the interests of the dominant class in the council.

By the fifth century B. C. commerce and industry had developed to a point where changes in this activity reverberated throughout Athenian life. Many sons of aristocrats and other freemen went into the exciting life of business and maritime careers. The new opportunities presented to Athenians were often in conflict with custom. Government itself, in the fifth century extending to imperial dimensions abroad and including all classes of freemen at home was a very different affair from what it had been only a century earlier. The traditional family pattern of the tribe and the gens began to disintegrate due to the presence of a money economy and the freedom of young members to move out on their own in the Athenian empire. The whole range of custom in Greek life was challenged by a new range of interests and activities in such a way that many came to consider that being good in the conventional sense was to "miss out" in the novel opportunities now open to freemen. Custom itself came to be challenged, and the gods were by many seen to be nothing more than fairy tales intended to keep the many subservient to the few.

The general temper of this era of conflict of custom and new interests may best be illustrated by the plays of Euripides. There are many instances of conflict between the new and the customary in Euripides. One of the main conflicts of the time involved education. The development of industrial production, growth of capital and the possibility of one with means to put his money to work so that he might

occupy his time with interests more congenial to a life of leisure produced a definite split in the conception of what constituted a good man. For example, Zethus and Amphion, brothers, represent respectively the traditional notion of the good life of the freeman and the new.

Zethus says, admonishing his brother,

You neglect what ought to be your first care. While nature has given you a man's soul, you affect to resemble a woman. A man favored by fortune, who neglects his affairs, and enthralled by the charm of music has no cares, will be a useless member of the family and of the state...Follow my advise, my brother. Silence your songs and follow the muse of battle. If you wish to deserve the name of a sensible man, here is the music to which you ought to apply yourself: digging, tilling the soil, herding the flocks. Leave to others those ingenious refinements from which you will get no other benefit than the impoverishment of your house.⁵

Amphion replies,

You reproach me with being weak in body and delicate like a woman. You are wrong. If I have a vigorous mind, that is a power far greater than strength of arm.⁶

Thus the conflict of the aristocratic life as defined by custom and that defined by a new conception was pointed up with reference to education. The old emphasises the life spent in pursuit of the practical arts, the new is concerned with the pursuit of the so-called purely intellectual arts.

The disintegration of the "ingroup" in Greek society had proceeded to a point where in the Peloponnesian War Alcibiades, Athenian leader, could have more interests in common with the Spartan enemy than his own Athens. After his desertion to the enemy he was recalled and given a

⁵Euripides, Antiope, Frags. 185, 187, 188, quoted in Paul Decharme, Euripides and the Spirit of His Drama, p. 48.

⁶Ibid., Frag. 199, p. 49.

military command when a more conservative group attained power in the Athenian assembly. This was a novel phenomenon in Athenian life and it indicates the degree to which custom had ceased to provide adequate purposes and interests for the individual.

As to the gods which had heretofore been accepted in a primitive manner by the Greek youth, skepticism concerning their origins and function increasingly arose. The rise of philosophy, the attempt to find the reason behind social and physical phenomena, had the effect of encouraging the "explanation" and analysis of the gods and the custom which they sanctioned. There developed three skeptical attitudes toward the gods. There were those who believed there were no gods; those who believed there were gods but that they cared nothing for human beings and their pursuits; and those who believed the gods existed and had the power to intervene in human affairs but could be influenced by gifts and supplication.⁷

An excellent example of criticism of the gods and the custom which they were held to sanction may be observed in the following lines from Euripides.

Does any man say there are gods in Heaven? No! there are none, if a man will not be fool enough to credit the old tale. Let not my words guide your judgment; see for yourselves. I say that tyranny slays its thousands and despoils their goods, and men who break their oath cause cities to be sacked; and, doing so, they are happier than men who walk quietly in the ways of piety from day to day. And I know of small states, where the gods are honored, and that are overmastered in battle by numbers and become subject to greater states that are less god-fearing.⁸

⁷Cf. Plato, Laws X, 889-904. (Unless otherwise indicated Jowett's translation of Plato's works are used throughout.)

⁸Euripides, Beleroophon, Frag. 286, quoted in Freidrich Solmsen, Plato's Theology, p. 25.

The result of the invention, social interaction, travel, war and commerce, and colonization in Greece was that custom broke down and the Greeks were left in a state of moral confusion. Right and wrong were no longer self-evident and a youth no longer became a full participating member of a custom-ruled society by simply growing up by imitating adult activity. Instead of a stable pattern of public conformity to a fixed way of life, the youth saw and heard conflicting practices and customs.

What is important to note here with reference to morality is that both radicals and conservative thinkers saw the impossibility of depending upon custom for guidance. The customary way of life itself had disintegrated; the government, the family institutions, the relations between the sexes, international relations, religion, the use of leisure time, all these had been modified by rapidly changing conditions. The practical reasons for tradition and custom in many phases of Greek life, namely, to provide a community of interests in which members might achieve a rich and full life through conformity to and protection of a preestablished way of life had ceased to exist.

The Moral Alternatives in Athens

When custom became inadequate in Greek society, and social and spiritual chaos was the price to be paid by continuing to rely upon customary morality, the individual had at that time only two alternatives to withdrawal from life. Both of these two alternatives involved thinking, and therefore were based upon and were in both cases a new departure from the primitive procedure of accepting that which exists as identical with that which is proper. One way out was to reestablish a set of interests by prescription. That is, a comprehensive way of life, fixed and immutable,

might be conceived and established. The morality which would be necessary to perpetuate such an ideal social structure would in itself be ideal and immutable. The other alternative was to repudiate morality. In doing so the good becomes whatever an individual aims for and is able to expedite. Under the circumstances the widespread adoption of this alternative could, in its extreme form, destroy, ultimately, whatever community of interests remained in Greek life.

The latter alternative was to take individual self-development or self-interest as the first law of life. It was implied in this position that those who had the intellectual and material means, the ability to manipulate and persuade men and the physical and other material means necessary to this end, might freely pursue their interests. The good is that to which one devotes his energies and talents. The right becomes whatever measures are necessary to attain the individual's good. In its most brutal form, it may be summarized as might makes right. Aside, however, from the means implied, this position was based upon a penetrating insight, namely, that the end of life is self-realization.

In the absence of scientific method, and in the presence of an aristocratic social order with its habits and attitudes, the other alternative emphasized the importance of a stable, harmonious, fixed community of interests. Of course, in the Greek situation this meant not a community of interests among all men, but only freemen, and the range and extent of common interests and purposes even within this area, as it developed, was extremely limited. To expect a democratic basis for a community of interests would be expecting too much of the Greeks.

This position was based upon the idea that we live in two worlds,

one spiritual and transcendental, the other material and in time and space. The structure of the spiritual world provides a pattern for the material, practical world. A community of interests and purposes, that social harmony which is possible only if the range of interests and social functions is limited and fixed, can be achieved only if the transcendental pattern of truth, beauty and goodness can be apprehended and used as the model by which to prescribe a way of life. The method of apprehension is pure reason, or immediate intuition. A good man knows right from wrong just as he knows two and two make four. Thus moral standards are immutable and transcendent. Morality is in this view identical with conformity with the Eternal nature of things. This alternative "assumes the existence of a final and unquestionable knowledge upon which we can fall back in order to settle automatically every moral problem..."⁹

Thus what the primitive man took for granted, namely, the integral connection between self-development and a community of interests and purposes, but which he did not intellectualize, became in Greece under the impact of changing conditions, two separate entities, both of which, when isolated, tend to destroy the other. The moral problem, in short, as pointed up so sharply in Greek society, emerged in a form analagous to the question: in water, which is more important, hydrogen or oxygen? Either taken in isolation precludes any discussion of water itself. The following two chapters are devoted to the clarification of these two alternatives.

⁹John Dewey and James H. Tufts, Ethics, (Revised), p. 364.

CHAPTER IV

CUSTOM AND THE SOPHISTS

Introduction

When custom became inadequate as a moral standard in Ancient Greece, the Sophists became the spokesmen for those who would break out of the chains of routine and forge new careers and new interests on a purely individual basis. With no fixed and authoritative moral pattern available to replace the old, this position in effect repudiated the notion of any community morality at all and turned to nature, the world as it appeared in direct experience, for a clue to the good life. The world of experience was characterized by strife, change and the absence of a common body of belief and practice. Might and power seemed to be basic factors in the pursuit of happiness.

The standard which is identified with the extreme Sophists of Ancient Greece is that might, or success in action, makes right. The successful implementation of one's interests and designs, with only that Machiavellian regard for social consequences which is required to secure success, is the moral standard. While it places individual self-development in the position of the supreme good, it tends in actual practice to destroy the very basis for any self-development at all, namely, a community of interests.

The Sophists

It was in this world of conflict and change that the Sophists made their livelihoods by teaching. They were men not attached to any permanent settlement. They traveled and roved, in search of someone to teach.

They charged fees for their instruction, and, it may be observed, are more to be associated with the new rich, the families of merchantile wealth. This is illustrated in the case of Protagoras himself, the most famous of the Sophists, by the locale of Plato's Protagoras, which was in the spacious home of the wealthy Callias of Athens.¹

The Sophists had a perfect opportunity to see the variation in life among and within the various Greek and neighboring cultures, the differences in competing patterns of economy, government, family arrangements and other phases of associated life. They were relatively free from the weight of the dogma of custom and tradition because they had no permanent city of their own. Further, their livelihood depended upon the patronage of those interested in the new life, the new activities connected with public administration, imperialism and trade.

while from some of them an Athenian youth would receive only a more or less systematic instruction in everything conducive to good citizenship (rhetoric, law, etc.) he would in listening to others imbibe advanced doctrines to the effect that all human beings were equal, that distinctions based on class, wealth, or sex were artificial, as national or racial barriers...²

The more extreme Sophists assumed a position which was the virtual repudiation of customary or conventional morality. Since justice, or a compact system of customary relations within Greek culture, had ceased to exist in the fifth century, the self-evidence of custom, or morality, ceased to exist for sensitive people. Since the gods had come to have the function of sanctioning the strange confusion of traditional morals, new and changing laws made in the assembly, and the dictates of strong

¹Protagoras, p. 81.

²Freidrich Solmsen, Plato's Theology, p. 18.

men, there was much conflict concerning the gods. Men were confused and the most extreme critics of this confusion, this conflict of standards, took the position that morality had no basis in nature, and that rational computation of the chances of survival and success was wiser than the expectation that the gods would help him who fought for the conventionally better cause. There were too many examples of the folly of living in accordance with the old moral precepts for sensitive men to continue to have faith in them.

The Sophists had the effect of encouraging imaginative people to set at naught customary standards. For them custom was no more binding than assembly-made law, and no more binding than the gods, which too were mere convention, and either made by the weak to restrain the strong, or by the strong to inhibit their fellows. They offered as proof that religion, morality and law belonged to social convention rather than to the structure of the universe the fact that among different peoples belief and custom and law were so radically different. Man, the individual, is the measure of all things, declared Protagoras. Life according to nature was the life of individual shrewdness and might overcoming the shrewdness and might of one's fellows.

The contrast between life according to nature and life according to humanly imposed principles was fundamental with the Sophists; it only remained to class religion with conventions devised and imposed by man, to bring it under condemnation.³

Thrasymachus in the Republic speaks for the extreme wing of the Sophistic movement when he says: "I proclaim that justice is nothing

³Arthur Fairbanks, A Handbook of Greek Religion, p. 328.

else than the interest of the stronger."⁴ When prodded to explain what he meant by this, Thrasymachus identified justice with departure from conventional morality in favor of individual interests:

...justice and the just is in reality another's good; that is to say, the interest of the ruler and stronger, and the loss of the subject and servant; and injustice the opposite; for the unjust is lord over the truly simple and just; he is the stronger, and his subjects do what is for his interest, and minister to his happiness, which is very far from being their own. Consider further, most foolish Socrates, the just is always a loser in comparison with the unjust. First of all, in private contracts; whenever the unjust is the partner of the just you will find that when the partnership is dissolved the unjust man has always more and the just less. Secondly, as to their dealings with the state: when there is an income-tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same amount of income; and when there is anything to be received the one gains nothing and the other much...And thus, as I have shown, Socrates, injustice, when on a sufficient scale, has more strength and freedom and mastery than justice; and, as I said at first, justice is the interest of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest.⁵

Another Sophist, Callicles, in holding the belief in the efficacy of convention supported by the gods to be futile, says:

For the truth is, Socrates, that you, who pretend to be engaged in the pursuit of truth, are appealing now to the popular and vulgar notions of right, which are not natural, but only conventional. Convention and nature are generally at variance with one another...The reason, as I conceive, is that the makers of laws are the majority who are weak; and they make the laws and distribute praises and censures with a view to themselves and their own interests;...But if there were a man who had sufficient force, he would shake off and break through, and escape from all charms, and all our laws which are against nature; the slave would rise in rebellion and be lord over us, and the light of natural justice would shine forth.⁶

⁴Republic, Bk. 1, 338.

⁵Ibid., 343, 344.

⁶Gorgias, 473.

Where law, custom or convention were useful for one's purposes it might be obeyed. Otherwise it is a sign of weakness to submit to a standard which operates against one's interests. The Sophists advised men that contemporary morality, which was sanctioned by the gods and the state was in many ways a hinderance to a fuller life which was now possible in the Greek world, and that where it operated in an inhibitory way, it must be disregarded.

To the Sophists the supreme category was not "truth" as such, nor "reality" as such, but the good, the good for the individual. And the good for the individual must be determined by the interests and capacities of the individual.

They held, in brief:

that morality is essentially a practical interest belonging simply to man and his life, and having no reference to anything in the order of reality beyond his interests; (2) that all moral standards are relative...Every man has certain interests and knows when these interests are furthered by his actions or when they are hindered. Their furtherance is the object of his desires, the thing he seeks--in short, for him it is the good.⁷

This revolutionary idea was an extreme departure from a tradition which defined both the purposes and desires of individuals and the practical methods of implementing such desires. The position that no moral, or social, habit or institutional form was ultimately good or bad in itself is the recognition of the fact that morality, if it is to be of any validity at all, must conduce to the achievement of human, individual desires and ambitions.

⁷Clifford L. Barrett, Ethics, pp. 54,55.

The moral problem in a social structure of novelty and conflicting forms of behavior then is that of determining how best one may achieve his goals, which implies that the purpose of associated life is to provide the basis for the development of the talents and interests of individuals, nothing more nor less, notions of a life hereafter to the contrary notwithstanding.

The Sophists, breaking away from dependence on the standards of authority and custom, encouraged men to assume initiative, and in light of their own intelligence to seek what they regarded as good--for themselves.⁸

This is, then, the meaning of Protagoras' proposition that man, meaning the individual man, is the measure of all things.

Sophistic Doctrine and Modern Life

While this type of moral standard for long centuries depended upon force and custom in the Western tradition and indeed became embedded in the Christian system, in modern times it has

acquired a new authority because it fits in with much else that we believe. There is first of all the general conviction that class war is an ineradicable feature of modern life. Then the wide acceptance of the Darwinian hypothesis, that survival is the symbol of fitness in the biological realm, has biased the modern mind in favor of the conception that moral ideas merely represent survival in the field of conduct...As a result of these and other influences the doctrine that right is whatever the stronger can force the weaker to accept has been lifted to a new level of cogency.⁹

While the maintenance of any degree of community among men at all necessitates the repudiation to some extent in practice of this standard, the past two thousand years of Western history indicates that there always

⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁹M. C. Otto, Things and Ideals, pp. 77, 78.

remains, in any particular situation, a wide area in which might in some form may be used as the standard without complete social destruction. The prevalence of the standard in crystallized institutions or in the individualism of the few in periods of social change results in the degradation of human experience and the atrophy of capacity for experience. Inevitably it involves the dominance of some particular interest or set of interests, for to give all interests carte blanche would end in the destruction of any kind of social order whatever.

Thus for Machiavelli, the political interests of the prince may be best secured by the exercise of intelligence and power on their behalf. The moral standard for the prince is "success in keeping and increasing his power."¹⁰

...he (Machiavelli) was merely interested in a single end, political power, and indifferent to others. He never hesitated to express sweeping judgments of rulers who allowed their states to grow weak. Moreover, he was in no definite sense scientific, though his judgment was formed empirically...But his empiricism was that of common sense or of shrewd practical foresight...¹¹

Machiavelli illustrates in his criticism of the submissive Christian virtues that the quality which an interest must have to make it moral is the power to implement it.

Our religion places the supreme happiness in humility, lowliness, and contempt for worldly objects, whilst the other, on the contrary, places the supreme good in grandeur of soul, strength of body, and all such qualities as render men formidable...These principles seem to me to have made men feeble, and caused them to become an easy prey to evil-minded men, who can control them more securely, seeing that the great body of men,

¹⁰George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, p. 341.

¹¹Ibid., p. 341.

for the sake of gaining Paradise, are more disposed to endure injuries than to avenge them.¹²

The modern world, throwing off the shackles of divine revelation and other superstitions typical of a fixed social structure, and emerging, armed with science and technology, but without an authoritative standard which could justify itself in the effects of its use upon the experience of all individuals, has more or less naturally, as the Sophists, sought to justify its new interests in terms of power. The rise of national states brought forth many "jungle" theories of international relations, and the world still is operating upon the basic assumption that chaos is the proper structure of international relations. For instance, Treitschke "taught not only with frankness but with captivating enthusiasm that between nations there can be no right and wrong. The only consideration for a nation was how best to advance its own interests, regardless of the consequences to other nations."¹³

The modern dictatorships in international affairs, the axiom of competition in economics, the supremacy of certain races over others, the supremacy of the male head in the family institutions, the availability of consumer goods and services including health and educational services being determined by pecuniary power, the intellectual content of industrial enterprise being confined to a narrow group, all these illustrate in more or less disguised form the principle of might makes right. The basic contradiction in the position is that it needs, in order to operate, the very community it seeks to destroy, and the result of its

¹²Niccola Machiavelli, Discourses. ii. 2.

¹³Otto, op. cit., p. 91.

operation is deepseated moral confusion.

But despite the fact that the extreme Sophists and their historical descendents have continuously drawn the wrong conclusion from their primary assumption, yet they have at least served to emphasize the primary right of human desires, and the fact that the goodness or badness of behavior must be determined by reference to the foreseeable consequences which flow therefrom.

Is the conclusion they draw from this the only one logically to be drawn? Clearly not, if morality is relative to men's purposes. By whose compulsion must human life conform to the rule of animal existence? We can decide to make right and wrong mean something very different. The way is suggested by what is expected to be done when conflicts arise in the bosom of the individual. When an individual is called upon to settle a conflict between his own ideals, he certainly does not ordinarily let the various desires fight it out. There is often a struggle, and sometimes a particular impulse does a good deal of pushing and slugging, but, as a rule, the individual aims at an adjustment in which the various desires involved shall have consideration. The pressure of the community, his own "larger" good, a "remoter" good, any or all of these, and other considerations still, may be brought in to check the force of immediate desire.¹⁴

The Reaction to the Sophistic Doctrine

Needless to say, to such a conservative aristocrat as Plato, the ethic which holds that the supreme principle in human society is individual desire, and that theoretically one desire is as good as another, was not only too simple but was dangerous to what was left of traditional institutional forms as well. Plato's chief objection to this position was that it made for rank individualism and that it did not supply a criterion for what is desirable. What is a good ambition? What is a good purpose?

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 95, 96.

In order to off-set what he considered the subversive implications of the Sophistic doctrine, Plato set about to place the standard for purposes, activities, interests and man's inherent nature beyond nature, in the world of spirit. To effect his purpose Plato made the spiritual world supply a limited number of virtues and career possibilities and recommended that men be poured into these according to the inherent "type" of the individual, to the exclusion of all other considerations. With reference to laws, practices, and moral standards in general Plato recommended that the social structure be placed in the hands of one or more wise men. According to Plato, whatever these governors decided, if their decisions be accompanied by "right reason," would be the revelation of the Truth, or the True World of Being.

CHAPTER V

PLATO AND TWO-WORLDISM

Introduction

The Sophists presented a challenge to Greek morality. They denied the validity of custom by pointing out obvious inconsistencies in customs themselves and in indicating the futility of attempting to live by it under conditions of flux and change. They likewise denied the validity of legislation which had for its sole ground either the interests of a tyrant or the weight of a majority in the assembly. Their main point, however, was that man is the measure of all things and as such is the case, what is right and wrong is an individual matter. For the Sophists, then, individual self-realization, for those who have the means required, is the end of life and the test of right and wrong. But their substituting of a social jungle for a social community of interests made their position seem extremely irrational and it had the effect of producing the alternative which is associated with the name of Plato.

Plato the aristocrat, contemptuous of the activities and interests of slaves and workers, could not be expected to see the continuous extension of common interests and common purposes among men as the test for morality. But he, as in the case of the Sophists, could see that a practice or an interest did not receive its sanction from the mere fact that men had long behaved in a certain manner. Witness the tradition of immorality among the traditional gods. Whatever might be said for custom, it was obvious that it did not furnish a permanent standard. What was needed was a permanent, objective standard which could be relied upon for moral guidance, once and for all.

Plato's alternative was the ingenious creation of the most forceful myth of all time. In this myth the universe is divided into two realms, one the material realm from which the Sophists took their cue, and the supernatural realm. Beyond and behind the world of nature, which is the world of matter, is Mind, the World of Ideas, which sets the pattern for the natural world. The happenings and objects of the world of sense experience attain whatever degree of reality they may have from the extent to which they conform to their Eternal Archetypes in the yonder world. Now man, because of a pre-existence in the transcendental world has just a spark of it in him. This is Soul or Mind. Some men are able, by the exercise of the highest part or faculty of the mind, that is, pure reason, to envision or see the perfect realities of the Model Realm. This they may do by the use of the mind only, without the aid of any part of the body or the senses. Thus, via immediate, unaided insight, the minds of the select few are able to participate in the realm of the eternal verities. This is at once the greatest achievement for the individual, and the most practical thing in ordering and ruling the social structure. Thus the true moral standard is nothing less than conformity to what the seer finds when he communicates with the Eternal Author of All.

Socrates is made to say,

The ideas are, as it were, patterns, fixed in nature, and other things are like them, and resemblances of them.¹

And,

Paramenides proceeded: And would you also make absolute ideas of the just and the beautiful and the good, and all of that class?

¹Parmenides, 132.

Yes, he (Socrates) said, I should.²

Thus moral principles are fixed, immutable, and hold good for all time.

Plato's Method of Determining the Standard

A clue to the understanding of the doctrine of Ideas may be obtained from mathematics in which Plato noticed that there were certain concepts which he thought to have no basis in empirical phenomena, i.e. the world of time and space relations. Such is, thought Plato, the concept of the perfect circle or the straight line, or the axioms of Euclidian geometry. These never change, they are immaterial, and almost anyone is able to have a conception of them.

Now, since the soul may know in either of two ways, i.e. immediately and through herself alone, in which case the result is real knowledge, or through sense experience, or the body, in which case the result is only opinion or approximation, and since it is impossible to know such an object as the perfect circle through the senses, for the reason that it is not a sensible object, there must be another order of reality in which these unsensible objects have their being. The same applies to such abstract notions as justice, the good, sameness, likeness, equality and others which are not material objects, but objects of mind, and which exist prior to material objects. For Plato there was such a realm and it was the true, the eternal realm of reality. The only true science must take the objects of this realm as the objects for its knowledge. On the other hand, nothing permanent and eternal can be known about particular

²Ibid., 130.

objects such as swine and their care, farming and its implements, or a particular family and its administration. These are characterized by change, by generation and corruption, and as such may never be the objects of superior knowledge. For instance,

...philosophical minds always love knowledge of a sort which shows them the eternal nature not varying from generation and corruption.³

And,

Are not these who are verily and indeed wanting in the knowledge of the true being of each thing, and who have in their souls no clear pattern, and are unable as with a painter's eye to look at the absolute truth and to that original to repair, and having perfect vision of the other world to order the laws about beauty, goodness, justice in this, if not already ordered, and to guard and preserve the order of them--are not such persons, I ask, simply blind?⁴

An illustration of what is meant is shown in the case of the discussion of the idea of equality. To Plato it was self-evident that before two objects could be unequal, certainly there must be prior in time and nature a standard by which they are unequal. The following discussion shows the type of reasoning which likewise holds that before there can be immorality, there must be a standard prior to and in light of which such behavior is to be judged. It will likewise illustrate what is meant by going outside the practical situation, beyond the pale of the consequences of behavior, for such a standard.

And shall we proceed a step further, and affirm that there is such a thing as equality, not of one piece of wood or stone with another, but that, over and above this, there is absolute equality?

³Republic, vi, 485.

⁴Ibid., 484.

Say so, yes...

And do we know the nature of this absolute essence?

To be sure...

And must we not allow, that when I or any one, looking at any object observes that the thing which he sees aims at being some other thing, but falls short of, and cannot be, that other thing, but is inferior, he who makes this observation must have had a previous knowledge of that to which the other, although similar was inferior,

Certainly,

Then we must have known equality previously to the time when we first saw the material equals, and reflected that all these apparent equals strive to attain absolute equality, but fall short of it?

And,

Then before we began to see or hear or perceive in any way, we must have had a knowledge of absolute equality, or we could not have referred to that standard the equals which are derived from the senses?--for to that they all aspire, and of that they fall short?⁵

In other words, the higher sense of equality, that which makes real objects seem to be equal, is a fixed, immutable standard, and must have been known to man before he was born, was forgotten at birth and recovered, for those who are able to recover it, after birth. As Plato says,

Then may we not say, Simmias, that if, as we are always repeating, there is an absolute beauty, and goodness, and an absolute essence of all things; and if, to this, which is now discovered to have existed in our former state, we refer all our sensations, and with this compare them, finding these ideas to be pre-existent and our inborn possession--then our souls (minds) must have had a prior existence...⁶

If this be the case, then learning is only the recollection of eternal ideas once known but now forgotten. This is Plato's position. An

⁵Phaedo, 74.

⁶Ibid., 76.

illustration which will make Plato's meaning clear in the case of the recollection of the slave boy in the Meno. Here Socrates illustrates what he means by the eternal nature of truth. To show that Meno's slave boy once, in another existence, had seen, or had knowledge of the fact that the square of the diagonal of a given square will produce a square which is twice the size of the original square, Socrates prods and guides the boy through a series of wrong answers and demonstrations. Socrates draws the figures upon the ground with a stick, until at last the problem is completely diagrammed and the boy sees, upon Socrates' suggestion, that the proposition is true.

The explanation given by Socrates⁷ is that since the boy could not solve the problem in the beginning, and since he had never been instructed in geometry, and since Socrates certainly could not have given him the knowledge, that the boy did finally affirm the correctness of the proposition proved he only remembered something which he already knew.

Furthermore, only those souls, or minds, which are educable may see these absolutes. A soul which has from prenatal existence these truths hidden in his nature may recollect them, or learn them, by the question and answer method observed in the case of the slave boy in the Meno, and which was called dialectic.

Plato's conception that learning is the recollection of eternal truth raises the question of the nature of the previous existence in which the soul had a glimpse of or learned absolute truth. Without going

⁷Meno, passim.

into Plato's theology in detail, the following from the Phaedrus will give some idea of what is meant:

For, as has been already said, every soul of man has in the way of nature beheld true being; this was the condition of her passing into the form of man. But all souls do not easily recall the things of the other world; they may have seen them for a short time only, or they may have been unfortunate in their earthly lot, and, having had their hearts turned to unrighteousness through some corrupting influence, they may have lost the memory of the holy things which once they saw. Few only retain an adequate remembrance of them; and they, when they behold there an image of that other world, are rapt in amazement; but they are ignorant of what this rapture means, because they do not clearly perceive. For there is no light or justice or temperance or any of the higher ideas which are precious to souls in the earthly copies of them; they are seen through a glass dimly; and there are few who, going to the images, behold in them the realities, and these only with difficulty. There was a time when with the rest of the happy band they saw beauty shining in brightness, --we philosophers following in the train of Zeus, others in company with other gods; and then we beheld the beatific vision and were initiated into a mystery which may be truly called most blessed, celebrated by us in our state of innocence, before we had any experience of the evils to come, when we were admitted to the sight of apparitions innocent and simple and calm and happy, which we beheld in that living tomb which we carry about, now that we are imprisoned in the body, like an oyster in his shell.⁸

Thus Plato removed truth, including moral standards, from the arena of opinion and utility by placing them beyond nature, beyond the reach of anyone except the eminently qualified, the "wise." Such men as come to have a clear recollection of absolute Truth, Goodness, and Beauty must be allowed to order the social life according to this divine pattern. The scheme which Plato devised which includes the philosopher-king as the guardian of the city is set forth in the Republic and the Laws. It is based essentially upon the basic structure of Greek society of Plato's day. In that society, though to a lesser degree in the fifth

⁸Phaedrus, 250. (Italics mine)

century B. C., what the young might do as a life work was for all intents and purposes decided by custom, and social status which was likewise determined by custom. A cobbler's son would be a cobbler, an aristocrat's son would find his occupation in such liberal pursuits as public administration and the "higher" arts. Since it was the Greek habit to assume that things as they are are such by nature and that what they are is their fixed nature, it becomes understandable how Plato, in the absence of an experimental logic, took the world of forms, social and physical, as absolute, immutable, and fixed in and by nature. Any departure from "form" was considered "unnatural." This is made clear in Plato's conception of justice.

I believe we have found the trail, Glaucon, and I don't think it will get away. 'Goodness,' said he. 'What numbskulls we were,' said I. 'Like people who hunt high and low for something they hold in their hands. We have been talking about this all the time. We have said that each man should confine himself to one pursuit in the city, the pursuit which his nature is most naturally adapted. And to do one's task and not to meddle in many is justice which can be defined as one man, one task, for which he is naturally fitted.'⁹

That justice in the state is dictated by a fixed, natural pattern is shown by Plato in his simple assumption that classes are something given in nature, good, and not something to be modified.

But when the cobbler or any other man whom nature designed to be a trader, having his heart lifted up by wealth or strength, or the number of his followers, or any like advantage, attempts to force his way into the class of warriors, or a warrior into that of legislators and guardians, for which he is unfitted, and either to take the implements or the duties of the other; or when one man is a trader, legislator, and warrior all in one, then I think you will agree with me in saying that this interchange and this meddling of one with another is the ruin of the state.

⁹Republic, trans. Paul Shorey, p. 210. (Italics mine)

Most true

Seeing then, I said, that there are three distinct classes, any meddling of one with another, or the change of one into another, is the greatest harm to the State, and may be most justly termed evil-doing?¹⁰

The state obtains its structure from the natural composition of the individuals in it. For Plato there are three natural types of human beings: those in whom pure reason reigns and for whom the natural excellence is contemplation of the eternal verities and social domination; the spirited or warrior type which is midway between the first type and the third; the type which finds its ends and pursuits in the things of the flesh or the senses.

Since all souls have three principles, i.e. pure reason, the will, and the appetites, an individual is by nature whatever nature has made the ruling principle in him. In some it is reason, in some will, and in some inferior bodily appetites.

The purpose of Plato's education is to educate the ruling class and to place the other natural types in their natural niches in the social order. The rulers will think and govern, the warriors will fight and enforce the thoughts, rules and laws of the rulers, and the mass, the individuals who exist to provide the material basis of the social order, will make and produce. Thus the discrete separation of thinkers and doers, the thinkers utilizing the warrior class for the purpose of enforcement. The curriculum which Plato would utilize is traditional Greek aristocratic education, with dialectic, or the logical process through which the thinker may behold eternal truth, added for the final education

¹⁰Republic, iv, 434.

of the rulers. Without criticizing this scheme, it is upon its surface discriminatory, for even if Plato should allow all children to enter the educational process, the child reared in the cobbler's hut would not be likely to take to such a curriculum as would the child reared in aristocratic surroundings. It follows that the scheme would operate to insure social stratification as well as to prepare the ruling class.

The question yet remains how the eternal pattern of truth, goodness and beauty shall be made effective. The answer is simply that whatever the ruling class decides upon is to be taken as the eternal truth. The law, including morals, made by mind, with right reason, with a view to preserving harmony within and between the social classes is law by nature, sanctioned by God, the author of the nature of things. In the following passage Plato answers the Sophists and makes clear his own alternative moral standard.

In the first place, my dear friend, these people [the Sophists] would say that the Gods exist not by nature, but by art, and by the laws of states, which are different in different places, according to the agreement of those who make them; and that the principles of justice have no existence at all in nature, but that mankind are always disputing about them and altering them; and that the alterations which are made by art and by law have no basis in nature, but are of authority for the moment, and at the time at which they are made.--These, my friends, are the sayings of wise men, poets and prose writers, which find a way into the minds of youth. They are told by them that the highest right is might, and in this way the young fall into impieties, under the idea that the Gods are not such as the law bids them imagine; and hence arise factions, these philosophers inviting them to lead a true life according to nature, that is, to live in real dominion over others, and not in legal subjection to them.

Cleinias. What a dreadful picture....

Athenian. True, Cleinias; but then what should the lawgiver do when this evil is of long standing? should he only rise up in the state and threaten all mankind, proclaiming that if they will not say and think that the Gods are such as the law ordains (and this may be extended generally to the honourable, the just, and

to all the highest things, and to all that relates to virtue and vice), and if they will not make their actions conform to the copy which the law gives them, then he who refuses to obey the law shall die, or suffer stripes and bonds, or privation of citizenship, or in some cases be punished by loss of property and exile? Should he not rather, when he is making laws for men, at the same time infuse the spirit of persuasion into his words, and mitigate the severity of them as far as he can?

Cleinias. Why, Stranger, if such persuasion be at all possible, then a legislator who has anything in him ought never to weary of persuading men; he ought to leave nothing unsaid in support of the ancient opinion that there are Gods, and all those other truths which you were just now mentioning; he ought to support the law and also art, and acknowledge that both alike exist by nature, and no less than nature, if they are the creations of mind in accordance with right reason,....¹¹

Plato and the Western Tradition

The Platonic formula of two-worlds, one supplying the eternal pattern to which the other must conform, entered into the Western tradition in many ways, but it was principally through the Christian movement and its theology that it became part and parcel of the thinking habits of Western man. The Christian philosophers accepted it as a welcome formula which would lend intellectual prestige to doctrine of the Church. The Church introduced a notable new feature. Instead of pure reason, the Good, or God, must be known more directly and in a more mystical manner. Therefore Christ was made the Redeemer of man, the actual incarnation of the Word on earth, and the Catholic Church was made God's direct earthly representative. Thus the Pope and the Catholic hierarchy became the intermediaries between the Everlasting and a sinful world. Thus moral authority became vested in a particular group of specially qualified human beings. Even the Protestant Reformation did not seek to

¹¹Laws, x, 889,890. (Italics mine)

disturb this formula; it only denied the sole right of the Papacy to be the intermediary between man and God. It substituted direct communication between God and the individual, or at least between particular Christian groups and God, for the main-office arrangement of the Catholic Church. God, the Supernatural, remained the pattern for moral standards.

Not only did the political theory formulated by nationalistic and dynastic groups striving to establish and maintain civil states separate from the dictates of the Papacy frame itself in this dualism, but early figures in a developing modern science paid homage to it. Thus

Francis Bacon, in the preface to his The Great Instauration, said:

Wherefore, seeing that these things do not depend upon myself, at the outset of the work I most humbly and fervently pray to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, that, remembering the sorrows of mankind and the pilgrimage of this our life wherein we wear out days few and evil, They will vouchsafe through my hands to endow the human family with new mercies. This likewise I humbly pray, that things human may not interfere with things divine, and that from the opening of the ways of sense and the increase of natural light there may arise in our minds no incredulity or darkness with regard to the divine mysteries; but rather that the understanding being thereby purified and purged of fancies and vanity, and yet not the less subject and entirely submissive to the divine oracles, may give to faith that which is faith's.¹²

Philosophic dualism, while it permeates the whole of Western tradition may be illustrated with reference to moral standards in its modern form. Otto quotes Emerson's statement:

The Times, as we say, the present aspect of our social state, the Laws, Divinity, Natural Science, Agriculture, Art, Trade, Letters, have their root in an invisible spiritual reality. To appear in these aspects they must first exist or have some necessary foundation. Besides all the reasons we assign, there

¹²Edwin A. Burt, (ed.), English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill, p. 12.

is a great reason for every extant fact; a reason which lies grand and immovable, often suspected behind it in silence.¹³

The Great Reason, the Over-Soul, is the Great Pattern to which one must repair to obtain moral truth.

In the realm of international relations the traditional conception of the standard for interstate affairs is that of natural law. The most concise modern statement of this position was the definition given by Grotius in his De jure belli ac pacis.

The law of nature is a dictate of right reason, which points that an act, according as it is or is not in conformity with rational nature, has in it a quality of moral baseness or moral necessity; and that, in consequence, such an act is either forbidden or enjoined by the author of nature, God.¹⁴

The American tradition the basic theory of freedom and morality was clothed in this dualism. The document most representative of the American independence movement is the Declaration of Independence. The second paragraph begins; "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..." The practical effect of such a formula is that whatever particular interest or set of interests which is able to make it "self-evident" that such interests should be set free, regardless of the desirability of doing so from the social point of view, thereby removes such interests and their consequences from the sphere of debate and inquiry.

The one feature common to all systems and theories which are based

¹³M. C. Otto, Things and Ideals, p. 112.

¹⁴Grotius, De jure belli ac pacis, trans. A. C. Campbell, Bk. i, Ch. i, sec. x, 1.

upon the mutual exclusion of thinking and doing is the feature of external authority. It is the necessity to go beyond and outside the confines of the social consequences for a pattern of right and wrong. But behind every use of this notion there can be found some practical purpose or interest which needs the emotional, un-intellectual support which an appeal to cosmic influences, because of man's prescientific thinking methods, gives. As Otto says,

Duty for duty's sake is a noble concept, but in practice it means blind obedience to a program outlined by some one else, who is not so blind and may not be so noble. Right for right's sake is a noble concept, but concretely it turns out to be right for somebody's might's sake.¹⁵

Plato's dividing the universe into two mutually exclusive realms of reality, one spiritual and the other material, was suggested by the aristocratic structure of Greek culture. Those relieved from manual work were free to occupy themselves in what at that time were the more congenial pursuits of conversation, the arts and government. The split in Greek society between thinkers and doers, designers and makers, those who ordered and commanded and those who obeyed and served the ends of the former, this split and its actual social results doubtless were the clue from which Plato constructed his thoroughgoing two-worldism.

This two-worldism has, at any rate, resulted in other dualisms, such as the separation of thinking and doing, theory and practice, and in education, culture vs. vocation. The modern notion of liberal education as the spiritual development of the individual, the inculcation of the "higher spiritual verities," aside from occupational education stems from

¹⁵Otto, op. cit., p. 75.

the basic dualism. Dewey in his analysis of the prevailing notion of "culture" holds its roots to be firmly embedded in the social dualism which Plato intellectualized and which became the intellectual and social pattern of Western civilization.

The liberal or mental arts such as grammar, rhetoric, literature, mathematics as a theoretical study--all of these were considered by Greek aristocracy to have special powers. As a matter of fact, they did have special powers, if those who studied them were the ruling and enjoying class, engaging in congenial social intercourse as an occupation. These were the elements of occupational education for men who already had provided for them the material basis for living.

On the other hand the mechanical arts were concerned with objects of a material nature, objects of the sensible world, and their aim was not to understand, to reason, to ponder, but merely to provide the means and instruments for the consuming leisure class and a subsistence for themselves.

There was no education for the mechanical or industrial arts in Plato's day. There was little or no intellectual content in these practical arts for the simple reason that they rested upon a rule-of-thumb, empirical method of procedure. It was not until the modern scientific and industrial revolutions that industrial and mechanical arts came to have the potential intellectual and artistic content which conversation and the governing of men had had before. Apprenticeship or empirical imitation was the mode of attaining personal skill in a given branch of the practical arts, and the result was a narrow technical skill without a scientific basis.

The result has been, even since the rise of democratic social notions and the method of science, and the decline of the notions of aristocracy and empirical method, the persistence of the basic notion of two kinds of knowledge and two kinds of education. Thus the modern dualism of culture vs. vocation. While the social basis for such a dualism no longer exists or should exist, it is nevertheless retained as the prevailing basic educational assumption.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO MORAL STANDARDS

Introduction

The thesis here urged is that there is a way out of moral conflict and social confusion for modern man. This modus operandi is possible only if both the pattern of survival of the fittest and an eternal pattern of transcendental moral truth are both repudiated as bases for morality, and democracy and science taken as the reference points for a moral theory.

The major assumption to be made is that human experience is the primary good and that the object of associated life is no other than to secure the richest and fullest possible experience for all individuals. Maximum individual self-development is possible only in a community of interests which is conscious of its primary purpose. Since blind conformity, conformity to custom and practice and conformity to an illusory eternal moral pattern are inadequate moral procedures in a free culture, the only alternative is to make moral standards experimental tools which have but one function, namely, to provide the basis for the continuous extension of common interests and purposes among men.

This alternative places man's experience and his destiny precisely where he may exercise full control over it, i.e. in his own hands. Man's religion in this alternative becomes his devotion to the way of life in which the purpose for living together is the continuous expansion of the capacity of each individual to share in the interests and concerns of his fellowmen. The interests of his fellowmen become his interests and

his interests become the aims of others. Thus the object of his religion is a continuously widening area of shared interests and concerns.

The purpose of education in this alternative becomes the continuous expansion of the individual's ability to share in a widening community of interests and concerns. In order to provide this opportunity, education must take as its major task to enable the individual to gain insight into the conflict of moral standards. Only then may the individual be said to have an opportunity to develop a consistent philosophy with which to fashion his life career.

Democracy

Democracy has traditionally included the conceptions of freedom and equality. However, the traditional meaning of these conceptions has been obscured by their connection with the eternal nature of things. As soon as the cosmos became the "friend" of the democratic belief, the necessity for man to be its friend and to continuously use intelligent inquiry in order to expand its meaning ceased. What is the basic meaning of the terms freedom and equality?

What of equality? If taken as an absolute it has no meaning. In what particular way are or should men be equal? Men are not endowed with the same bodily and nervous constitution. Men and women differ structurally and biological considerations make their social functions somewhat different. In addition to equality with respect to the law and its administration, Dewey says,

In short, each one is equally an individual and entitled to equal opportunity of development of his own capacities, be they large or small in range. Moreover, each has needs of his own, as significant to him as those of others are to them. The very fact

of natural and psychological inequality is all the more reason for establishment by law of equality of opportunity, since otherwise the former becomes a means of oppression of the less gifted.¹

The inequality of intelligence itself is not a signal for the more gifted to exploit or isolate the less gifted, but an invitation to all to participate to the limit of capacity. With respect to inequality of intelligence, Dewey says,

While what we call intelligence may be distributed in unequal amounts, it is the democratic faith that it is sufficiently general so that each individual has something to contribute, and the value of each contribution can be assessed only as it enters into the final pooled intelligence constituted by the contributions of all. Every authoritarian scheme, on the contrary, assumes that its value may be assessed only by some prior principle, if not of family and birth or race and color or possession of material wealth, then by the position and rank a person occupies in the existing social scheme.²

This idea was expressed by Bertrand Russell in "Why Men Fight" in terms which make the ability to purpose and share the criterion for participation rather than an external measure.

There are three forces on the side of life which require no exceptional mental endowment, which are not very rare at the present, and might be very common under better social institutions. They are love, the instinct of constructiveness, and the joy of life. All these are checked and enfeebled at present by the conditions under which men live--not only the less outwardly fortunate, but also the majority of the well-to-do. Our institutions rest upon injustice and authority: it is only by closing our hearts to sympathy and our minds against truth that we can endure the oppressions by which we profit.³

The other basic idea in democracy is freedom. But to postulate freedom as the aim of democratic associated life does not in itself

¹John Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration," School and Society, VI (April, 1937), 457-62.

²Ibid.

³Bertrand Russell, Why Men Fight, pp. 23, 24.

differentiate democracy from other and totalitarian schemes of associated living. Indeed, according to one interpretation of the doctrine of freedom, that in which it means to be "left alone," one such as Robinson Crusoe, alone upon a desert island, has the essence of freedom. The only obstacle to complete freedom for Crusoe, according to this view, was the appearance of Man Friday upon the scene. This notion historically is the result of the reaction to the absolutism of seventeenth and eighteenth century monarchies, but its formulation in terms of absolutism, while it may have assisted in the liberation of human capacities and talents at that time, works havoc in modern community life. It has been indicated with reference to feral children that no human freedom whatever is possible in isolation from a community of human interests, or apart that is, from participation or sharing.

Plato, the Church Fathers, Hegel, Marx, the modern absolutists, and the advocates of economic individualism have all postulated freedom as their goal. Obviously the word freedom does not explain itself nor does it give a clue, in itself, to its meaning. The fact is, it has no necessary meaning. It has always in the past meant a particular freedom "from" a particular condition or set of conditions, freedom to do a particular thing, or it has meant life in accordance with some version of the eternal structure of the universe. Life according to the nature of things itself has had different meanings, depending upon which priesthood or which interest group happened to be interpreting or translating the "true nature of things" into terms of social relations. For instance, for Plato freedom meant the individual's "staying in his place" and obeying the dictates of the wise lawgiver, his place being dictated by the eternal

pattern of "natural" social position, and the law being the result of the immediate intuition or perception of the lawgiver. For the Church Fathers, after Plato, it meant living an obedient life in accordance with the dictates of the secular prince who is supervised and sanctioned by the Catholic hierarchy, and this in accordance with the revealed nature of things; for the Renaissance autocrats it meant individual self-determination for the few and life according to the revealed nature of things for the many, the latter meaning living in accordance with established custom and tradition, as sanctioned by the Church. For Hegel freedom meant identification of one's purposes with the purposes of established institutions, particularly the state which he thought should, when erected with reference to the model of the Greek City State, be equivalent to the fullest possible expression of associated human life. Marx meant by freedom the complete identification of the individual with the citizen, the pattern of behavior to be dictated by the necessities of dialectical materialism as interpreted by the Marxist priesthood, i.e. the hierarchy of the Communist party. For Hitler freedom meant life in accordance with the dictates of national institutions as directed by the naturally superior race and headed by the chief priest, the Fuhrer. The "natural rights" school of individualism which was sponsored by the rising capitalistic middle-class found freedom in the very minimum of governmental activity and the very maximum exercise of economic talents, and this was sanctioned by an array of eternal verities, eternal rights and privileges which were thought to exist in the nature of things.

Obviously all these views of freedom stem from sources other than an empirical view of human nature and its possibilities. They all exalt

some particular interest to the station of the only interest or at any rate the overriding interest to which all else must be subordinated. They all derive their claims from sources outside of experience. In each of these schemes the individual's important goals or interests are predetermined, and the area or range within which he may exercise free, original thought in planning free and original behavior is limited to a fixed pattern. In each of these schemes some social activities are held to be inherently worthwhile, regardless of the effect of their consequences upon the experience of the individual. For Plato every man finds his freedom in doing what nature "supposes" him to do, and in reality this is derived from the old established aristocratic Greek way of life; for Christian theology, the ancient or received way of life as revealed in scripture and Church doctrine and tradition; in the case of Hegel the establishment of the national state and its organismic well-being is the supreme purpose of associated life.

The one thing common to these historical schemes is that important purposes are dictated, for some practical reason, by some interest group which has a common interest which it seeks to accomplish quite aside from the social consequences of its achievement. Some form of external authority, or some form of the dictates of the nature of things, is the sanction invoked. Freedom in each case is to be achieved only at the expense of denying that other and competing interests and purposes have any claim to expression.

What is the nature of the freedom the conditions of which it is the purpose of democracy to provide? It is the use of mind, or intelligence, in the pursuit of individual self-development. It is the freedom to extend

oneself, i.e. his interests and purposes, in such a way that his purposes are sharable by other human beings. It is the freedom to enrich the lives of other human beings as the normal consequence of the pursuit of one's own interests. In Dewey's words,

The democratic idea of freedom is not the right of each individual to do as he pleases, even if it be qualified by adding 'provided he does not interfere with the same freedom on the part of others.' While the idea is not always, not often enough, expressed in words, the basic freedom is that of freedom of mind and of whatever degree of freedom of action and experience is necessary to produce freedom of intelligence. The modes of freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights are all of this nature. Freedom of belief and conscience, of expression of opinion, of assembly for discussion and conference, of the press as an organ of communication. They are guaranteed because without them individuals are not free to develop and society is deprived of what they might contribute.⁴

Democracy and the Moral Life

A clue to the meaning of the moral life, or the life of freedom and equality of opportunity, may be found if the basic assumption be made that individual desires and purposes constitute the justification for human society. As Otto says, human life may be seen to be a "howling mob of desires, each struggling to get breathing room for the ideal to which it clings."⁵ These competing interests, within the individual and between individuals, makes choice necessary and this "the necessity of choosing, lays the foundation of the moral life."⁶

⁴Dewey, op. cit.

⁵M. C. Otto, Things and Ideals, p. 116.

⁶Ibid.

The Method of Liberating and Assisting Human Interests and Desires

If the mere, simple presence of interests and aims in conflict is taken as the basis for morality, then there is required a method of procedure, a method of judging which any individual may use in order to promote, for himself and for the selves of others, the maximum liberation and use of capacities and interests. This method is intelligence. To avoid ambiguity, intelligence is here taken to mean, (1) human beings can act with awareness of their action; (2) that they can act deliberately or purposefully, that is, act because they want specifically what the action will secure; (3) that they are not limited to action which is its own immediate incentive but can act from a desire for remoter ends the attainment of which is dependent upon the present action as means.

Intelligence is required, therefore, in order that choice be possible. The function of intelligence in morality is to make it possible for the individual, in making plans and choices, for the sake of his own experience to do so with reference to a comprehensive framework. What is the use of intelligence which renders individual choice and action moral?

Given a being, then, who is spontaneously active, whose impulses and desires conflict among themselves and with those of others, who can become aware of his actions, his wants, and the conflicting interests in which he is involved, who can manipulate the situation with reference to a projected goal, and you have a potentially moral being.⁷

The moral individual seeks to use his intelligence to protect for himself and others the kind of associated life in which there is the broadest possible range of shared interests, for the latter is the prerequisite for freedom. As Otto says,

⁷Ibid.

With these two facts before us, namely, the primacy of desires and the impossibility of satisfying all of them, we are in a position to state the goal of the moral life. It is the richest attainment of satisfied wants. To which had better be added at once that by this is meant not a settled, fixed quantum, but a progressive approximation, changing and growing with potentialities, and the completest possible participation in the appealing interests of life. Dedication to this end is the essence of the moral problem, and the fashioning of one's life in accord with this purpose is moral discipline.⁸

This estimate of the moral goal must be taken in its social or collective context, which means, "the wants of others must be included in the moral aim along with one's own wants not only for theoretical reasons, but because they actually form a part of everyone's wants."⁹

The fact that no human progress would have ever been possible had not this identification of the wants and desires of others as one's own been an actual fact does not imply that men have intellectualized this actuality and consciously used it as the basis of associated life. The fact is that men have not done so, and the result has been, as Bode indicates, the inefficient use of human capacity.

As far as the development of capacity is concerned, any form of human association, no matter how degraded, is better than none. Such association inevitably means development of capacity even if this development is lopsided and misdirected...¹⁰

But for the best possible opportunity to build a life for all individuals there is required the use of intelligence.

our judgements must be made in terms of participation in common interests...Conduct on the part of communities or of individuals

⁸Ibid., p. 122.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Boyd H. Bode, Democracy as a Way of Life, pp. 48, 49.

must be evaluated with reference to its effect on promoting common interests among men. Liberty grows as the area of common interests is widened.¹¹

Science and Democracy

The most obvious result of modern science is the profound effect it has had upon associated life. The family structure which for thousands of years was typical has now been challenged and partially disintegrated, and has been made the locus of penetrating conflict of standards. The democratic notion that the sole purpose of life is the optimum development of individual human capacity for experience and that experience is its own justification has developed as the result of science and technology. Government, which for thousands of years was military in nature is now a mosaic of conflicting patterns and practices, functions and purposes. Business, technology and industry, and trade, only a few centuries ago an inferior mode of activity to be engaged in only by members of an inferior social caste now dominates group life. The practical arts, once based upon limited routine methods and an empirical, rule of thumb way of thinking, now is science and technology, with a method of procedure which makes it possible to turn untold natural energies to the account of human purposes and wants. Science has, in short, introduced into human culture a new feature in history, namely, the continuous alteration of the conditions of associated life, with the resulting feature of the perennial inadequacy of current standards and the impossibility of ultimate and fixed moral standards. Dewey points up the effects of the operation of such standards under present day circumstances:

¹¹Ibid., pp. 47, 48.

conventionalized morals conceal from view the uncertainty which attends decision as to what is good in a concrete case, and covers up the problematic nature of what is right and obligatory. But consideration of social questions and conflicting proposals brings just these things home to us. It puts before us situations where the moral struggle is not just to be kept from departing from what we know already to be good and right, but where we need to discover what is good and right, and where reflection and experimentation are the sole means of discovery.¹²

What is most important to note here is the fact that science provides modern man with a unique way of producing truth. This, the experimental mode of thinking and doing, produces hypothetical or "operational" truth and its claim to validity in any particular case is not whether it conforms to an antecedent, external order of divined reality, but simply whether it works out in experience as expected. Predictability is the criterion of this type of truth. When new conditions arise, or new data found, scientific truths must, as a matter of course, undergo reconstruction. Reorganization, or the rebuilding of scientific truth, is not undertaken by men of science with tears and sorrow; indeed, remaking truth means more effective use, wider predictability, increased control, and is for the man of science, if not for the professor, at once a challenge, a beckoning and a blessing.

There is no longer a place in experimental science for a realm of ultimate reality as there had been previous to the modern scientific revolution. Where early science held that it was "thinking the thoughts of God after him," all that science recognizes now is the possibility of hypotheses, and these are only tentative. As Dewey says,

The idea of a two-realm scheme persisted for moral and religious purposes; it vanished for purposes of natural science. The

¹²John Dewey and James H. Tufts, Ethics, (Revised), p. 349.

higher realm which had been the object of true science became the exclusive habitat of objects connected with values that in their relation to man furnish the norm and end of human destiny. The lower realm of change which had been the subject of opinion and practice became the sole and only object of natural science. The realm in which opinion held sway was no longer a genuine although inferior portion of objective being. It was a strictly human product, due to ignorance and error. Such was the philosophy, which, because of the new science, replaced the old metaphysics. But--and this "but" is of fundamental importance--in spite of the revolution, the old conceptions of knowledge as related to an antecedent reality and of moral regulation as derived from properties of this reality, persisted.¹³

For the modern scientific view, then, there are no absolute truths, even in the area of mathematics. Plato's perfect circle, for instance, is an instrumental or operational concept, constructed by man for the purpose of aiding in getting practical work done. If modern man could find a figure which could do the work which the circle concept does in a way superior to the way the idea of the circle works, the scientific procedure would be to adopt the better notion. The ideal circle, it is ordinarily overlooked, is based upon certain time and space assumptions. For instance, it assumes a regular, plane surface. No ancient surveyor of land or grain measurer would have constructed a mathematics based upon a surface with some particular set of irregularities. Ancient inventors of mathematics constructed the sort of mathematics which would yield the greatest degree of control of quantities of materials. A best circle, thus, is the shortest line which will include within it the greatest possible area. An ancient mason, constructing a grain elevator or silo, must have been extremely interested in such a line, for it meant decreased costs and maximum utilization of available space.

¹³John Dewey, The Quest for Certainty, p. 97.

Or consider the general notion that such equations as "two plus two make four," which is generally taken as an eternal truth. What is overlooked in placing such things in a realm of Absolute Being is that the units of the data or materials which arithmetic is used to control (1) must always maintain their individual identity, and (2) remain mutually exclusive. For example, two apples and two apples, roughly speaking, add up to four apples, but this is true only as long as the apples remain apples, and as long as something new, which behaves in a new way, does not emerge when two apples and two apples are brought together in relationship under changed conditions. Thus, it would be meaningless and useless to say "two apples plus two apples make four apple ciders."

Or again, one hydrogen atom and one oxygen atom, brought together do not make two of anything; indeed, the result is still one unit, which behaves as one unit, and a totally different unit at that. The result, water, is a unit which behaves neither like hydrogen nor oxygen.

Thus experimental science repudiates eternal truth, for all that are taken for such are seen, upon closer observation, to operate, and have meaning and usefulness only so long as certain conditions exist and are fulfilled; and truth has to be altered when conditions are modified.

Dewey, in his introduction to his Reconstruction in Philosophy quotes C. D. Darlington, British man of science, as follows:

'Scientific discovery is often carelessly looked upon as the creation of some new knowledge which can be added to the great body of knowledge. This is true of the strictly trivial discoveries. It is not true of the fundamental discoveries, such as those of the laws of mechanics, of chemical combination, of evolution, on which scientific advance depends. These always

entail the destruction of or disintegration of old knowledge before the new can be created.¹⁴

What is the significance for morality of the experimental method of science which yields only operational, or flexible truths? The experimental method of science when applied in social relations to moral standards, views such as mere social instrumentalities, made, communicated and reconstructed for the sole purpose of maintaining a particular social framework. Even absolutistic moral theories must be seen to be thus, for their purpose has always been to maintain an authoritarian social structure. Even dogmatic morality has historically been tested by its ability to do its work, i.e. to maintain some particular crystallized type of social life. So it develops that the question is not whether morality is instrumental, but what kind of social life for men is best.

If democracy, as a way of life, a way of life which has for its purpose the optimum development of individual capacity and interests through sharing freely in common experiences, is taken as that to which men must pledge their allegiance, then the instrumental nature of morality must become intellectualized and conscious. Only in this way can a morality, conscious of itself and its true function, lend itself to continuous reorganization.

From this view moral truth must find its claim to validity, its sanction, its reason for being, in the social results of using it in concrete affairs.

This view of the source of morality has nothing in common with the traditional view that moral standards secure their validity from the

¹⁴John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, p. 14.

external nature of things. It applies not to an ascetic existence spent in preparation for a life hereafter as does Christian morality. On the contrary, its only point of reference is this life, this world of experience. It is a complete departure from the general view that experience and individual desire are per se forces of evil to be overcome. It makes the life of experience in association with fellow beings the ultimate category of reality. It is a complete repudiation of the sort of moral authority which finds its claim to validity within itself. In short it holds that democratic social standards are hypothetical, are operational concepts, and are contrived and reconstructed continuously on the basis of social expediency, i.e. moral truth must be consciously made and used, as tools or instruments, for the attainment of human purposes and not the reverse.

To hold that moral knowledge is instrumental in precisely the same way as any other knowledge, that its criterion or measure must be sought in the social consequences of its use, does not complete it. By what criterion does democracy measure the goodness of the social consequences which are flowing or are likely to flow from acting upon a proposed plan of social action, or a plan of action already in operation? The consequences must be such that they provide the basis for the continuous widening of the area of shared or sharable interests and concerns among human beings.

The Nature and Function of Moral Principles

The application of the scientific method to moral standards, then, renders them tools, instead of masters; instruments instead of ultimate ends. It is the very basic assumption of democracy that no completed and

finished heirarchy of good ends and goals are desirable nor possible. To make any particular human interest inherently and by nature good and to undergird it with a sanction or justification outside the arena of secular human association is to abdicate man's collective privilege to make of associated life all and anything that cooperative human imagination and effort can make of it. Thus the experimental alternative,

implies that reflective morality demands observation of particular situations, rather than fixed adherence to a a priori principles; that free inquiry and freedom of publication and discussion must be encouraged and not merely grudgingly tolerated; that opportunity at different times and places must be given for trying different measures so that their effects may be capable of observation and of comparison with one another. It is, in short, the method of democracy...¹⁵

This estimate of moral standards, while framed in conventional language, implies much more than is apparent. It implies that any and all truths or standards are instrumental and as such must quickly and easily lend themselves to reconstruction. Just as the brotherhood of the laboratory no longer recognized absolute knowledge in any sphere of scientific activity, democracy, when new conditions make its institutions inadequate to procure the development of personality, through the context of a community of interests, must eagerly inquire, re-examine, test, and reorganize its institutions. Just as men of science eagerly receive new data and actually go in search of new data and new conditions as the occasion for widening and reorganizing their hypotheses, democracy must proceed with this positive attitude in the continuous refashioning of its moral standards. Dewey has well stated this requirement.

¹⁵Dewey and Tufts, op. cit., p. 364.

In questions of social morality, more fundamental than any particular principle held or decision reached is the attitude of willingness to reexamine and if necessary to revise current convictions, even if that course entails the effort to change by concerted effort existing institutions, and to direct existing tendencies to new ends.¹⁶

At the present time most people would raise serious objections to the repudiation of external moral sanctions such as long established custom, natural law or the Word of God. To many the position would be equivalent to a complete repudiation of authority. Such objections must be considered superficial for the reason that they identify "external authority" with "authority." What is, then, the function of authority in the democratic way of life?

Adoption of the experimental method does not signify that there is no place for authority and precedent. On the contrary precedent is a valuable instrumentality. But precedents are to be used rather than to be implicitly followed; they are to be used as tools of analysis of present situations, suggesting points to be looked into and hypotheses to be tried. They are much the same worth as are personal memories in individual crises; a storehouse to be drawn upon for suggestion. There is also a place for the use of authorities. Even in free scientific inquiry, present investigators rely upon the findings of investigators of the past. They employ theories and principles which are identified with scientific inquiries of the past. They do so, however, only as long as no evidence is presented calling for a reexamination of their findings and theories. They never assume that these findings are so final that under no circumstances can they be questioned and modified. Because of partisanship, love of certainty, and devotion to routine, accepted points of view gain a momentum which for long periods even in science may restrict observation and reflection. But this limitation is recognized to be a weakness of human nature and not a desirable use of the principle of authority.¹⁷

Thus the true status of any particular moral standard is purely operational or instrumental and as such is held, even while it is being used,

¹⁶Ibid., p. 366.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 365, 366.

to be tentative, in anticipation of new conditions which for weal or woe would render the operational standard inadequate to produce the consequences which it must produce if it would conduce to the protection of the democratic way of life.

What is meant by utilizing moral precedents as instruments for analysis rather than compulsive directives for specific behavior may be illustrated. Consider the absolute known as the Golden Rule. What does it mean? Is its meaning really self-evident as its advocates proclaim? Does it apply itself in any given situation? Does a man know, just because he is a man, what the Golden Rule demands in a particular situation? Can it mean in human association that one person should actually foist upon others interests which they are not able or willing to share with him? Should the parent treat the young child as the parent would be treated? Should the traveler amongst the Borneo head-hunters wish to be the object or sharer of their interests? Can the police officer actually treat the vicious killer at large as he himself would like to be treated? It is clear that the Golden Rule in itself is apt to have no sensible meaning at all per se. But what if it be taken to mean that each one shall do his utmost in all social activities, excepting none, to promote the enrichment of the lives of others? Taken in this manner it is impossible to assume that it lays down specific acts for its fulfillment. Taken in this manner the Golden Rule is a tool with which and from which to analyze the demands of particular situations. The existence of a social structure of fixed, customary interests and expectations is precisely what is not present in a free culture, yet only under such primitive conditions could the Golden Rule be considered an absolute. Men do not know

intuitively or automatically what it demands. Where the Golden Rule is taken as a self-evident moral standard is under primitive conditions where, when "Individuals trespass, deviating from these established purposes,...they do so with the conviction that thereby social condemnation...ensues."¹⁸ To take a lock from the hair of a Crow warrior under any circumstances was the surest way to tender oneself an invitation to travel to the Happy Hunting Ground, and this was true because customary usage and long established reciprocal relations defined the content of the rule. But under present conditions one must inquire in order to be an adequate neighbor, he must think in order to determine what brotherhood demands, and the content of its demands change continuously. With reference to the taking of a lock of hair, the democratic use of the Golden Rule would certainly ordinarily leave the disposition of one's hair to one's discretion. But dozens of instances may be imagined in which the content of the Golden Rule would have to be established through inquiry. For instance, immigration officials may be led to take all of a person's locks for sanitary purposes; a child's hair, or an adults hair, may be cut off to prevent disease or physical injury. In this fashion the Golden Rule becomes a working tool, an operational concept, but the content of it must be filled in with reference to a larger good, namely, the continuous extension of common interests.

One other illustration will clarify the issue of self-evident standards vs. experimental or operational standards and illustrate that "morality must justify itself at the bar of life, not life at the bar of

¹⁸Ibid., p. 197.

morality."¹⁹ The separation by force and violence of the English colonies in America from the mother country was justified upon the proposition that according to the structure and demands of Nature all men are created equal and have certain inalienable rights such as life, liberty and pursuit of happiness or property. It would require no intellectual genius to show in terms which would be meaningful that as a matter of fact all men are not created equal except that the manner of their creation is about the same in most cases. Nor would it strain the intellectual fibers to show that men do not have and should not have absolute rights or privileges of any description. Yet the notion of inalienable rights with regard to ownership, control and disposition of both producer and consumer property became embedded in tradition under circumstances which rendered intelligent much of the actual behavior which ensued under its aegis. Life in frontier America was based upon what appeared to be unlimited resources in land and timber and the like, and unlimited breathing space. Population was sparsely distributed and the area of common interests in frontier life was extremely narrow. What one man did with his property usually had congenial social consequences if indeed it had any general social consequences at all. Conflicts could always be worked out practically within the framework of a seeming absolute property right. A man might sell, give away, abuse, use as exploitive instruments, or destroy his property and the general attitude was "that is his business." As a matter of fact, a fair case could be made out for allegiance to this absolute under the circumstances. However, the

¹⁹Otto, op. cit., p. 127.

practical social conditions which historically rendered this standard adequate did not remain the same.

Present day conditions resemble frontier conditions hardly at all. Imagine the social consequences if a large railroad line, or steamship line, or telegraph or telephone service should, upon the basis of absolute right to dispose of property, decide to cease operations. Again, for the damage upon the lives of individuals, or the reduction of freedom resulting from the maintaining of the dualism of employer vs. employee, which traditional relation derives from an absolute notion of property rights, it is only necessary to observe modern industrial relations practices.

Thus the principle of absolute individual rights, so precious historically, which were the concepts used to guide the liberation of human capacity and interests through the extension of the area of shared interests between home-Britishers and colonial-Britishers, and between colonials themselves, becomes, under vastly different circumstances, the principle of enslavement, of reduction of freedom, and the thwarting of the urge to extend the areas of shared interests and concerns. The side of the movement for independence which was intellectualized and woven into tradition was not the liberation of individuals, rather it was the absolute formula used by the Founding Fathers to lend prestige to their practical aims and purposes.

Education and Democratic Standards

Implied in the democratic view is a totally new conception of the nature and function of the school. Both curriculum and administration and organization of the human relations within the school must undergo

vast reconstruction if this view is accepted. But what is more important here is the fact that the very nature of democracy prohibits the imposition of a moral theory upon the young. What is demanded is a social situation in which the young may have the opportunity to see clearly the conflict of moral standards in the contemporary world and that they be assisted in working out the habits and ideas which constitute a consistent philosophy of life.

The following chapter will seek to indicate some of the principal implications of the democratic view for education and a different conception of liberal education suggested.

CHAPTER VII

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Introduction

If the democratic ideal of maximum participation is to be the controlling belief in education certain distinctive consequences must follow with reference to process and content. First, it is impossible to divorce the process or mode of learning from the purpose of learning. An authoritarian learning process necessarily produces an authoritarian outlook. This implies that the social ideal of democracy can only be achieved if education is seen to be social in process and content.

Next, the basic issue in liberal education is the conflict of standards. It is safe to say that until a modern youth has had the opportunity to study the conflict in contemporary culture from the reference point of the conflict of moral standards, he has not had a liberal education.

Finally, the dualism of culture vs. vocation has no place in education for democracy. The presence of two general groups of students, the book-minded and the hand-minded, rather than a cue to separate the two groups must be taken as an invitation to completely reexamine educational theory and practice. This calls for more than making the traditional bookish curriculum universal.

Education as Social

When education is seen to have the basic purpose to provide the opportunity for the individual to become a member of the larger community and to provide, in the process, a moral orientation, certain problems

arise. First, the school must become an extension, in subject matter and interests, of the larger community life. The occupations of the larger community with reference to government, industry, family life must be taken as the activities in which the young desire to participate. When life was simple and the areas of common interests limited the child was able, much as in primitive society, to participate both vicariously and directly in community life. Direct participation in the life of the home, industry, economic activity, government and other activities was easy for these were close at hand. Such is not the case today. Today the child is isolated from the principal activities of the larger community. Thus the socializing purpose of the school must be to reconnect the young individual and the community, for it is only through participation that one may become a member and thus have the opportunity for self-expansion. Dewey summarizes the social function of education as follows:

First, a complex civilization is too complex to be assimilated in toto. It has to be broken up into portions, as it were, and assimilated piecemeal, in a gradual and graded way. The relationships of our present social life are so numerous and so interwoven that a child placed in the most favorable position could not readily share in many of the most important of them. Not sharing in them, their meaning would not be communicated to him, would not become a part of his own mental disposition...

In the second place, it is the business of the school to eliminate, so far as possible, the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes. It establishes a purified medium of action. Selection aims not only at simplifying but at weeding out what is undesirable. Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead-wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse. The school has the duty of omitting such things from the environment which it supplies, and thereby doing what it can to counteract their influence in the ordinary social environment...

In the third place, it is the office of the school environment to balance the various elements of the social environment, and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was

born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment...A modern society is many societies more or less loosely connected...Each such group exercises a formative influence on the active dispositions of its members...One code prevails in the family; another, on the street; a third, in the workshop or store; a fourth, in religious association. As a person passes from one of the environments to another, he is subjected to antagonistic pulls, and is in danger of being split into a being having different standards of judgement and emotion for different occasions. This danger imposes upon the school a steadying and integrating office.¹

Membership implies a method of living with others, a method of making moral judgments. It is not modern man's privilege to be certain and secure in his moral standards. On the contrary, the larger community is the scene of several conflicting moral standards in operation. Thus, the problem of bringing the young into the status of full participation is rendered difficult. If it is undemocratic to arbitrarily impose one of these conflicting moral standards as the one which should have the dominant position, and if to leave the problem of moral standards out of the educational enterprise is equivalent to the complete denial of the possibility of a liberal education, some alternative to indoctrination is necessary. Modern man has too well illustrated the futility of attempting to achieve a rich and continuously expanding life by the use of conflicting standards. Thus in the clarification of the conflict of standards, education must fulfill its integrating office.

Education must assume the responsibility of aiding the individual to gain clear insight into the nature of his conflicting standards and the basic assumptions behind them. In addition to the conscious planning of school life so that the school becomes a place where democracy is

¹John Dewey, Democracy and Education, pp. 23-26.

applied to conduct, every opportunity must be seized upon to point up the contrasting consequences of the use of democratic standards and absolute standards. This places the primary obligation upon every teacher in American education, at whatever level, to make up his own mind as to whether he will be loyal to democracy or to dogma. It further requires that each teacher should have an education which has given him the insight and ability to provide this opportunity for the youth with whom he works.

Bode has indicated that this intellectualization of the moral problem and the conflicting moral standards involved is not only the very minimum to be expected from education which pledges allegiance to democracy, but that the school itself must be organized upon the basis of its philosophy.

If this philosophy is a philosophy of democracy, the school must undertake to exemplify, in its organization and procedure, its conception of democratic living. This is necessary, not merely to promote a better intellectual understanding of democracy, but to create the conditions for transforming democratic precepts into established habits of feeling and willing. In brief, the school must be a place where pupils go, not merely to learn, but to carry on a way of life.²

While the place of vocational interests remains the same in all democratic education, the mode of approach to such interests varies with chronological and maturity level. A brief consideration of the traditional dualism of culture vs. vocation will make this clear. To maintain that there are two distinctive kinds of education, that they have mutually exclusive purposes, that the method of thinking in the one is essentially different from the other, is to maintain in education the validity of the principle of aristocracy or some other social ideal

²Boyd H. Bode, Democracy as a Way of Life, p. 77.

obnoxious to the philosophy of democracy. It is a repudiation of democratic views of "informed and intelligent action as the aim of educational development."³ This places the development of vocational ability and interest in the same category with all other learning activities and makes mandatory the realization that all education must be socially oriented. What is more, the procedure in vocational learning must be identical with that of other social learnings, i.e. intelligence, or mind, taken in the experimental sense. To the degree knowledge is gained without reference to its social connections and implications, to the degree a vocational interest is pursued without reference to the democratic social function and purpose of the particular vocational interest, and to the degree to which the learning takes place in an empirical, rule-of-thumb manner, to this extent such increased skill and knowledge is potentially immoral and thus undemocratic. Therefore, all institutions professing to give a vocational or professional education are promoting further social conflict when they fail to frame such education in the democratic ideal. To share and to serve in the democratic enterprise requires that vocational education be thoroughly enveloped in the clarification of the moral problem as in the case of other educational endeavor. It is too often overlooked that the young prospective forester or engineer or lawyer will presently be a direct party to the conflict of moral standards, and that it is not as a man in the abstract that he will participate in community life, but principally as a worker in a particular field of endeavor. To fail to thus make vocational education social, or liberal, is to assume that

³"Body and Mind," Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, Iv, pp. 17-19, reproduced in Joseph Ratner (ed.), Intelligence in the Modern World, p. 606.

practical activities have no moral import, when as a matter of fact, it is only activity which has any social, hence moral, consequences whatever.

Moral Conflict and the Curriculum

If it be assumed that the interests and the activities in the school are to be derived from the larger community, what is to be the way in which democracy is served within the curriculum? If activities and studies have been selected with a view to promoting habits of conduct in a democratic society and the intellectualization of the meaning of democracy as a way of life,

This meaning of democracy naturally must be handled in terms of contrast with absolutism. To understand this meaning in generalized form undoubtedly requires a certain stage of chronological and intellectual maturity. Specific instances of the conflict between democracy and absolutism, however, are encountered at every level of the educative process. These will be exploited by the teacher who knows what he is about.⁴

With respect to social science, the opportunity to see the contemporary conflict between custom or theological dogma and democratic notions must be provided. Absolutes concerning social organization, race, and others must be analyzed and seen in their origins and contemporary bearings. Every individual should have the opportunity to clearly see that social institutions, judged from the point of view of democracy, derive whatever claim to truth they may set forth from the degree to which they provide the basis for the maximum self-development of all individuals. This, the democratic ideal, must find a place in any consideration of contemporary conflict within social institutions. For instance, traditional notions and practices of "free enterprise" must be judged not on a basis

⁴Boyd H. Bode, Progressive Education at the Crossroads, p. 116.

of the prestige of tradition, nor upon the historical adequacy of such social organization, but upon present effectiveness in securing the opportunity for participation for all.

In natural science the whole question of authority versus empirical testing may be made the background of study. The gradual freeing of the mind of superstition and decadent philosophical and theological dogma with respect to natural phenomena may be used as the springboard for the intellectualization of the problem of standards. The true nature of principles in mathematics and other scientific subject matter may be viewed with the aim to point up all along the line that principles are operational concepts and that optimum control is secured only when the learning in these fields is experimental and openminded. The moral aim of democracy is thereby secured in giving the individual the ability to use such flexible knowledge in widening and deepening his capacity to share in the activities of others.

In the fields of literature and art questions of standards continuously present themselves. Where "truth, beauty and goodness" are presented as eternal verities, as absolutes, the individual must be given the opportunity to gain insight into the democratic notion that truth is instrumental to getting the work of the world done, that beauty is a relative value, that art is an active process of enhancing one's appreciation rather than the essence of the absolute idea of beauty, and that goodness is a matter of the effect one's behavior and purposes have upon the experience of himself and others.

In conclusion it may be observed that only if the conflict of standards and the effective intellectualization of the democratic social

ideal are made the basic points of reference in liberal education the great hope that education may have a controlling part in the future of our civilization must necessarily become an empty dream. A return to the past in education, the appeal to authority of tradition or contemporary dogmas in liberal education renders it impotent to accomplish the task of promoting the further democratization of our culture. To view the past and its standards as merely instrumental rather than as ultimate ideals is equivalent to making morality, the good life and the good society something always yet to be created. As Dewey says,

Since we can neither beg nor borrow a culture without betraying both it and ourselves, nothing remains save to produce one. Those who are too feeble or too finicky to engage in the enterprise will continue their search for asylums and hospitals which they idealize into palaces. Others will either go their way still caught in the meshes of a mechanical industrialism, or will subdue the industrial machinery to human ends until the nation is endowed with soul.

Certain commonplaces must be reiterated till their import is acknowledged. The industrial revolution was born of the new science of nature. Any democracy which is more than an imitation of some archaic republican government must issue from the womb of our chaotic industrialism. Science makes democracy possible because of the substitution it makes possible of inanimate forces for human muscular energy, and because of the resources for excess production and easy distribution which it effects. The old culture is doomed for us because it was built upon an alliance of political and spiritual powers, an equilibrium of governing and leisure classes, which no longer exists. Those who deplore the crudities and superficialities of thought and sensation which mark our day are rarely inhuman enough to wish the old regime back. They are merely unintelligent enough to want a result without the conditions which produced it, and in the face of conditions making the result no longer possible.⁵

⁵Joseph Ratner (ed.), Characters and Events, Vol. II, p. 502.

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