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Pagan and Christian Ethics

Mr. Jaffa characterized his lecture as being the attempt of a political scientist to rid his science of its most outstanding dilemma, the problem of morals and politics. This problem stands in the same relation to political science and its allied studies as the method of inductive reasoning stands to the natural sciences. The relation is one of despair. The social sciences are not wholly impotent with respect to problems of value, for they can act as a critique of the truth or error of judgements following out of theories of value, but they cannot legitimately criticize the moral right or wrong involved in entertaining such judgements. Anthropology was able to provide a refutation of the Nazi racial theories, but it could furnish no grounds for the moral condemnation of the belief in German superiority. The social sciences must content themselves with being a laboratory in which theories about ethical values can be put to the test.

Pragmatism accomplishes a tentative solution of the problem by relegating different theories of value to the limbo of opinion, and advocating equal toleration of all these theories. This solution, however, becomes paradoxical since the principle of toleration is incompatible with several of these opinions. Catholicism and Marxism to name two, are built upon doctrines which assert their absolute supremacies over their neighbors. They both claim to be more than opinions. Pragmatism is then compelled to deny these claims to supremacy, and by so doing, it destroys the tentative solution which it originally proposed.

This paradox is not imminent in the nature of ethical theory. It only becomes immanent when all ethical theories are treated as opinions. To vitiate this paradoxical result, Mr. Jaffa investigated the claims of one of these ethical doctrines to be something more than an opinion. For his example, Mr. Jaffa turned to Catholicism rather than to Marxism, since Catholicism has, especially in the writings of St. Thomas, a more highly systematized ethics.

A condensed expression of one of the assumptions underlying the structure of Aristotelian and Thomistic Ethics is the quotation from the *Metaphysics* with which Thomas introduces his commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics*.—"Wisdom depends upon a perception of order." Order is here taken in its most general sense, as being synonymous with 'relation.' The application of relation to physics is called 'cause and effect,' its application to mathematics, 'function,' and its application to human affairs is called 'law.' Law is

sometimes used in a generic sense, but it is properly applied to ethics and politics. The perception of order in human relations can be subdivided into these two branches, ethics and politics, without prejudice to their multiple interconnections.

The science of ethics, like all others, has its proper subject matter, the passions of the soul as determinative of action. The passions are the genus of the science, the manners of acting are the species.

The truly scientific character of the *Nichomachean Ethics* is indicated by Aristotle's method of approaching the definition of a virtue. The definition first takes the form of a question, 'what are the passions of which courage, for example, is a mean?'. This question has implications which go far beyond the science of ethics itself, and these implications constitute the right of ethics to be called a science. One of these implications is that the science of ethics is a science of contraries, just as Aristotle's physics is a physics of contraries. This relation of the ethics to the physics also implies that either of the ethical extremes, the falling short of the exceeding, involves the destruction of that which the mean tends to preserve. The definition of a virtue is completed when the passions of which it is a mean, and the end to which this mean tends, both become known.

Another implication contained in Aristotle's mode of procedure and in his definitions is the architectonic structure of the science of ethics. The hierarchical classification is demanded since particular virtues are defined with reference to their end. In all cases, according to Thomas' interpretation, the end is the preservation of the subject who has the virtue. Courage has reference to those situations in which the immediately continued existence of the subject is threatened. As such it is relevant to animals as well as to us, and its end in us is the prevention of destruction to our animal nature. Temperance has reference to the preservation of our animal nature. Equity, magnanimity, and justice specifically are human virtues, and their end is the perfection and preservation of our rational nature. The virtues are valued as their ends are valued. Thus the ethical hierarchy is an image of the hierarchy of being.

It is by this parallel relation that St. Thomas transmutes the pagan ethics into a form compatible with Christianity, and by which he is enabled to ignore the heroic courage and the other heroic virtues mentioned in books seven and nine of the ethics. According to the principle of defining by 'maximum potentiality,' these heroic virtues become an anomaly for St. Thomas, and

in so far as they exceed that measure of being towards the preservation of which they tend as toward their end, St. Thomas is justified in disregarding them.

At this point the architectural metaphor which Mr. Jaffa used showed its power. The comparison of the Aristotelen and Thomistic ethics with architecture goes beyond a simple reference to the unity and order of ethical science. It has further relevance in calling attention to the strength which each element in the structure must have to sustain that part of the structure which it supports.

The transformation of the pagan ethics into Christian

ethics provides a model for the political scientists. It indicates that a speculative search must be undertaken for a principle by which a body of ethical science can be made compatible with the ends the political scientist has in mind, a principle in some way analogous to 'maximum potentiality.' The contemporary end in view is liberal democratic humanitarianism. Another consideration for the political scientist is the strength of the ethical structure to be transferred. It's conceivable that there might be no structure quite strong enough to support the ideals of democratic humanitarianism, Christianity, and capitalism.

D. REA

Lessing on Education

Problems involving the idea of God are infinite in magnitude, but man's understanding is all too finite. Reasoning about these important problems, therefore, always involves a process of shrinking down to size. The problem of how to understand revelation looms like a gigantic sphere, so large and obvious that it begs to be investigated. The difficulty is that there is no way to grasp it in our small hands. But if we can assume that the essence of this huge sphere is not its size but its shape, we can then construct a ball that we can hold in our hands. The ball can be thoroughly investigated until we assure ourselves that we understand its spherical nature. And if our assumption is correct we also understand the nature of the giant sphere.

Of course, this shrinking process is analogy. The trouble with analogy is that we can never be certain that our original assumption is correct. But it seems clear that if we once choose to reason about things divine we have no choice but to proceed analogously. There is a choice however as to which analogy to choose. Since there are an infinite number of aspects of the relationship of God to man, there must be an infinite number of analogous relationships which we may construct or select.

Lessing restricts himself to one analogy, the teacher-to-student relationship. The criticism may be made that this is less than the whole story, but surely Lessing would not deny this. He says that this is one way of looking at revelation, preferable to laughing at religion.

One way to think of the Bible is as the textbooks which God furnishes for the course of education through which He conducts mankind. Lessing provides no definition of education, but his implied definition is as follows: Education is that process whereby the individual acquires the ability to restrict his inclinations and actions to those that are proper and right, for no other reason than that they are proper and right.

If a person with no musical training sits down at the

piano with the intention of expressing himself musically, what precludes any possibility of success is the lack of restriction of his motions. Because, through ignorance of the laws of music, he is free to make any motion at the keyboard that he wishes, his action is so completely random that the sounds produced never take an intelligible form and sequence. Training in music, then, has as its end the restriction of actions to that certain limited number of motions and combinations of motions which are proper to music. But Lessing would distinguish between training and education. The primary concern of training is the skill with which the individual performs within the limits of the restriction applied to his inclinations and actions; whereas the primary concern of education is, in addition to a lesser concern for skill, the reason for which the individual submits to restriction.

The very young child submits to musical law on the assurance that immediate reward and punishment attend his efforts. The young man submits because he is persuaded that future public approval and honor attend his submission. The mature man submits because he recognizes that musical law is good in itself.

Thus, for Lessing, the education of mankind by God is a process, in three stages, the aim of which is to teach man to restrict his actions and inclinations to those which are moral, for the sole reason that they are moral. The Old Testament lesson is a coercive imposition of moral restriction, the compulsion consisting in the assurance that God punishes and rewards sin and virtue in this life. The New Testament lesson is the persuasion of man to accept moral restriction for the sake of reward and punishment in a future life. The ultimate, Age of Reason lesson is the self-imposition of moral restriction, not through compulsion or persuasion, but through the realization that moral restriction is preferable *in itself* to license.

Self-imposition of moral restriction on thought and act is the sign of maturity, the sign that a man is what it is to be a man.

GOLDWIN

Foot Notes to Sappho

I remember having read somewhere of a French text of the *Aeneid* that had its own peculiar method of stimulating the readers interest. For example, the destruction of Laocoon and his sons in the second book. The Latin runs:

Ecce autem gemini a Tenedo tranquilla per alta

Horresco referens immensis orbibus angues

Incumbunt pelago pariterque ad littora tendunt.

Then these edifying foot notes. 1. gemini: Regardez! Il y en a deux! 2. a Tenedo: Voila! Ils viennent de Tenedos! 3. tranquilla: La mer est placide. 4. honesco referens; Le poète a peur! 5. pariterque: Ils sont cote à cote!

Whether or not Mr. Abrahamson had read a similar interpretation of Sappho's *To Aphrodite* I can't say; but judging from his performance Friday evening, he's an ardent disciple.

According to Mr. Abrahamson there are two approved techniques for invoking the aid of a god. The first is to remind him that you've done him a favor in the past and that it's time to reciprocate. In the nature of things this method would seem strictly limited. The other is to recite instances when he has previously come to your aid—apparently on the principle that after a while it gets to be a habit.

Sappho chooses the latter, but is at once faced with the problem of how to address a goddess. God-conjuring is a tricky business and everything depends on the proper epithet. Sappho uses for this purpose a compound word meaning "splendour-throned"—which she may have invented herself since no other extant poet has it—and the phrase "wile-weaving child of Zeus."

Just why "splendour-throned" is somewhat doubtful, but Mr. Abrahamson suggests it may have something to do with Aphrodite's many-colored scarf. About the "wile-weaving" he has no doubt, and he quotes chapter and verse to show that the Greeks didn't either. Hesiod classes love as one of the five sons of Night—along with Vengeance, Death, Old-age and Discord. Homer took a dim view, too. For him, besides being tricky, Aphrodite is utterly ruthless.

There is the scene in the *Iliad*, after Paris' battle with Menalaus. Although one might think it was a little late for that kind of sentiment, Helen decides that this isn't the time to see Paris. But it only takes one "I'll hate you as I have loved you" remark from Aphrodite to

send her off—fast.

Here I'd like to put in a word of my own for Sappho. "Wile-weaving" may have been a traditional epithet for the Goddess of Love, but after all, Homer simply put it into the mouths of his characters. He didn't have to take the consequences. They did. But Sappho uses it face to face with Aphrodite herself. Which indicates not only a certain courage, verging on madness perhaps, but a precise knowledge of the realities of the thing. For her, love is nothing sentimental nor virginally romantic. She harps on the fact of past visitations and is prepared, indeed asks, for all the guile, the deceits, the trickeries which she knows quite clearly are a part of it all. There is no quiet or peace or calm in the entire business. Nor is it expected. It is not for nothing that the last words of Sappho to Aphrodite are to call her "my stay in Battle."

After the invocation comes a relatively long, handsome passage describing the previous descent of the Goddess to the "dark earth." Mr. Abrahamson's point seems to be that it doesn't take the poetess long to drop the theme of unrequited love for the joys of poetic description. Also he sees a large significance in the adjective "dark." It might refer to the fertility of the soil, or perhaps land as opposed to water, or even to the under-world. Then there is the problem of the locomotion of Aphrodite's chariot. The Greek word apparently means sparrow. But there are those realists who point out that two sparrows would hardly be adequate for the job.

Once arrived, Aphrodite smiled. Mr. Abrahamson says that this, too, is a stock-in-trade epithet. I get the impression of the Mona Lisa variety rather than the tooth paste type.

Next, quite sensibly, the Goddess asks Sappho three questions: what was wrong, why she called, and what did she want. The fact that there were three questions and that later the Goddess made three promises has some meaning Mr. Abrahamson thinks. The three promises are: even if your beloved runs from you, soon she'll chase you; if she doesn't want what you have to offer, she'll offer herself; if she doesn't love you now, she will in a little while whether she wants to or not. Which seems to about cover all the possibilities.

There was no question period as Mr. Abrahamson had a cold.

KEENEY

Voices in the Wilderness

The purpose of Mr. Cherniss' lecture was to present in somewhat of a chronological fashion the character and effects of the pre-socratic philosophers. As was stated, he did not intend to exhaust that character nor to propose a pattern or formula by which it could be understood in its entirety, but rather to suggest and indicate some aspects of its form and development. Mr. Cherniss hewed to this line.

But even this less lofty task is faced with the difficult problem of sources. Later philosophers in whose doctrines we find references to their predecessors are considered by the pre-socratic scholar questionable though oftentimes valuable quoters. There is in existence, however, a partially preserved book written by a gentleman called Theophrastos in which our scholars delightfully find recorded many of the opinions of the early Greek

philosophers. There are, according to Mr. Cherniss, many other sources available to the scholar which in their additive aspect are quite important. But enough of sources.

It is not the reviewer's intention to reproduce even in sketchy outline the lecturer's exposition of the successive opinions of the pre-socratics. This would indeed be presumptuous for one whose naive opinion used to be that Greek philosophy began with Plato. Those who are interested in such a reproduction would best turn to Burnet's "Early Greek Philosophy" which contains a good deal of Mr. Cherniss' lecture and some of this review. I would nevertheless like to record a few impressions that were made by the lecture and Mr. Burnet.

I was principally struck by the almost universal concern of the early Greeks with cosmology. Each seemed aware of the transitory nature of things and each seemed bent on discovering that permanent and indissoluble stuff out of which all things are made or that first principle by which all things are governed. This concern and awareness can surely be exemplified by the various doctrines of Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes and Herakleitos. Thales believed water was that stuff of which all other things were migratory forms. He is said to have imagined that the world process was reflected in the transition that came to be when water assumed its various forms, i.e. vapor and solid. For Anaximander this principle was an "indestructible, ageless, deathless" something (usually called infinity) out of which everything arose and into which everything returned. This is, as Anaximander says, "as is meet; for they make reparation and satisfaction to one another according to the ordering of time." Anaximenes thought it was air that gave life to things; an air which was boundless yet determinate and which, under varying conditions, assumed the character of water, earth and fire.

This concern with permanent stuff and governing principles arose from a view of nature as a continuous process of generation and corruption, of change and becoming, of contending opposites. Things in nature, though constantly changing as seasons do change, seemed to do so in somewhat of an orderly manner. There must then exist some underlying idea that orders change and makes it intelligible. This view of nature is best and fully expressed in the doctrine of Herakleitos. He conceived nature as a constant flux in which nothing is anything but a different degree of everything else. For him everything was one and many, itself and its opposite and "kindled according to measure and according to measure extinguished." He was consequently in need of some such stuff of a permanent nature which would pass into everything and into which, in turn, everything would pass. This stuff was Fire. "All things are an exchange for fire and fire for all things."

Unlike Anaximander, Herakleitos thought that the contention of opposites was not unjust. He says somewhere, "Homer was wrong in saying: 'Would that strife might perish from among Gods and Men!' He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; for if his prayer were heard, all things would pass

away. . . ." But this eternal contention, this unrelenting becoming takes place according to a hidden harmony which renders the world intelligible to man. The first reality is not the continual processes of growth and decay, of change and flux, of contending opposites, but that formula, that hidden harmony which governs those processes. Wisdom for Herakleitos was not the perception of the processes themselves, not the knowledge of many opposite things, but rather the knowledge of the underlying unity of the opposites. Wisdom became something apart from all, and truth is to be found in introspection.

Hence in Herakleitos as in his three predecessors we find a struggling to order and make understandable the transitory nature of things according to some such stuff or principle which is either a part of that nature (as in the case of Herakleitos) or independent of it.

The second impression made chiefly by Mr. Cherniss with the help of Mr. Burnet was the progressive development of early Greek thought. Each successive doctrine seemed to develop more fully the implications of its predecessor and to add a few of its own. This process was neither rash nor headstrong, but was continually checked for dilemmas and contradictions. To give just one example, Herakleitos made explicit the implicit virtues in the theories of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes and carried them along with his own to their proper conclusion. In contrast to or as a check against the common sense view of nature as flux and knowledge as a subjective affair, the logic of Parmenides arrived and brought to a head the everlasting problems of being and becoming, of appearance and reality. The logic of Parmenides was a direct denial that we can know anything at all about change for "since nothing but being can be, being is all that is." If anything is hot, it can not be anything but hot, in fact, it can't be anything but being. Change does not exist and the world is forever doomed to the same fate.

It was left for Plato to reconcile change and Eleatic logic, to reconcile appearance and reality, to assert reason, solve the paradoxes and synthesize the virtues of his predecessors. If he stood on the shoulders of giants, he was nevertheless "eingrosser Cagliostro." (For reasons other than Nietzsche's.)

At this point I would like to conclude with some general comments about the lecture. Though Mr. Cherniss added much information and some excitement to our already fascinating experience with Greek thought, he nevertheless confined himself too strictly to that sort of lecture that one can read in a good book. If he had been less recitative and more analytical, I think the lecture would have had greater value. Information in the sense of fact is much more easily and less precariously learned from some precious document for facts are less susceptible to misunderstanding when read than when heard. At St. John's we have a great respect for scholars, but an even greater respect for enthusiasts. Perhaps this is wrong, but I'm inclined to believe as Parmenides in that "whatever is, is," and let's let it go at that.

P. A. CAMPONISCHI