A METHODOLOGY FOR MORALISTS

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Despite the opinions of some contemporary philosophers to the contrary, there still seems to be no good reason why we should not maintain the centuries-old view of ethics as that rational discipline which seeks to guide men in their conduct in so far as this is related to ultimate goals and ideals. Ethics is thus scientific, inasmuch as it attempts to present in orderly fashion objective moral facts and universally valid theories and rules. It does not record how men conduct themselves--that is the function of such sciences as sociology and anthropology-- but seeks to ascertain the standards by which they ought to act : it is normative. However, it presents a code based not on human or divine authority , but only on considerations verifiable by human reason.

If such is the nature and purpose of ethics it is of the utmost importance that we follow, in attempting to create this science, not just any method which we may happen to be familiar with or which may have proven itself of value in some other science, but rather the one which is in itself most suitable to our material and purpose. It is moreover desirable that we understand explicitly and in detail what this method entails and that we apply it with all deliberation and flexibility. However, at different stages of a science we may use different methods. The one we pursue when, aware of our ignorance, we attempt to dispel it, may differ completely from the course we set when we try to prove to others the validity of the final position we have developed. We must then distinguish between the method of discovery and that of demonstration. We shall here concern ourselves only with the former, in ethics.

Philosophers have proposed many such methods of establishing rational systems of moral values. It would seem however that these all fall into four main types : the inductive, the deductive, the empirico-rational and the dialectical.

Since we consider the first three to be incomplete and hence misleading and inadequate, we shall only describe them briefly and mention some of their more important proponents. Their views, though unduly limited, can frequently help us to work out a more comprehensive theory. In regard to the dialectical method, we shall first sketch its historical development up to modern times : how Socrates initiated it, how Plato and Aristotle each developed it to suit their own needs, and how the medieval approach was fundamentally a synthesis and extension of those of Plato and Aristotle. We shall then outline what we conceive the dialectical method at its present state of development to involve. We shall discuss two basic methodological issues. The first concerns the main topics to be raised and their order. The second has to do with the specific means the moralist may use to develop his ethics. This we hope will suffice as an outline of a theory of ethical methodology.

Inadequate Methods

The proponents of the inductive method usually defend their position on the grounds that we can develop a science in only one of two ways : inductively or deductively. However, they say, in ethics we must proceed inductively because we have no way of deducing what is right and wrong in human conduct. In mathematics we may proceed a priori because there we are interested only in what certain ideal and arbitrary definitions and assumptions may entail. In ethics however we are concerned with the behavior of living men, whose nature and end we cannot define. We cannot therefore deduce what their behavior should be. Since moreover good and bad are relative terms whose use varies in every culture and century we can determine what they are at any particular time and place only by observation and comparison. We thus discover what ethics is by cataloging all our different acts as good or as evil, according to how men generally agree to designate them, adding thereto whatever reasons they may give, if any.

Hume gives us a classic exposition of this viewpoint[1]. He will follow, he says, a very simple method. He will by analysis ascertain all the attributes, habits, sentiments and faculties which make up what is commonly called a man's personal merit. He will then classify each of these as either good or bad, according to whether, if ascribed to any person, it implies either praise or blame. The very nature of language will guide him almost infallibly in these judgments, since the least acquaintance with it is enough to guide one in collecting and arranging the estimable or blameable qualities of men. Since

these are questions of fact success will come only through an empirical method.

We have in our own day many different forms of this approach.

One example of it is found in the work of Eugène Dupréel. For him there is only one moral science, and this is moral sociology, whose sole function is to investigate and ascertain what moral rules a given society has adopted and the reasons for which they have adopted them. For the moralist has no business telling others what they ought to do. It is only society itself which can set up moral rules and ends. "No matter which way we stretch the notion of science, we shall never be able to legitimately bestow on one moral theory rather than another the prestige of scientific truth. Our only science of human action, which is confined within the limits of the quest of strict truth, attempts to ascertain which moral values are accepted or proposed, and to understand why different consciences receive them them the way they do; but in no case does it ever propose any itself"[2]. Thus moral truths are to be discovered by the usual methods of sociological investigation[3].

The work of Kinsey is a good example of how such a viewpoint may be carried out in practice. For although he disclaimed any intention to derive value judgments from his data, he nevertheless did make them, although usually by negation and implication[4].

The contemporary analytic philosophers hold out for a quite different but still basically inductive approach, which is only a highly sophisticated version of Hume. Language, they maintain, records the common and millennial experience of the race and thus a study of it can uncover, make explicit and elucidate the major insights contained therein. This viewpoint entails a rather extreme modification of the traditional concept of ethics as the normative science of conduct. Thus Ayer has stated that "A strictly philosophical treatise on ethics should therefore make no ethical pronouncements", and again, "What we are interested in is the possibility of reducing the whole sphere of ethical terms to non-ethical terms"[5]. Many of the analysts have followed him on this point. They view ethics not as the study of how man should act, but as the study of the language used when talking about how men ought to act. Hare has expressed this position very succinctly : "Ethics, as I conceive it, is the logical study of the language of morals"[6]. As a consequence, their views about the methodology of ethics are also correspondingly different.

The proponents of the deductive method of discovering ethics hold that it is possible to achieve such a clear-cut over-all view of the nature of man and of the universe that we have then only to draw

the necessary conclusions which that entails for the conduct of men.

Descartes thought such a program feasible and would have liked to carry it out, as he considered it to be the ultimate extension and completion of his philosophy. From the sure foundations of his metaphysics and natural science he could, he thought, deduce with mathematical certainty the principles and most of the applications of the right.

This Cartesian dream Spinoza, at least in his own opinion, made real. The mathematicians start with a group of definitions and axioms and from these deduce a vast number of certain and true propositions. We call them true, says Spinoza, because they are all consistent with one another and with the definitions and axioms; they are certain because the definitions and axioms have a probative clarity. Now, the mathematicians arrive at their conclusions by seeing that there is a necessary relation between them and their principles. What counts then is that the axioms and definitions, our intuitions, be correct. Spinoza believed that he had achieved intuitions of the primary elements of the cosmic process. Since one of these is its absolute determinism, the same necessity reigns in the real as in the geometrical world, and hence the same method is valid. Since he, Spinoza, is acquainted with method and has these intuitions, he can show men what their function is and how they should fulfill it. It is, in brief, to achieve blessedness or liberty by an intuitive grasp of the divine attributes and of what they necessarily entail for the world.

In the following century Rousseau proposed to develop his moral and political ideas in a manner which also was essentially deductive. Facts are useless here, he assures us, for they only inform us of our present deteriorated condition. We must go back to man as he existed in the state of pure nature, wherein we see him as he was meant to be : free and equal, and guided only by instincts of self-preservation and of sympathy for all suffering and death. This vantage point provides the principles from which we can derive all rules of natural right. In the nineteenth century the French eclectics repudiated the conclusions which Rousseau had drawn, but they kept on trying to deduce man's obligations from their concept of him.

In this century a deductive approach of a broad sort is exemplified by the work of H. J. Paton[7]. Seeing the world as a society of spirits who all have similar intellects and free wills, he holds morality to consist in what they can all rationally and coherently desire to do. We make value judgments by being directly and immediately aware of how actions are or are not compatible with what it is rational for the whole of humanity to will. These judgments are then basically

intuitive, says Paton. It would however seem more correct to say that it is the relation of a given act to others that is known intuitively. Then, the value judgment that we make in consequence is a deduction following from this intuition and our notions of good and evil. Our moral theories are merely explicitations of what it means to be a rational will.

The modern scholastics have criticized both the inductive and deductive methods in ethics as being by themselves inadequate. The inductive can determine only how man acts, never how he should act. Inasmuch as it thus leaves aside any question of obligation it is non-ethical. For the laws which it discovers are only generalizations of fact, valuable as data, but incapable by themselves of giving any help in the guidance of conduct. Nor can a purely deductive ethics, the scholastics object, do any better. The most it can provide is a vague and empty formalism. For ethics cannot procede a priori, but must first establish a solid basis of fact. The moralist cannot discover how man should act unless he knows what kind of a being man is, what kind of acts he performs and what kind of world he lives in. The proponents of a purely inductive or a purely deductive method thus both commit the same fallacy, of considering science and method, which are analogical terms, as univocal. As a result they believe ethics can be developed scientifically only through the method of their preferred science. They do not see that although all the various scientific disciplines are similar to each other in many ways, there are among them essentially different types, that each of these types may develop its own unique methods, and thus that ethics should not be limited to some method or other just because it has proven well-adapted to another science.

Rejecting for ethics a purely inductive or purely deductive method, most scholastics nevertheless maintain that the proper manner of developing it consists of a combination of both. The moral philosopher, they say, achieves his end by the rational analysis of the data of experience and of such sciences as anthropology, sociology and psychology. Guided by his own empirical metaphysics and the lessons of history, and giving especial consideration to the opinions and theories men have held about conduct, he abstracts from these data such fundamental moral concepts as goodness, right, obligation and merit. By comparing and interrelating these concepts he can then make certain universal and necessary generalizations which serve as the axioms of the moral order. Examples would be : good and bad are distinct and contrary; we should do good and avoid evil; good acts merit rewards; evil acts merit punishment. By thus confronting experience with reason, the moralist is also able to

determine what is man's highest and ultimate good, and all of this constitutes the formal aspect of ethics. It is completed by applying it to all the acts which men may do. The moralist, it is said, here deduces the ethical value of all these different kinds of acts, by seeing whether or not they are in conformity with the ultimate good, whether or not they lead to it. Thus, according to these scholastics, to develop properly a moral theory, the philosopher cannot proceed in a purely deductive or purely inductive manner; rather, his method should be inductivo-deductive, or if one prefers, empirico-rational[8].

But now, is such a position tenable ?

While the criticisms the scholastics make of other theories seem well founded, the position they themselves hold, although it is valid up to a point, is inadequate as a description of the actual manner in which moral philosophy has developed. To say that the moralist proceeds in an inductivo-deductive fashion is misleading, and the explanations usually given only strengthen the misconception. For it is implied that the moralist works in the same way as the technological assistant who has only to gather his data, then apply his principles to them. This is admittedly a caricature, but it makes a point : the term inductivo-deductive is too abstract to convey correctly the actual growth of ethics, which has progressed less in the thinker's study than in the concrete hurly-burly of life. For the outstanding advances in moral theory have been the result of experiences in which men, agonized by pressing problems, were forced to find solutions, as when Antigone formulated the principle of the natural law in defence of her life, as when the youth of Hungary spontaneously developed and arose to defend ideals of truth and freedom. Although it is not wrong to say that there was a combination of induction and deduction used, this hardly provides an adequate notion of the tortuous groping procedure actually followed.

From this point of view the term empirico-rational is better, but still not satisfactory. For ethics is empirical in a much deeper sense than these scholastics mean, since the moral dialectic is an integral part of every people's cultural life. Sortais calls ethics empirico-rational because it is by analysing the facts of the psychological and sociological sciences and reflecting upon them that reason arrives at the fundamental moral concepts. He would have us believe that moral theory is then further developed by a deduction from these of universal and necessary laws of conduct[9]. This view strikes us as excessively rationalistic. Ethics has in the past evolved in a very different fashion and we see no reason to expect a change. Contrary to Sortais, we would hold that the primary ethical concepts

like the good, duty and right were not originally established by philosophers but were found already made in the existing religious and social codes. These concepts and their concomitant principles and rules have in the course of time been constantly reexamined and reformulated in the light of new experience. This has demanded considerable reflection. But this reflection has for the most part been the work not of ivory-tower scholars, but of men actually pressed by the problems of life and seeking to solve them, as when Socrates was led to state the necessity of observing the law when he had occasion to save his life by disobeying it. In all this the work of the scholar in ethics has been to state in technical language the insights of others, to place them in their historical and scientific context, to criticise them and to pass the results on to succeeding generations. The pioneer moralists, those who developed these insights, did so by reacting against contemporary opinions, pointing out facts or aspects that had been overlooked or misinterpreted and suggesting alternative solutions. Of course these moralists are often themselves scholars. Thus has ethics developed dialectically in the experience of mankind.

By saying that the method of ethics is the inductivo-deductive, these scholastics also leave themselves open to another objection, namely, that such a specification is insufficiently distinct. Although all methods are ultimately reducible to induction and deduction, all that this can mean is that these are the general bases on which specific sciences build their particular methods. It seems rather strange that ethics should not have developed, like other disciplines, its own procedures, so that its method can be characterised by only the most general terms. These considerations lead us to think that the only valid sense in which we can say that ethics is inductivo-deductive is not in specifying its method, but only in designating two necessary characteristics which its method, whatever it will be, will have to have.

Development of the dialectical method

Let us consider then our fourth kind of method. Since it was first developed in Antiquity and was used during the Middle Ages, it may rightly be denominated the traditional. However, it seems preferable to call it, as we have previously, the dialectical, since this indicates more clearly its predominant and unifying note. A cursory review here of its beginnings will help to make clear its main characteristics.

In attempting to stem the moral agnosticism of the Sophists Socrates proposed the dictum that virtue is knowledge. He also

suggested that although many men have neither virtue nor knowledge, they could attain to them by his method, three elements of which were induction, the maieutic process and dialectic. By induction he meant the examination of various examples and applications of an object to clarify and define what it is. The maieutic process was a kind of philosophical midwifery, in which he helped men to bring forth their ideas into the world. However, its main importance lay not in the actual bringing forth, but in the consequent examination and testing to see if the supposed seed was viable or only an empty busk. This maieutic process was dialectical, that is, it occurred between two or more people who in discussing a problem as thoroughly as they could at least clarified it even if they did not solve it.

Philosophers today still make use, in its essentials, of the Socratic method. They still arrive at definitions in his inductive, empirical fashion. They agree that they should carefully scrutinize and test any creature they may produce. Except perhaps for a few eccentrics, they admit they progress only by criticising and enlarging on their own positions or those of others.

Plato always maintained the Socratic principle that virtue was knowledge. To show how this was possible he developed his theory of ideas, in which all real knowing is a reminiscing, which eventually leads to the Good, the highest idea of all, that illumines the mind the same way the sun lights all things. Men's memories, nevertheless, must be prodded by the concrete objects of this world and by the questions of their fellowmen : the Socratic method still holds.

Plato continued to call it dialectic, but he had shifted the meaning of the term. To it he assigned, besides its primary reference to a discussion, the sense of what occurs in and results from a dialogue : the search for, and the apprehension of, the ideas. Moreover, to arrive at the ideas Plato emphasized two new processes, division (or classification) and the use of hypotheses.

Aristotle also called ethics dialectical. However, he meant by this something quite contrary to what Plato did. Dialectics, for the latter, was the highest and most certain type of knowledge; it was truly science. Aristotle on the other hand defined science as universal, necessary and certain knowledge based on definition and deductive demonstration. He thus opposed science to dialectics, which is knowledge based on opinion, and hence only probable.

For Aristotle the function of dialectics is to prepare the way for true science. It fulfills this function in two ways. In the first place it is historical and critical, thereby clearing the ground for science. It is historical in a broad sense; thus the first book of the *Ethics* records

various views concerning happiness. It is critical, inasmuch as the preceeding phase provides him with concrete points which he can scrutinize and accept or reject, in part or in whole. Hence the importance he attaches to the *aporiai*, the study of conflicting views on a problem; they act as the framework of the dialectic. The second major function dialectics has in regard to science is to provide first principles. Negatively, it shows where they are not to be found, by its criticisms of accepted opinion. It derives them also in a positive way, because demonstration must proceed from what is true and primary. These undemonstrated bases of science are laid by induction, which may take the form either of the intuition of an essence, or of the eduction of a general proposition. Induction then is not a phase of science, but of dialectics.

Aristotelian moral theory is thus consciously and systematically empirical. His heavy reliance on the *aporiai* is, we would emphasize, an empirical procedure, for the generally accepted opinions are results of generations of experience. Then too an empirical method not only starts off from experience, but it also verifies its conclusions by facts. This, states Aristotle, is how ethics should be developed. "The opinions of the wise seem, then, to harmonize with our arguments. But while such things carry some conviction, the truth in practical matters is discerned from the facts of life; for these are the decisive factor. We must therefore survey what we have already said, bringing it to the test of the facts of life, and if it harmonizes with the facts we must accept it, but if it clashes with them we must suppose it to be mere theory"[10].

In the Aristotelian sense of the words ethics is therefore empirical and dialectical but not scientific. For science deals with necessary certitudes, dialectics with the probable and possible, and in ethics we must be content "to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premisses of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better"[11]. It is dialectical too in the original meaning of the word, referring to a discussion of various viewpoints of a problem. "To examine all the opinions that have been held were perhaps somewhat fruitless; enough to examine those that are most prevalent or that seem to be arguable"[12].

A major feature of the dialectic method as it was practiced by the medieval scholastics was its bookishness; it initiated its discussions of problems from what had already been written about them by recognized masters, either in the distant past or more recently. Hence the large number of commentaries; hence also the constant reference to the authorities. However, this procedure was historically

justifiable, for it took Europe centuries to reassimilate the intellectual capital of Greece. It was also acceptable methodologically as long as the authorities were verified by experience : the decline of scholasticism was marked by a failure to refer back to reality. We should note here that the medieval moralists had available to them a new and important source of moral data. As priests they frequently had to serve as confessors and spiritual directors and so had to help to deal with the concrete moral problems of a wide variety of people; furthermore, as professors of moral theology they got further input from other confessors who queried them about every kind of problem imaginable. Another aspect was the use made, in establishing definitions, of etymologies and the varying meanings of words, for these were considered as impersonal authorities since they contain and divulge the experience of the ages. The similarity here to linguistic analysis is clear. Counterbalancing this reliance on the past, the scholastics had a highly optimistic confidence in man's reason–it reminds one of Dewey's faith in intelligence to solve the problems of the modern world. However, they gave it a much different basis : since man is through his intelligence similar to God, he should daily increase this resemblance to the deity by using it. This initial view was greatly strengthened by a practical consideration underlined by Abélard : because the authorities seemingly contradict themselves, man has to use his reason to decide what to accept. In Aquinas we find an approach that is a patent consolidation of the dialectical methods of Plato and Aristotle. It is Platonic inasmuch as it can give scientific knowledge and relies heavily on the comparison and criticism by one another of theories and facts. It is Aristotelian in its reliance on experience and logic.

Such in brief was the development of the dialectical method in ethics, which gave way, at the beginning of the modern period, to the inductive and deductive approaches. Now however we must try to describe what dialectics has come to consist of. We shall deal first with the order of topics to follow in establishing a moral theory.

The order of development

As far as methodology is concerned, the question of the proper order of developing ethics is of the highest importance. This is generally admitted but the fact remains that moralists differ greatly in the way in which they develop their theories. The reasons for this seem obvious enough. It is because they differ about the nature and function of ethics itself, about the nature of man, and about the

nature of reality in general. So, as long as men hold to different kinds of philosophy they will necessarily have different views about ethics and its methodology. Thus, depending on the general philosophy one holds to, he might use as his model of procedure the physical sciences, or the mathematical sciences, and so on, or he might alternatively consider ethics as requiring its own special approach.

From this it follows that in order to work out a moral system the first step should be to establish one's philosophical basis. We cannot develop a theory and code of conduct in a vacuum. Before any consideration can be given to what men ought to do, there are certain preliminary questions which must be answered. We have to resolve such issues as : What kind of being is man ? How does he act, with freedom or according to a determined pattern ? How does he as an individual come into existence and develop ? Is there order and design in this universe ? Is there a supreme being responsible for its existence and on whom everything in it is dependent ? To what extent can we have an objective knowledge of our nature and of our situation in this world ? These and similar related questions must be given a definite answer one way or another before a logical attempt can be made to guide man's conduct, for according to how we answer them, we shall arrive at respectively different views as to how man should act. All of which reduces itself to this, that ethics borrows, and necessarily, from psychology and metaphysics analyses and interpretations which function as the matrix of ethical thinking.

Even the most antimetaphysical thinkers confirm this through their practice. Thus, that antimetaphysician par excellence, A. J. Ayer, argued that ethical concepts are unanalyzable pseudo-concepts, and that there is no way one can determine the validity of any objective moral values. Such views however clearly result from his particular nominalistic interpretation of nature and of our knowledge. With his different world-view, on the other hand, Dewey rejected such doctrines and held morality to be relative but objective.

Since his general philosophical position determines largely what his moral theories will be, every moralist has to take great care that he has an adequate and comprehensive metaphysics. Each one of course has to make his own decision about what kind of metaphysics satisfies best these criteria. Let me simply say that I have found the Aristotelian tradition of classical realism the most objective and useful. Viewing the world as made up of different kinds of beings, each with its own characteristic set of qualities, potentialities and tendencies but all forming together an orderly, intelligible universe, this tradition provides a solid basis for a rational morality. To the extent, then, that it provides a factual and reasonably complete

interpretation of reality, the method implied by it for ethics will have to be accepted too by moralists of different metaphysical persuasions.

After assessing the adequacy of his general philosophical viewpoint, the moralist has first of all to take up the question of ends. The reason, as Aristotle noted, is that every act is done in order to achieve some good. Thus, every act has an end and the ends that we seek are what determine how we shall act. It will then be of crucial importance for the moralist to distinguish as well as he can, among the various ends which men do in fact seek, which are proper and improper, higher and lower, necessary and merely desirable, objective and subjective. Only in this way, by studying the whole range of possible ends and determining which ones men ought to follow, can the moralist provide valid and adequate guidelines for the conduct of life. Of the various questions which arise here, the most important of all is whether or not men have any objective ends. For if it can be established that men do in fact have certain ends of their very nature, this will make possible a morality that is universal and objective.

On this matter also Aristotle provides an important insight. The main good and end of every kind of thing consists of performing its own characteristic functions. There is no reason to consider man an exception. Thus, by determining which actions and functions are characteristic both specifically and generically to man we can thereby establish a certain number of objective ends. We have other ways too of determining objective ends. One is by determining the different sorts of innate tendencies we have; to each one there will correspond an objective end. Another would be to determine the different kinds and levels of needs that men have; the satisfying and the satisfaction of them would constitute natural ends. Yet another way is to study how men develop and to determine what are their potentialities and how they can achieve a broad and harmonious fulfilment of them. In all this, we should further note, scientific psychology, sociology and anthropology may supplement philosophical analysis considerably.

To achieve effectiveness in our lives, that is, to live morally, we have to integrate our acts into a coherent whole. In turn this is possible only inasmuch as all the ends which we seek can similarly form a unified coherent whole. This means then that we cannot just decide on various unrelated ends and then seek to achieve them. Rather, after we have established what are the main proper ends for man to seek, we must hierarchize them. This is a simple enough matter in regard to many since those that are primarily means to

others are clearly subordinate to them. A more difficult problem arises when we come to rank those various series of means-and-ends. Let us simply note that in such cases our value rankings will be a function of our metaphysical vision of the universe.

Since the function of ethics is to guide conduct, after establishing the ends that we ought to seek and their hierarchy, the moralist must consider the means through which we achieve those ends, namely our acts. First, the moralist will have to have a clear analysis of how and why we act the way we do. For this he will rely largely on the work of the psychologists, both philosophical and scientific. To it he will add his own analysis of the effects of different sorts of circumstances of the acts on the agent's voluntariness, freedom and responsibility.

The hierarchy of ends having been established and the means to achieving them having been considered, the next logical step is to take up morality itself, the relation existing between our ends and our acts and whereby these acts are denominated good or evil. Here the ethician will also have to make clear the distinction and the relations existing between moral, ontological and physical goods and evils. Another exceptionally important question that arises here concerns the difference between objective and subjective morality, which in turn leads to the issue about the degree to which objective morality is relative. In this way, we may further note, the moralist is laying the foundation for that art of ill-repute, which nevertheless is so necessary, which used to be known as casuistry.

Since we have various ends towards which we ought to tend, and since some acts are means to reaching these goals and others are not, the next problem for the moralist will be that of the moral laws or rules : the need for them, their nature, their functions, how they can be established and how they ought to be applied. Here let us simply remark firstly that despite the popularity nowadays of situationalism and of its denigration of moral rules, men still need a code of moral laws. It is a matter of psychological necessity. Even a professional moralist would have a hard time living a moral life from day to day if he had not learned a convenient summary of the main kinds of acts that should be performed and avoided. Secondly, the moral laws will have to be formulated in different degrees or on different levels of specification. The first and broadest of all moral rules, that we ought to do good and to avoid evil, is a self-evident precept that we derive simply by a consideration of the fact of ultimate ends and of the notions of good and evil. The other moral rules are simply applications and specifications of this general principle. We formulate them by analysis and interpretation of the various natural inclinations and ends which we have previously established.

To complete his theory on right living the moralist will also have to discuss the various consequences that follow from what he has taken up : vice and virtue, conscience, guilt, responsibility and obligation, rights and duties. The development of these ideas will of course take place along with the others as it becomes possible, and needed.

Such, we hold, is the proper order of working out a moral theory. It is the order made necessary by the nature of ethics and of human behavior. For, if man is a free, end-seeking rational animal as he has traditionally been conceived, then to establish valid guidelines for his conduct we have to procede as we have indicated by establishing the goods and ends that we ought to seek, and then determining how we achieve those ends through our acts. In the Aristotelian tradition the primacy of these notions of good and end has generally been admitted. Unfortunately, even in that tradition, the methodological implications of that primacy have frequently been ignored or overlooked. Perhaps the most outstanding illustration of this is the widespread use of the claim that "the end never justifies the means," just as though it were a literally true, self-evident proposition.

The dialectical vehicles

Earlier we sketched the rise of the dialectical method in antiquity and the Middle Ages. By appropriate use of the developments of modern science and philosophy, we can now give a much more explicit, rich and adequate formulation of it in terms of the various means that the moralist can use to establish his theories.

The first and most obvious type of these means are facts. For here we must accept the position taken by Aristotle. We saw earlier how conscious and thoroughgoing was his empiricism in moral philosophy. This was not a mere bias, but a well-grounded perspective. As he pointed out, ethics deals with life and so must start off with the facts about it. Hence even though it is not an exact science, we must still seek to make it as objective as possible, and we do this by first of all ascertaining as well as we can all the pertinent facts. These of course are of various sorts. Some will be borrowed from philosophical psychology and metaphysics; others will be more specifically ethical data, such as the moral principles which men apply when they find themselves in such and such circumstances; others yet will be the actual values and the opinions regarding values which men entertain, which can be ascertained through the polls and other research of sociologists and psychologists. In this area an analysis of literary works can frequently be of use too.

Common opinions about moral matters are also used by the moralist as means to establish his theory. Once he has established as a matter of fact that certain opinions are held, he then goes on to consider their validity. He cannot lay them aside as irrelevant, because their practical importance is great. His science is not the most precise; he cannot, like the mathematician, rely on clear deductions; nor can he, like the physical scientist, base himself on minute measurements; in many of his problems a multiplicity of factors create much confusion, so that the determination of the truth is often consequent to a certain flair, to insight, which may come at seemingly unlikely moments. Hence it is that the opinions of men may embody in various degrees the true solution of a problem. Whence also the necessity, for the moralist, to advert to these opinions, for even the most foolhardy of them reflect some smidgen of the truth, although in practice we can afford to neglect many of them after a cursory examination.

Language analysis is a third means used to develop moral doctrine. It includes a wide variety of procedures. It may refer to searching through one's language to find the names of the virtues and vices, as Hume suggested. It may mean the study of how language is used, to determine thereby the meaning and definitions of ethical terms, in the manner of Hare. It may involve an analysis of the maxims and sayings current in a language to uncover in that way the ethical principles accepted. The basis of all such analysis is the fact that language epitomizes in itself the experience of past generations, because it is our only practical medium of communicating that experience. Thus whenever a new insight into reality is gained, a new term or a new use of an old term may be introduced into the language to tell others about it. If this insight has some validity, the use of the term expressing it may spread and become accepted. Later on, when these terms have thus become imbedded in the language, and so perpetuated, but usually also obscured, the moralist may then analyse this language to locate these various insights, which, when found, he can subject to a more philosophical type of analysis to make them sufficiently precise and useful.

The moralist also makes use of the positive sciences, but only as ancillary means. For he has at his disposal the philosophy of man and of being, and these, together with the data of ethics itself, provide an adequate base on which he can build a system which is complete as far as principles are concerned. However, as a practical philosopher he must apply these principles and laws, and it is here that the positive sciences are of use. First and mainly, they fill in or clarify many details which the moralist has to know to indicate the correct

and full solution of many problems. Secondly, their studies may indicate to the moralist many specific problems which he either may not have suspected or which may have arisen with changing circumstances. Thus, anthropology provides much valuable information regarding the family, monogamous and polygamous. Psychology, by its study of personality structure and of reflexes, often renders clearer the etiology of much behavior which previously was either ignored or not too well understood. Sociology and political science determine more quickly and accurately for the moralist those conditions which are important factors in concrete problems of social ethics, such as the necessity for modern corporations to spend large sums to advertise their products; or again, the conditions which may create new problems of conscience for those individuals living in totalitarian societies : the citizens there face problems whose correct moral evaluation will depend to some extent on a knowledge of the sociological and political forces at work, for these determine how far co-existence and co-operation with the authorities are possible.

Moral philosophy also makes use of pragmatic verification. However, the legitimate employment of pragmatism in ethics cannot be along the lines laid out by Dewey, to wit, it cannot mean that the means determine the end, that ethics should reject all ultimate ends, or that there is no objective hierarchy of values. Ethics nevertheless is pragmatic in two other senses. First, pragmatism is a corollary of ethics' being teleological and empirical. After determining what is man's major objective purposes in life, ethics must then proceed pragmatically to discover which acts are good and which are evil, that is, it must establish on the basis of the experience of mankind which acts are means to these ends and which are not. Our traditional catalog of virtues and vices is thus quite pragmatic. Moral philosophy is also pragmatic in its use of a secondary evaluative criterion of ethical systems. All moralists claim the application of their doctrines will make men happier; the degree then to which these doctrines achieve this or make it impossible will be a measure of their truth, for we judge things by their fruits. On this basis, we can easily judge wrong such views as social Darwinism, individualistic capitalism and the various forms of totalitarianism. However, the pragmatic will necessarily be only a secondary criterion since we often cannot determine with precision the efficacy of means to an end just from a consideration of concrete results because there are uncontrolled factors also at work.

Consistency is another means of verifying and of developing ethical theory. As a manner of verification it is of particular

importance in ethics because pragmatic verification there is so often unsatisfactory and incomplete. The moralist then perforce judges theories by their logical consistency. For as truth is necessarily one and cannot contradict itself, any doctrinal structure, once it has been set up, can be evaluated to some extent on this basis. This applies especially to ethics because of the large part which dialectic plays in its formulation. In this sense however consistency is only an internal and formal type of verification. What is of greater importance is that it is used in a more material way in the actual development of moral theory. What ethics searches for is an integrated, harmonious and efficient set of means to the ultimate end. The moralist then must uncover which means objectively are consistent with this end and with each other. Thus consistency under both these aspects is his necessary guide.

Extending, so to speak, the limits of consistency gives the moralist another means of making and evaluating theories, which we may designate as interdisciplinary compatibility. For, every ethical system is a function of a philosophy. In reference then to any philosophy, that moral theory is best which is the most compatible, the most consistent with that philosophy. But this indicates only a relative value of this moral theory. A more absolute evaluation will have to consider not only this, but also the compatibility and consistency of the ethics and the philosophy themselves with common experience and the other sciences. Thus that moral theory will be best which will flow from the philosophy that is the most satisfactory explanation of the world as a whole, and which will also take into account most adequately all the pertinent data provided by the sciences of man, especially psychology, anthropology and sociology.

The formation and the consequent acceptance or rejection of hypotheses is yet another means of developing ethics, as necessary here as in the experimental science. Good examples of this may be found in Aristotle : his acceptance as hypotheses of the current opinions regarding happiness, the virtues and the vices. Thus in regard to happiness he distinguished three arguable positions : that it consists of a life of pleasure, of honor or of contemplation; and he established the correct one both directly and indirectly, by showing that the first two were insufficient and that the third was the fulfillment of man's natural function.

Another characteristic means used in constructing moral theories is synthesis. Here, synthesis does not denote a mathematical deduction, nor is it merely a unified treatment of the problem. It signifies rather an organizing, an architectonic synthesis, an ordered systematization of human values. These cannot be deduced in the

geometrical sense of the word, nor are they found as such in nature. They are the insights and opinions which men have in reference to what is good and evil. Ethical synthesis consists of defining, comparing and judging these values, in separating the real from the illusory, and in ordering these real values into a hierarchy, according to their usefulness and necessity. This is done by evaluating them in the light of the ultimate end, on the basis of their consistency and compatibility with it. Such a synthesis is thus deductive, but only in an analogical sense. It is not the strict mathematical type of deduction, for although its conclusions are necessary, they do not exclude the possibility of other equally good or bad acts. Consider what occurs. We know our ultimate end. Someone proposes some particular object as a good. We investigate to see whether this object is in any way incompatible with the end or with the order of means to the end. If it is not we say it is morally good and we relate it to other values in our hierarchy. If it is, we say it is evil and we exclude it from our system. We have gone from the end to the means for the end; these are related like cause and effect, we have then deduced in an analogical sense, the morality of the proposed act from the end. Thus, because many different means lead to the end, it is possible to relate and order this wide variety of means into a comprehensive synthesis of values.

We come finally to the major means of developing ethics : dialectics. We have seen how it has been used since at least the time of Socrates and what we mean by it. It is that method of seeking truth which proceeds by comparing, criticising and controlling by each other the various facts, theories and opinions which men have held in regard to each problem. It is especially necessary in ethics which is a practical science and thus depends more for the solution of its problems on insight than on systematic deduction (as in mathematics) or on experimentation (as in the physical sciences). It is moreover the thread which binds and unifies the uses which the moralist makes of all these other means. Thus he starts off in every problem by trying to ascertain the facts and here already he employs the dialectic method : by a continual comparison of these facts he is able to locate lacunae or errors in them by their lack of consistency. On the basis of these facts he is then in a position to criticise the various theories and opinions entertained for their interpretation. In so doing he may himself arrive at a new insight into the problem, which he may then propose as a new hypothesis, to be verified pragmatically if possible, to be checked by its consistency with the facts, with the more plausible theories and with the whole ethical system, and to be then in its turn inspected and criticised by the

other moralists of the philosophical community. As this dialectical investigation continues, this insight may be either accepted or rejected, but ordinarily it will, by a greater emphasis on this point, by a deemphasis of another, by the discovery of new aspects of others, be subtly transformed and gradually incorporated into the tradition. Dialectics is thus a primary condition of progress. By it the ethical system remains open and hospitable to all new truth and growth. If all this is so, we are then justified in characterizing the whole procedure as dialectical.

We can now see why the traditional, dialectical method remains superior to all others. The basic reason is that it subsumes the other methods as aspects of itself. It thus has all their advantages and can transcend their inadequacies. It is also the most objective; that theory is the most objective whose bases and conclusions best agree with the facts, as well these may be ascertained; but the purely inductive and deductive methods arbitrarily predetermine that they will ignore certain whole areas of facts; the dialectical method on the contrary considers arguments drawn from any phase of experience and thus remains the closest to the whole of reality. In this way it is also the most open; based as it is on solid foundation of insights into the nature of reality, it can readily absorb any new, founded insight into that same reality. It can do this because it respects the analogical character of reality and of our knowledge of it; for we must always vary our method according to the kind of objects we are studying, the viewpoint which we take and the type of necessity binding said objects; hence it is a methodological error in ethics to proceed inductively, as though we were studying completely determined physical phenomena, or deductively, as if living human beings were mere ideal constructs which never vary; the traditional moralists, seeing man as a free, end-seeking animal, developed a method, to determine how he should act, which allows full play to his ingenuity in discovering the indefinite variety of ways in which he can reach happiness, but which also takes into full account the limits imposed on him by reality. Thus, finally, the dialectical method is also normative, in a specific and adequate manner. Ethics is the philosophical answer to man's most pressing problem : How should he act ? The rationalists' answer, though highminded, is narrow and leaves many areas uncovered; the empiricists, if they do not simply deny the problem, cannot, with their assumptions, escape from the web of a relativism which makes impossible any real obligations and rights; but the supple and comprehensive method of dialectics provides us with what still remains the most complete and satisfying approach.

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NOTES

[1] *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section I, end.

[2] "De quelque manière qu'on torture l'idée de science, jamais on n'en tirera le moyen de faire légitimement bénéficier du prestige de la vérité scientifique, une morale plutôt qu'une autre. L'unique science des actions humaines, confinée dans la recherche de la stricte vérité, s'attache à connaitre les valeurs morales reçues ou proposées, à comprendre la raison de l'accueil qui leur est fait par les consciences, mais elle n'en propose en aucun cas." *Traité de Morale*, Bruxelles, 1932, p. 281.

[3] For a fuller discussion of his approach, see my article "The Sociological Approach to Ethics" in *Metaphilosophy* IV, 1973, 298-320.

[4] A. C. Kinsey, W. B. Pomeroy and C. E. Marten, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Philadelphia, 1948, see especially pp. 199-203, 305-6, 562.

[5] A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, New York, 1936, p. 151-2.

[6] R. N. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Oxford, 1952, p. iii.

[7] In *The Good Will*, London, 1927.

[8] Cf. G. F. Sortais, *Traité de Philosophie*, Paris, 1922, v.I, p. 759-60. Sortais is one of the scholastics who has dealt most systematically and thoroughly with the problem of methodology.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 759-60.

[10] *Michomachean Ethics*, 1179a 16. Cf. also 1098b 9.

[11] *Ibid.*, 1094b 20.

[12] *Ibid.*, 1095a 27.