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Source: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1981), pp. 187-207
Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2709316
Accessed: 07-05-2018 09:04 UTC

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ARISTOTLE'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL ETHICS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO MODERN PROBLEMS

BY KURT VON FRITZ

For a considerable length of time the theoretical foundations of ethics—in its practical application called morals—have remained an unsolved problem. There was no problem, as long as practically everyone in the Judaic and Christian world firmly believed in God. What God had ordered was good, what He had forbidden, was bad; and the one was good *because* God had ordered it and its opposite was bad *because* He had forbidden it. No further questions had to be asked.

The problem arose in the middle of the nineteenth century when the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach through his book on *Das Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence of Christianity) and his lectures on *Das Wesen der Religion* (The Essence of Religion) undermined the belief in the reality of God among a rapidly increasing number of educated people by trying to prove that the belief in God was an illusion: the outgrowth of an unconscious desire for something to guarantee the stability of the social order and of the whole world.

As a consequence of this rapidly spreading unbelief the question of what could replace the belief in God became urgent because the educated nonbelievers were afraid that if their own inner disposition should spread to the lower classes the latter might fall into complete moral anarchy.

The first result of the consequent search for a substitute for the belief in God as a foundation and support of ethics and morals was the so-called *Wertphilosophie* (philosophy of values) developed by the German philosophers Hermann Lotze and Heinrich Rickert. Their fundamental thesis was that values *gelten* (are valid), but do not exist (*sind nicht*). They derived what appears at first sight a rather strange thesis from the distinction of two fundamentally different kinds of laws: natural laws and moral laws.

1. Of the natural laws it can be said that they *are* (*sind*: exist) in as much as everything that occurs happens in agreement with them, so that one can say that all actual occurrences obey these laws. If we discover that certain events do not obey these laws, it follows that the relevant natural laws had not been sufficiently known or correctly formulated and that their formulation therefore needs to be corrected.

Since every event happens in agreement with natural laws, our knowledge of them enables us to predict future events. If such predictions come true, the natural law on the basis of which the predictions have been made, is ''verified.'' If they do not come true, it is ''falsified'' and its formulation has consequently to be corrected. But the general truth of the statement that natural laws *are* is not affected by the fact that occasionally their formulation may have to be corrected.

The case with moral laws is entirely different. It has always been difficult to make predictions on the basis of such laws, for even at the time when belief in God was nearly universal His laws were by no means universally obeyed. On the other hand, the fact that they were not always obeyed was not, as in the case of natural laws, a reason to correct them. Quite the contrary, for they were given by God. Hence, though they *were* not always actually obeyed they *ought* always to be obeyed. Such is also the intent of the statement of the originators of the ''philosophy of value'' to the effect that moral principles or moral values *gelten* (are valid), but do not exist. However, this alone makes it clear that the ''values'' of which the ''Philosophy of Values'' speaks are nothing but God's commandments without God's authority supporting them.

But what is the meaning of the statement that values are valid if the source of their validity, the authority of God, is denied without being replaced by something of approximately equal power? The change in the nature of the foundation also had practical consequences. Even when the belief in God and his commandments was still practically universal, the motives of those who obeyed His commandments or appeared to do so were frequently questioned. Was their dominant motive sincere love of God or fear of punishment in another world? The number of those who obey God's commandments purely out of sincere love of God had always been rather small. In view of the many consolations offered by the churches the fear of punishment in the next world could, so to speak, always be postponed until the last moment. It is therefore not surprising that the fear of secular consequences, viz., punishment by the civil authorities and the loss of the respect of their fellowmen, was a more powerful inducement for many than the true religious motives. Unlike God, human beings can be deceived. So there arose the temptation merely to *act* the pious man and under this cover to pursue less pious aims. As a consequence the problem of the fully conscious and the half-conscious hypocrite, the Tartuffe and the Ornifle, has always existed, even in times when the belief in God was still pretty much universal.

The problem became much worse, of course, after the belief in divine sanctions had disappeared and was replaced by a belief in the ''validity'' of moral values without external support. For some time it became almost a kind of sport among young people to ''unmask'' those pretending to act in agreement with ''valid'' principles because they believed in their ''validity,'' and to suggest that in actual fact the actions of such people were determined by other, mostly rather shabby, motives. The confusion was increased by the fact that by now the belief in one common law, ordered by God and valid for all, had been largely replaced by the belief in different and mutually conflicting ideologies, and that the adherents of these various ideologies tried to "unmask" each other, everyone vehemently contending to be more "honest," to act from "better," "more decent" motives than the others. In fact none of the various parties was able to point out clear and generally convincing criteria by which the superiority of one faith over the others could be established, nor—what is still much more important—could they show by what means it is possible to determine clearly who is really sincere in his professed faith and who adheres to it only because, by doing so, he hopes to gain personal advantages. It is not surprising that in the absence of convincing criteria the dispute between the different groups not infrequently breaks out into violence, which only through the application of counter-violence can be prevented from leading to a complete suppression of all freedom of expression.

The confusion created in this way has, however, also led to a development in an entirely different direction. Max Weber as a student had been very much impressed by the teachings of Hermann Lotze and Heinrich Rickert, and all through his life he continued to look upon them with great veneration. But when later he became an academic teacher he found himself confronted with a different problem. He found that many of his academic colleagues adhered to very different sorts of ideologies: conservative, liberalistic, nationalistic, socialistic, and others, but that every one of them believed he was able to prove "scientifically" that his ideology was the true one. This claim appeared to Weber unfounded. In examining the alleged proofs he came to the conclusion that it is impossible to prove the correctness of an ideology "scientifically." All that science can do, he contended, is to show on the basis of previous experience what the consequences of certain actions in all likelihood will be. If then a man who in this way has been enlightened about the probable, but often nevertheless unexpected, consequences of certain actions or decisions, wants to avoid these consequences under all circumstances, his own actions will be determined by the scientific instruction he has received. However, if he is prepared to accept these consequences in view of a larger aim that appears still more important to him, science as such is not able to give him any further guidance. He must make a free decision as to what principle or, as Max Weber also sometimes expressed it, which demon he wants to follow.

The most important change that occurred in the development of Max Weber's theory was the replacement of ideologies by the more general notion of "values" and the concomitant demand for a "value-free science." *Die wertfreie Wissenschaft* became the predominant slogan which is still accepted nearly everywhere. Yet, with all due respect to the intellectual genius and moral integrity of Max Weber there are certain weaknesses in his much admired theory. Some of these revealed themselves in personal applications he made of it in unusual situations. For example, in a letter written to a friend, while under the impact of the terrible defeat suffered by Germany in the first World War and of the way it was treated by the victorious allies, Weber exclaimed that for the sake of Germany he was prepared to enter into a pact with the devil. Obviously, as the expression of a temporary mood, this must not be taken very seriously. There can hardly be any doubt that if Weber had lived to see the national-socialist regime in action he would not have entered into a pact with the nazi "devil," but would have put up his utmost resistance, for both intellectual and moral reasons: for intellectual reasons because he would have foreseen what consequences the victory of this regime was ultimately bound to have for Germany; for moral reasons because of the realization that in the long run it is never good for a cause to enjoy the support of the "devil," a truth that has been rather profoundly illustrated in a novel by Maximilian Klinger, a friend of the young Goethe, which unfortunately is now completely forgotten. Obviously the choice of a "demon" to follow when science is unable to offer further guidance, is subject to certain restrictions. So the question that arises is where to find the criteria for these restrictions.

But the universally admired theory of Max Weber has still further weaknesses. It is clear that enlarging the demand that science be kept free from the influence of ideologies to the demand that it be kept free from "values" opens the door exactly to that which Max Weber intended to combat by all means. If there is a free choice among conflicting values all of which contend to be supreme there arises the danger that this freedom of choice will not remain restricted to "values" already universally recognized, but will incorporate as well the freedom to define or posit what is to be considered a "value." And that is what actually happened. The claim was raised that it was desirable and necessary to "create" values, not in the sense of the realization *in fact* of what had already been acknowledged as value *in theory*, but in the sense of positing new criteria as to what was or was not to be considered as value. With this claim all objective limits were abolished.

The fact is that Max Weber in certain concrete cases said that it was his conscience that forbade him to follow a certain direction. But what does this mean as long as the origin and nature of this "conscience" is not more clearly defined? Here too the confusion arises from the choice of the word "value" to designate the guiding principles of human action: a heritage from the philosophy of Lotze and Rickert, who had used the word as a replacement of God's commandments without God's authority which had supported them. To clear up the nature of this confusion a book with the title *Aristotle and the Problem of Value* by the American classicist Whitney J. Oates—later Professor of Humanities at Princeton University—is especially useful. In that book Oates repeatedly expresses his amazement over the fact that Plato and Aristotle continually talk about the *ἀγαθόν*, i.e., the "good," but appear never to have asked the question what a "value" is, though without this notion, in his opinion, it is impossible to determine what "good" is. We see here a clear example of the circular reasoning that has prevailed since Lotze and Rickert. What is good was once determined by God's commandments, based on His authority. When the belief in God was no longer universal, His commandments were replaced by "values" considered "valid" without God's authority. This philosophy was accepted by Oates so completely that he could not understand how anyone could speak of "the Good" without speaking of "values." However, since the ancient philosophers had never believed in the commandments of a personal God, they naturally felt no need to replace them with "values."

On the other hand, it is not at all true that the ancient philosophers did not have the notion of "value" or that they made no effort whatsoever to find out the function of values in the order of the world in which we live. Aristotle uses the term *ἀξία* for the concept of value, and speaks—like the moderns—of a "monetary value" (*ἀξία ἥ νομίσμασι μετρεῖται*), pointing out at the same time, however, that not all values can be measured in terms of money. Of these values he says—also in perfect agreement with the moderns—that they change, depending on supply and demand. He adds that this is true not only of monetary values but also of other kinds. In periods, for instance, of apparently assured peace, the military virtues and abilities are usually little "valued," while in times of acute danger to the country their "value" rises rapidly. The value of an object or of a quality consequently is determined by the esteem which it enjoys: a fact which can be observed at all times and in the most different fields. A striking modern example in the figurative arts is the fate of the painters and paintings of the so-called impressionist school. . . . While they were living those who did not have independent means (among them the initiator of the impressionist movement and one of its very greatest representatives, Camille Pissarro) were often in danger of starvation. Now, after a real connoisseur, Julius Meyer-Graefe, has drawn attention to the quality of their work and, by his persistence, has succeeded in making them famous, their works are sold at fantastic prices. On the other hand, the "works" of a charlatan who manages to find a promoter who understands how to propagandize efficiently for him, may be sold during his lifetime at very high prices; that is, they represent very high "values." Though there is undoubtedly something that may be called the objective quality of a work of art, the number of those who have sufficient appreciation of it to stand up for it independently of the judgment of others is so small, that the recognized and marketable "value" of works of art will always depend on changing fashions.

The ancient Greeks, therefore, were obviously wise in refusing—or rather, in never even being tempted—to choose as fundamental for their ethics something so unstable, so subject to changing fashions as "values." Looking at the problem from this point of view it appears self-evident that the answer to the question of what is ultimately good for man must be found directly in the nature of things. Whether it is good for a man's health to drink concentrated sulphuric acid cannot be determined by means of an arbitrarily chosen "system of values."

For Plato the ultimate criterion of what is good for man was not the commandment of a personal god, but the impersonal idea of the Good. To come as near as possible to a full insight into the essence of this idea and to orient himself by it in all his actions and attitudes ought to be the aim of every human being, for this is in his own well considered interest.

Aristotle in his later life renounced Plato's theory of ideas. He therefore was compelled to look for a different criterion by which to measure what is ultimately good for a human being. In order to find such a criterion he carefully studied the position of humans within the realm of living beings. This is the anthropological aspect of Aristotle's ethics.

The decisive passage is found right at the beginning of Aristotle's *Politika*, where he observes that "man" is a *ζῷον πολιτικόν*, a social being, "more than any bee," i.e., more than any other animal living in herds or swarms or any other kind of organized group. What distinguished him from all other mortal living beings is the *λόγος ἐπὶ τῷ δηλοῦν τὸ συμφέρον καὶ τὸ βλαβερὸν ὥστε καὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἄδικον.* Λόγος in this sentence does not mean "reason" but "speech," as he makes clear when he contrasts it with *φωνή* (voice), with which other animals are also endowed. The *λόγος* for Man and consequently what is right or wrong is the *discussion* of the question of what is really and ultimately helpful or harmful.

From this fact a number of further inferences can be derived. Man is so much a social being that without the society of other human beings he cannot even become human in the full sense of the word. Whoever is *ἄπολις* (= asocial) by nature and not by chance, i.e., by force of unfavorable circumstances, is either *φαῦλος* or *κρείττων* than an ordinary human being (we might say: either a lowly creature or a kind of superman).

What Aristotle says here is the very opposite of the theory elaborated by Rousseau in answering the public question set up for competition by the Dijon Academy: the theory that man is by nature good but is corrupted by society. In order to substantiate what he says Aristotle draws attention to the fact that man unless restrained by society is the most lawless and licentious of all higher animals: he alone knows no seasonal limitations to his sexuality; he has a strong inclination to harm his health by overeating; he is the only animal with no inhibitions against killing individuals of his own species; he even goes so far as to kill individuals of his own species for nourishment—among the higher animals cannibalism is an exclusively human specialty. There can be hardly any doubt that, in perfect agreement with Aristotle's opinion, these negative peculiarities of the human race are not due to its corruption by society. Quite to the contrary, it is more specifically the discussion of what is right or wrong, arising naturally in social intercourse, that constitutes the most effective means nature has provided to help man overcome his naturally destructive tendencies. In order to become what we call really human, all human beings, according to Aristotle, have to undergo this process of humanization through social intercourse with their fellow human beings, though, as Aristotle later tries to show, he who with consistent effort develops what is "divine" in his nature may grow beyond the need of this intercourse, and may continue his growth toward perfection in comparative solitude.

Thus, according to Aristotle, the knowledge of what is right and wrong grows directly out of insight into what is ultimately beneficial or harmful to human beings. Both are in fact simply two aspects of essentially the same thing. In this respect Aristotle is seen to be also in conflict with Kant who acknowledges as truly moral only those actions and attitudes which are exclusively the result of obedience to what he calls the "categorical imperative" without the slightest admixture in the moral individual of any benefit for himself.

The difference between Aristotle and the German philosopher is due to the fact that Kant's philosophy is ultimately derived from the Jewish/Christian conviction that morality means obedience to the commandments of God.

Aristotle's God, on the other hand, does not rule the moral world by means of commandments, but *ὡς τὸ ἐρώμενον τὸ ἐρῶν* in the way in which that which is loved rules the one who loves it, i.e., by its perfection which induces those who see it to strive for the same perfection according to their ability. Such is the foundation of Aristotle's ethics in contrast to Jewish/Christian ethics.

But in order to understand fully Aristotle's position it is necessary to determine more precisely the place he gives Man among other living beings. In a fundamentally important passage in the first book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that it is not good to strive for the same degree of accuracy or exactness in all things, above all in the fields of ethics and politics, where at first sight everything appears to be variable and uncertain. As a consequence many believe that what is morally right or wrong is not determined by nature but only by what is set down in what is called statutory law, a view that is usually called the positivistic theory of law. For this reason, Aristotle continues, one must be glad if one succeeds in setting down roughly and in a general outline (τύπῳ περιλαβεῖν) what is right and what is wrong.

This passage was misunderstood by John Burnet to mean that in the field of ethics and politics no solid foundation can be found at all, and his interpretation has remained more or less predominant down to the present. In fact, however, there can be hardly any doubt that what Aristotle means to say is exactly the opposite. If one must be glad to be able to draw their outlines, to do so must be possible, and in fact, Aristotle at once proceeds to draw the guidelines within which only sound reasonable actions and decisions are possible, and to show that those outlines are solidly fixed by nature. What Aristotle combats with his warning against the attempt to try to make fixed moral rules for *everything* is the casuistry which has always been deadly for any sound ethical theory.

The firm outlines of Aristotle's ethics are established on the basis of his teleology. All human actions and decisions are determined by the aims or ends pursued; we always act τινὸς ἕνεκα in two different ways: by making (ποιεῖν) something or by doing (πράττειν) something (in the narrower sense of this word). The process of *making* something comes to its natural end (τέλος) by the completion of a definite thing or object, an ἔργον or "work." After this work has been completed it is, of course, possible to start at once to make another one; but this is a new process and does not affect the fact that the first process has come to its natural end with the completion of that product.

There is also a certain hierarchy of ends (τέλη). As a rule an object or ἔργον is not made for its own sake, but in order to serve a further aim or purpose; a bodkin, for instance, is made in order to make boots, which naturally also sets a limit to the production of bodkins: there is no sense in making more bodkins than are needed to produce shoes or boots and to keep a few in reserve in case some should be broken or lost. The shoes and boots are needed for walking, and again there is no sense in making more shoes than are needed for this purpose and perhaps in addition, to vary their style.

At this point in the hierarchy of aims and purposes there occurs a certain break. Walking or going to do something is not an ἔργον or work, but a process that can serve a further aim, even an aim which results in ποιεῖν, as for instance when someone goes to buy leather for the production of shoes. However, an action or process need not have an aim or purpose outside itself, as in the example adduced. It can also have its aim or purpose in itself, as for instance, when someone just "takes a walk." In this case there is no visible completion of a work. It can be said that in this case the action or process has its τέλος as well as its οὐ ἕνεκα in itself. The technical term created by Aristotle to designate the process or the action is ἐνέργεια, probably originally derived from the fact that the activity of making something has an ἔργον as its aim and τέλος, but is later used to designate all kinds of processes and activities including those which have their τέλος in themselves.

If the term ἐνέργεια is used in this sense it follows that the hierarchy of τέλη both begins and ends with ἐνέργεια. But the most important fact in regard to the understanding of life is that it *ends* with ἐνέργειαι. The ultimate τέλος and ultimate οὐ ἕνεκα is the εὖ ζῆν, the *good life:* εὐδαιμονία (happiness) in the sense of a completely satisfying existence. From this fact further insights can be derived. The objects which are produced by the activity called ποιεῖν or "making" are rightly called "goods" (ἀγαθά). An object produced in this way deserves the name "good" in the degree to which it serves its purpose. To the quality of the object corresponds the quality of its maker. If the quality of the object produced is good, the activity of its maker is a κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, a "working according to excellence" or a "working to perfection."

From these fundamental facts it is possible to derive a radical criticism of certain widespread practices which have developed since the time of the so-called industrial revolution. Among these is the practice of intentionally producing "goods" of poor quality so that they deteriorate rapidly and have to be replaced by new ones in order to reap a greater monetary profit. This leads not only to a waste of raw materials which is almost criminal, considering the fact that the supply of raw materials all over the world is not unlimited, but also pollutes the very source and mainspring of a fulfilled and satisfactory life.

In order to grasp this fully it is necessary to combine what has been said up to this point with the observations made by Aristotle at the beginning of his *Politics*. As Plato already had shown in his *Republic* the reason why Man is to a higher degree a social being "than any bee" is the lack of human individuals of αὐτάρκεια (autarchy or self-sufficiency). No human being is able to exercise in practice all the various abilities that are within the reach of mankind as a whole. He is compelled to collaborate with other human beings in the most varied capacities.

Bees, ants, termites, and other "socially organized" animals also have to collaborate in different functions; but these functions and capacities are fixed by nature: among bees there is the queen, the drones that are eliminated when they have served their purpose, and the worker bees that also serve to defend the hive if necessary. Among termites the soldier termites form a special class. But among human beings there is a much greater variety and a much greater flexibility. No human being is, like the social insects, fixed in exactly one function. There are human beings with outstanding talents and very outspoken inclinations who are both happiest and most useful to their fellow human beings when in following their inclinations they make full use of their talents. Aristotle illustrates this fact by the following example: a born musician may follow a philosophical discussion with absorbing interest, but when he suddenly hears beautiful music he will turn his attention to the music. With a born philosopher the opposite will happen.

One can expand upon Aristotle's observation by pointing out that there are also human beings with less pronounced inclinations and talents who consequently change their occupations more easily. In this way nature has provided for the changing needs of human societies in different situations.

From these facts it is also possible to derive the fundamental principle of the meaningful and "just" distribution of "goods." It is self-evident that everybody is able to make the best possible contribution to the well-being of society as a whole, if and when he is provided with two things: 1) sufficient means for the satisfaction of the so-called "necessities" of life: nourishment, shelter, clothing, and as Aristotle himself points out, a certain amount of active relaxation, e.g., in play or amusement, but all this within a healthy limit; 2) in addition, everything that he needs for making the best use of his talent: the best violinist has a claim to the best violin because he can make the best use of it.

In this respect the achievement is the decisive factor; but this does not mean that the most valuable achievement necessarily deserves the highest remuneration. Aristotle was convinced that no human achievement is more valuable than that of the true philosopher in as much as it is he who teaches his fellow human beings how to attain the greatest happiness: the εὖ ζῆν and εὐδαιμονία; yet this does not mean that he ought to receive the greatest remuneration in material goods. Quite to the contrary. To the extent that a philosopher like Aristotle is also engaged in scientific and scholarly research, he needs many assistants like those who assembled around him in his school, the so-called *peripatos,* helping him to collect and arrange the zoological, botanical, mineralogical, and also the historical facts that he needed for his various scientific enterprises.

Aristotle's modern successors in these pursuits may need complicated and expensive tools and laboratories, not for personal possession, but only for use. They may need books to a certain extent for personal possession so as to be able to make personal annotations. But apart from such needs, the philosopher, as Aristotle most strongly emphasizes, needs less for himself than anybody else since he is more able than anybody else to engage in serious work without interruption and to find complete satisfaction in it. In this conviction Aristotle goes so far as to declare that one who claims to be a philosopher but strives for great remuneration and wealth proves by this very fact that he is not a true philosopher and not worthy of the remuneration.

Aristotle also points out that under natural, i.e., primitive economic conditions things have a natural tendency to fall into their right places. Since natural "goods" are perishable there is no sense in trying to accumulate and preserve them beyond the natural limit of their durability. As an indication and confirmation of this he points to the great hospitability and liberality characteristic of life in the aristocratic communities described in the Iliad: one is glad to share one's goods, which would perish anyway, with strangers who have something interesting to tell.

But the invention of money—and this is a very essential point with Aristotle—has brought about a certain distortion of natural conditions. The invention of money as a means of general exchange was very useful because money in the form of precious metal was practically imperishable and freely divisible. This peculiar property makes all goods commensurable, which is not the case with natural goods. However, the very fact that money is exchangeable against everything creates the illusion that the possession of much money is a very desirable aim. In actual fact, apart from its function as a means of exchange, money, Aristotle says, is λῆρος (mere trash), a nonentity with no value in itself. This is very well illustrated by the myth of Midas, who was in danger of starving to death through the fulfillment of his wish that everything he touched be turned to gold, so that he was compelled to beseech the gods to take away their fateful gift. It is equally well illustrated by the fact that a man with a big bag full of gold who loses his way in the desert may die from thirst, the gold being of no avail to him. Aristotle draws the more general conclusion that whoever makes the acquisition of money the main aim of his life, *de facto* strives for the preservation of his "naked life" instead of striving for the εὖ ζῆν, the good life. In striving for wealth, i.e., the *means* for life, he misses the aim and actually impoverishes himself.

There is an analogous illusion in regard to the possession of power. For the adequate execution of certain necessary and useful activities a certain power over others is indispensable. An architect who cannot give his workers orders that have to be obeyed will never be able to create a building according to a consistent plan: a building that really fulfills its purpose. But the pride of being able to give orders to others creates the illusion that power is desirable for its own sake. Both aspirations, the striving for wealth for the sake of wealth and for power for the sake of power cause what Aristotle calls the greatest evil in the interrelations of human beings: πλεονεξία, the burning desire to have not only more than one's due share in proportion to others, but more wealth and more power than is good for the one who obtains them for himself.

2. Everything said thus far is by no means uncertain, subject to doubt or without solid foundation. It belongs, on the contrary, to the most solid, the most certain, the most unchanging insights concerning the very foundations of human life. But what has been determined by these considerations are *guidelines* which do not indicate directly and down to the last point what in a given situation is definitely the right thing to do. If *this* question is asked, one finds, to the contrary, that, as a rule, seemingly opposite principles can be derived from the guidelines, principles however which both complement and limit each other.

Starting from the insight, for instance, that, generally speaking, a person will make the best contribution to the benefit of the community by enthusiastically making use of his special talents and gifts, one can come to the conclusion that not only must everybody be given complete freedom to do what he desires to do but he should also receive from the community every possible support without restrictive criticism. If, on the other hand, one takes into consideration that innumerable individuals are enticed by the higher esteem that certain activities enjoy in society or by the fact that they give more power to choose not those occupations for which they are most talented or best fitted but others, one can come to the opposite conclusion that the choice of occupations must be subject to the sharpest control by the political authorities who have to insure that everybody is employed to the best advantage of the community regardless of personal wishes and ambitions.

That is the fundamental dilemma which Aristotle has very clearly pointed out. But since Aristotle does not go into further details, it is, in order to learn something from him, necessary to inquire what possible ways out of the dilemma offer themselves under the conditions prevailing in our own times.

In so-called totalitarian countries such decisions are usually made by government-appointed "high commissions." Now quite apart from the very important question of the principles used to select the members of these "high commissions" it is self-evident that no high commission of whatever quality can possibly have sufficient knowledge of all the qualities required for the enormous variety of occupations and functions, much less show sufficient judgment to determine with any degree of accuracy to what extent a given individual has these necessary qualities. The consequence is that decisions are usually made according to extraneous criteria, for instance, descent from certain classes of parents or, presumably, political reliability judged from the viewpoint of the ruling groups, in the USSR mainly the so-called *nomenclatura*. In other words, what in Aristotle's opinion ought to be the only decisive criterion for the choice of a person's function and occupation, that is, whether his talents and inclinations make him truly fit for the task connected with the chosen job, plays as a rule only a comparatively subordinate role in most totalitarian countries.

The main alternative to this principle of distribution is the "truly democratic method," practiced above all in the U.S.A. It consists in subjecting everybody to presumably "objective" tests, eliminating all extraneous considerations and making any kind of "favoritism" impossible. The ideal instrument of this method is what is known as the multiple-choice test. It consists of a great number of written questions to each of which a number of three to six or seven answers are suggested. The candidate must then select the answer which the examiner considers to be the correct one. In certain cases the suitability of a candidate for the career or task envisaged by him may actually be tested in this way either intentionally or by chance. An example of this was provided by certain questions asked in an examination of candidates for the diplomatic service. A friend of mine in the State Department who had access to the test papers drew my attention to the fact that one of the questions asked was whether the Sunnites or the Shiites were orthodox. This question is about equivalent to the question whether Catholicism or Protestantism is the orthodox form of the Christian faith. It goes without saying that a Catholic will consider the Catholics and a Protestant the Protestants as "orthodox." Within Islam the Sunnites correspond roughly to the Catholics, basing their faith on tradition, and the Shiites to the Protestants, going back to the original documents of their faith: the Protestants to the Gospels, the Shiites to the Koran, "The Shiites are orthodox" was considered the correct answer. What was the meaning of the test? Was it merely that the person posing the questions and determining what was to be considered the correct answer actually believed that he Shiites are orthodox? In this case the question has no significance other than to indicate the limited knowledge of the examiner. Or did it have a more subtle meaning? Perhaps the examiner expected the candidate to make the following reflections: it is more likely that the examiner is a Protestant than that he is a Catholic; hence, it is more likely that by analogy he considers the Shiites to be orthodox. In this case his answer would really have some bearing on the question of his suitability for the diplomatic service.

Another question asked was whether Napoleon had been a Corsican, a Frenchman, or an Italian. The "correct" answer is: a Frenchman. In fact, of course, he was a Corsican by birth, an Italian by descent, and a Frenchman by citizenship. In this case it is likely that the examiner wanted the candidate to indicate that he considered citizenship to be more decisive than birth or descent. Stendhal (Henri Beyle) would have judged differently. There were a few more questions which may have been intended to test abilities of the candidates that are really important or useful in the diplomatic service, but the enormous majority of the questions in a multiple-choice test actually test no more than the possession of completely sterile factual knowledge. It is not possible by means of such a test to find out whether a candidate has the much more essential ability to grasp the essence of an issue or of a situation.

Whether a candidate has this ability can be determined only by an examiner who possesses it himself, and he can be brought into the position as examiner only by others who clearly possess it. Since there can be no *regressus in infinitum,* at the beginning of the chain there must have been men who were so clearly in possession of the necessary qualities that they were accepted without formal examination. All this shows that there is no foolproof mechanical method which is sure to lead to the correct solution. Thus it is evident that the seemingly opposite principles which can be derived from the solid guidelines cannot be brought together for a convincing solution to a specific problem except by a discussion that takes into consideration all the concrete peculiarities of the case in agreement with what Aristotle calls the *λόγος ἐπὶ τῶ δηλοῦν τὸ συμφέρον καὶ τὸ βλαβερὸν, ὥστε καὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ’άδικον* (the discussion with the purpose of revealing what is beneficial and detrimental and consequently right and wrong).

Another illustration of the fact that seemingly opposite principles can be derived from the guidelines which Aristotle himself gives—but which in its essence goes back to Plato—is the way in which judges in their decisions are bound by laws. From the fact that laws which are necessarily formulated as general rules cannot be adequately adapted to the infinite variety of the incidents of human life, one can draw the conclusion that the judges should have nearly complete freedom in making their decisions on the basis of the special circumstances of the case, uninhibited by rigid laws: "a law is like a stubborn and self-willed old man, who always says the same thing without looking to the right or to the left," as Plato had said. Considering the fact that, unless the judges in their decisions are strictly bound by the law, they can by their arbitrary judgments set themselves up as a kind of tyrant and create a general state of uncertainty; one can come to the contrary conclusion that the judges ought to be very strictly controlled by law.

It is easy to enlarge this list of seemingly opposite but in truth complementary principles that can be derived from Aristotle's guidelines, partly with the help of hints given by Aristotle himself, partly by analogy based on later and modern experiences. From a generalization of the experience that unfavorable social conditions promote the increase of criminality one can draw the conclusion that "society" is ultimately responsible for all crimes and that, therefore, it is morally wrong to punish an individual for misdeeds which have been really caused by society, especially when he claims to have acted on the basis of his convictions. This can cause a dangerous helplessness in the organs of justice when confronted with crime and terrorism. On the other hand, the fact that, as experience shows, criminals (and especially criminals greedy for gain) do not disappear completely in a society which has for the most part eliminated the unjust distribution of wealth can lead to the conclusion that society can only be purified by the ruthless elimination or "liquidation" of all "asocial elements." With this argument one can justify every kind of totalitarian oppression and governmental terrorism.

Aristotle himself had pointed out the possible negative consequences of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of individual citizens, not only for the community to which they belong but even for the wealthy themselves. On the basis of such observations it is possible to argue in favor of the abolition of private property—with the exception of such utensils that must necessarily belong to individuals—and, above all, in favor of the prohibition of private gain by drastic means. But sharp controls of this kind require a bureaucracy that impedes the development of individual productivity. An impressive illustration of the possible negative consequences of such a course is provided by the reforms of Solon who had been invoked by the wealthy as well as by the poor to act as mediator between them and to bring about a reconciliation.

If Solon, as the poor had hoped and expected, had divided the Attic land into parts of, as far as possible, equal productivity and had distributed these parts equally among the population, the whole country would soon have been threatened by starvation because the available soil was by no means adequate for the production of sufficient food for the whole population. It was through the reforms of Solon, which made the inequality in the possession of land still greater than it had been before, that this danger was overcome. Up to then the sale of land had been restricted by laws meant for the benefit of the poor peasants and for their protection against the complete loss of their land, but under changed circumstances this law no longer functioned properly. By abolishing these laws the wealthy landowners acquired the opportunity to buy additional land and to concentrate on the production of wine and olive oil for export. The poor peasants, on the other hand, could henceforth sell their property and, under the changed conditions, could find occupation in other trades, especially in pottery and in the rapidly developing shipbuilding and shipping industries. The surplus wine and olive oil produced by wealthy landowners was exported in beautiful vessels produced by artistically gifted potters and very highly valued in the countries to which the products went. The transport of products to other countries was undertaken by the shipping industry. In this way Athenian trade earned enough money abroad to make it easy to import enough food from the countries on the northern borders of the Aegean to feed the Athenian population.

This increase in trade and the cultural history of Athens in the first half of the fifth century, when the majority of wealthy Athenians made enormous voluntary financial contributions for the benefit of the community in order to retain public esteem and political influence, show that private wealth can have extremely positive functions which cannot be equalled by a centrally controlled "totalitarian" economy and society.

With all this, Aristotle's warning against the destructive consequences of unrestrained yearning for monetary gain remains fully valid. In fact, it is more relevant today than it was in all previous periods of civilization. At no time in history has the willingness been as great as it is in our time to accept the destruction of enormous material (!!) goods to the detriment of whole communities, nay even of the whole of mankind, for the sake of purely monetary, yet factually fictitious, gains of private individuals or groups. The most conspicuous example is the use of gigantic tankers for the transport of oil on the grounds that it is "cheaper" than transport by means of a greater number of smaller ships. The result is the "saving" of money in the bank accounts of the firms that bring the oil from the Near East where it is produced to the countries where it is needed and used on both sides of the Atlantic. However, because of their size the big tankers are much more exposed to accidents than smaller ships, and when they run aground or leak, the oil spilling over a large stretch of the coast destroys plants, sea birds, oyster banks, and fish population down to a considerable depth, not to mention the damage to bathing beaches. Thus, even the monetary value of the material loss greatly exceeds the private profit made by the transport firms. Nevertheless, the right to private profit, even to the disadvantage of others, is so generally acknowledged in our times that up to now hardly an attempt has been made to make the shipping firms responsible by international agreement for the damage caused to others, or through the cumulative consequences of such accidents to the whole of mankind.

Yet the damage caused by gigantic oil tankers is only the most conspicuous example of this modern mentality and its consequences. Infinitely greater are the dangers threatening not only the present but, to a much greater extent, future generations from more recent inventions, specifically nuclear power plants. Nuclear power advocates declare that these plants are "very safe," especially in Germany where the most elaborate safeguards against accidents have been worked out. Yet even they do not deny that not only in the USA, where major accidents have occurred, but also in Germany there were a number of instances of the escape of radioactive gasses from a plant; the toxic gasses were said to be in very small amounts and far below the danger point except for those who work in the plants themselves!

But a group of experts at the University of Heidelberg from a number of different fields (physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, etc.), after prolonged and meticulous investigations, published a treatise in which they proved that though in the known cases the immediate dangers were indeed very small, the long range consequences were anything but negligible. The escaped radioactive gasses infect vegetation in the neighborhood of the nuclear works, spreading the pollution through pollen and through dissemination to larger areas where vegetation is eaten by animals who are infected in their turn, and so on, so that—though at first sight it may seem incredible—ever larger areas are infected in such a way that in the course of time they become dangerous to human beings. In spite of the fact that the German *Grundgesetz* prohibits censorship, this treatise, whose authors are all men of very high distinction, is neither distributed by the book trade nor mentioned in the catalogs of book-sellers but can only be obtained from the authors themselves if one has heard by chance of its existence. In the meantime, the warning of the Heidelberg scientists has had some effect on the population south of that city on the right bank of the Rhine, but the French continue to build one nuclear plant after the other on the opposite side of the Rhine, whence the prevailing western winds carry the escaping gasses across the Rhine to the German regions south of Heidelberg.

In the USA, scientists who had worked for the erection of nuclear plants but who, after discovering the possible dangers for the future, voluntarily gave up their jobs and issued their warnings, are said to have suffered all kinds of persecution by fervent promoters of atomic energy. Under such conditions, unfortunately, Aristotle's remedy of free and unlimited discussion against the consequences of unrestricted striving for profit cannot work very well.

To return, however, to the fundamental problem from which the preceding digression has taken its start: the question of how a desirable distribution of "goods" can best be effected. Up to this point it had been supposed that *if* the πλεονέκται did not manage to take more for themselves than is due to them, it would be possible to give everybody what he needs a) for a modest but sufficient subsistence, and b) for the acquisition of the necessary tools for an activity corresponding to his talents and his inclination. Generally speaking, this is probably true, but there are also emergency situations—natural catastrophies or foreign invasions—in which this is no longer the case. In this case what Aristotle set down as a guiding principle under normal conditions, namely, that one should not always strive for security but for the "good life," is no longer valid. It becomes, on the contrary, necessary for everyone to fight for the survival of the community; everybody has to do what is needed at the moment for this purpose, regardless of his special talents and inclinations. An application of this principle is compulsory military service which takes it for granted that every soldier has to do what he is ordered to do, regardless of his special talents. Yet even here Aristotle's rule that every dominant principle requires a certain limitation by the opposite principle remains valid. We find, therefore, that in all modern states in which compulsory military service exists, persons who because of their special talents are urgently needed for other tasks are declared "indispensable" and exempt from military service. But, the *natural* limitations of the dominant principle go beyond these generally accepted provisions: it was an almost criminal overestimation of purely military prowess and military heroism when the German High Command in the First World War sacrificed the lives of many thousands of selected German students, with all their talents and acquired intellectual capacities, by ordering them at Langemarck and at the Chemin des Dames to attack again and again against hopeless odds. The Americans, on the contrary, though, generally speaking, acknowledging the same principle that in military service a soldier can be used without regard to his special gifts, made great efforts to discover the first traces of special talents and tried to develop these by intensive training in order to be able to make use of them for special tasks. The results were very rewarding.

But to return to Aristotle's guidelines and the more general problems, Aristotle found himself in fundamental agreement with practically all Greek philosophers, including even Epicurus who in his famous garden led a very simple life and conducted a very extensive correspondence with his many friends and disciples in Asia Minor through which he instructed them in his philosophy, with his utter contempt for what the ancient Greeks called the βίος ἀπολαυστικας, a life of laziness devoted to sensual pleasure. Aristotle, on the basis of his teleological analysis of life, had shown beyond this that a really happy and satisfactory life can be attained only by κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, i.e., by making the best use of one's gifts and talents and by doing everything one does as well, as perfectly, as one is able to do it.

This insight, unfortunately, runs counter to everything that the enormous majority in our time believes and takes for granted. To find the highest satisfaction in what one does presupposes that one can see what he is achieving and that what he does is recognizable as his own work even if it is only well-washed laundry or a well-swept street. The assembly-line conveyer belt has been invented to make possible higher wages because in this way an object can be produced in less time. But nobody working in this fashion is able to do anything better or less well than his companions: nobody is able to produce anything complete that he can consider his own work. Work on the conveyer belt is the perfect counterpart to the modern habit of intentionally producing "goods" of poor quality so that they deteriorate rapidly and have to be replaced by new ones in order to reap greater profits. These are the two most radical perversions of the natural order of human life that characterize the modern world.

With this statement the review of Aristotle's anthropological ethics and the analysis of its importance as radical criticism of modern aberrations could be closed. But, it is perhaps worthwhile to supplement these remarks by confirmations drawn from my personal experiences and from reflections based on them, which will reveal a good many more perversions and oddities of modern life.

The happiest man I have encountered in my life was a black shoe-cleaner in Texas, who, as usual in that region, had installed himself in a barber shop and by whom I used to have my shoes polished every morning on my way to the university. When he was not occupied, he used to sing arias, mostly by Verdi, with a beautiful voice. He polished my shoes so that I was almost blinded by their shine, and when, in recognition of the excellence of his work, I gave him twice the amount he required, he beamed over his whole face and began to sing again. What made him beam was, of course, not the small sum but the recognition of his extraordinary κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια (excellently done work).

Perhaps it is permissible to connect a small historical philosophy of shoe-shining with this personal experience. It begins with Filippo Neri, the founder of the Order of the Oratorians, a saint whom Goethe loved. One day Neri was sent by the Pope to test a nun who was said to be a saint and even to have performed miracles. Neri went out on a rainy day, wearing big boots which on the way, of course, became very dirty. When he was admitted to the presence of the nun, he sat down, apparently completely exhausted, and asked her quite humbly whether she would not be kind enough to help him take off his dirty boots. When she indignantly refused, he straightway returned to the Pope and told him that there could be no question of saintliness.

The second story is about President Lincoln. It is said that the French ambassador once met him while he was cleaning his boots.

"Mr. President! You clean your own boots!" exclaimed the ambassador in amazement. "Well, whose boots do you clean, Mr. Ambassador?" was Lincoln's answer.

The third story is about myself. Once, when I was staying a week or two at the Fondation Hardt in Geneva, it happened repeatedly that in the morning I met a colleague who occupied the room next to mine on a common balcony where we cleaned our shoes. One day I asked him whether we could not on alternate days clean our combined shoes. He acceded to the agreement, with the effect that I had intended: our shoes were much better cleaned from then on since both of us had the ambition to do very good work for the other, while we both had a tendency to be negligent in regard to ourselves.

The last and most revealing story was told me by a nephew of mine. When he recently visited Mexico City, he was accosted by a small boy who offered to shine his shoes. Being a "true democrat," he refused since he considered it degrading for a human being to shine another man's shoes. Then, as he walked on, it occurred to him that the boy probably needed the money. So, he went back to him and offered to give him the money that he would have had to pay for the shoe shine. But, the little boy refused indignantly, saying he was no beggar: he wanted to *earn* his money. He was, of course, right and could rightly have looked down with contempt on the great number of those whose main aim it is to get paid as much as possible for work as poorly performed as possible. If my nephew had permitted the little boy to clean his shoes and then had paid him the double price, he probably would have accepted it gladly as tribute to the excellence of his performance, as did the boot-cleaner in my first story. My nephew, on the other hand, was, of course, well-meaning, but his attitude nevertheless revealed a perversion of democracy, which presumes to divide men and their occupations into two classes in such a way that certain occupations or the performance of certain tasks is considered "unworthy" of the people belonging to a certain class. The whole modern attitude in regard to boot-cleaning is a symbol of this perversion of democracy.

The democracy of nature is of a different kind. In a way, nature appears to be very aristocratic. Men are by nature endowed with very different natural talents, some of which are considered to belong to a much higher order than others. But there is a certain compensation. Beethoven's talent certainly belonged to the very highest order, but when he was congratulated on the completion of his most famous work, the Ninth Symphony, he was by no means happy. Rather, he complained that it made him only feel how much his completed work lagged behind that which he had been aiming at. This is a general rule: the higher the order to which a work or an activity belongs, the less it is possible for a human being to reach perfection in it. What is more, the higher the aims of a man engaged in the highest kind of work, and the nearer he comes to reaching them, the more he will be painfully sensitive about what is still lacking.

It is in the simple and apparently lowly work that something approaching perfection can be achieved. It is not by chance that, by all appearances, the happiest man I have encountered in my life was engaged in the "lowly" occupation of a boot-black. It is not by chance either that, to all appearances, the most unhappy people, the constantly disgruntled and dissatisfied, are not the really poor but those whose aim in life is to get as much monetary reward as possible for poorly performed work. All this is in perfect agreement with Aristotle's anthropological ethics.

Aristotle was a pagan philosopher. His philosophy has been presented here as a corrective to modern aberrations which may be considered the outgrowth of secularized Christianity. Yet, it is perhaps worthwhile to consider whether the philosophy of this pagan philosopher does not in many ways come nearer to the teachings of the originator of Christianity as He expressed them during his lifetime than much of what the Christian churches have developed as Christian doctrine after His death on the cross.

"In my Father's house are many mansions." Does this not mean that not everyone has to serve God in the same way, but that God has given different human beings different tasks? If so, it is in perfect agreement with Aristotle's anthropological ethical philosophy.

"Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect!" Does this not, though expressed in the form of a commandment, come very near to Aristotle's belief that God governs the world and the living beings in it through His perfection and through the attraction which He has for them by the contemplation of His perfection?

"God has made the Sabbath for the sake of men, and not mankind for the sake of the Sabbath." This outburst of Jesus against the pharisees who had condemned the poor woman for collecting grain on a Sabbath day makes what in itself is ultimately good for man the criterion according to which God gave His commandments and implicitly condemns an indoctrination which insists on the literal observance of certain prescriptions, as for instance the prohibition of eating meat on certain days, but then invents for those days special dishes which are apt to satisfy the most refined taste and are not restricted in their quantity.

In the belief that no service to others is degrading, Jesus and what can be gathered from Aristotle's principles also agree.

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