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# The Wednesday

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## Editorial

## *Illumination: Divine and Profane*

We had a debate on Surrealism recently in our weekly meeting. This movement is very interesting because it had relationships with philosophy, psychology, creativity and politics. The movement may have faded away over the decades, but it has left a long-lasting influence on all art that followed it. But what interests me here is the attitude of the surrealists towards vision. Vision may mean here both the religious experience and the ordinary way we look at the world.

Philosophy, in the empiricist method, takes perception to be the starting point. In this view, we come to have our knowledge through the senses. But the Surrealists came to challenge this view by taking their standpoint from an inner vision. They found the resources of such knowledge not in what is rational and conscious, but in the unconscious, the free flowing of ideas and images. Some thought that this could be facilitated by submitting to intoxication by various means.

The Surrealists developed techniques of automatic writing and painting, as well as what they called 'objective chance', a kind of chance meeting with objects that would solve artistic problems. All this was to emphasise the power of the unconscious and chance encounters in producing artwork.

It was at a time when Freud's and Marx's thought was very influential. If Freud concentrated on the unconscious, Marx emphasised praxis. Breton, the leader of the movement, adopted both. He was also aware of the danger of 'intoxication' that some Surrealists followed. He insisted on the unity of the inside/outside or mind/body which is near to what Benjamin described as a 'profane illumination'. Such experience does not eschew reality but takes an active interest in the world.

What the Surrealists demonstrated is that there are powers within the mind, conscious or unconscious, that could enlarge our view of ourselves and the world. These powers were recognised by mystics who would attribute them to a divine origin. Some of the Surrealists did move towards religion. But the general trend of materialism and naturalism put more emphasis on the human psyche and the body, what Benjamin called 'image space' and 'body space'. The mystics could also benefit from such a unity of reality.

The common thread between the inside/outside of the self is this 'image space' that invades both man and reality. The external reality is made up of images and the interiority of man is occupied by images. The image space takes its concrete form for the individual in his body: 'the image space' is 'more concretely, a body space', as Benjamin said in his essay on Surrealism. The physicality of the body, by being a link to external reality, guards against the daydreaming of the nihilist, while the images form the motivation of the individual. Reality has been brought into the interiority of the self, and the body extends to include all reality. Such a unity of internal and external reality forms a world of 'universal and integral actuality', or a 'unity of being' in mysticism. The Surrealist aestheticizes everything, and the mystic sees the Divine in everything.

There is a lesson here for philosophers to learn from art. Reality is both internal and external and both contribute to knowledge, wisdom and vision. The internal and external, together, provide an illumination that is both divine and profane. Abandoning one side to concentrate on the other may lead to the impoverishment of philosophy. A one-sided philosophy will either be absorbed into subjectivity or totally absorbed into external reality and forget the relevance of philosophising to subjective experience. What is needed is that both inner and outer reality are held together.

***The Editor***

# A Critique Of Kant's *Groundwork Of The Metaphysics Of Morals*

**Has Kant proved the reality of the Categorical Imperative or has he just convinced us of its reality by rhetoric? Is he right in separating moral actions from inclinations? Is it more real to follow the directions favored by Hobbes and Hume? The article below challenges Kant and argues for the inadequacy of his account of morality.**

EDWARD **GREENWOOD**

In the preface to the *Groundwork* Kant says his task is to search for and establish 'the supreme principle of morality' (4:392). Morality is not to be like a chair that stands on four legs, but like a single impressive pillar. This pillar is to be the good will. This is not to be a mere wish for the good, but must try to find the means to effect it. But even if the good will should achieve nothing in the actual empirical world, it would still, like a jewel, 'shine by itself'(4:394).

So, even in a work which purports to repudiate the emotional, Kant tries to convince us through impressive rhetoric, as well as by reasoning. Indeed Franz Brentano warned us not to be taken in by it. He even claimed that no one who hadn't fallen under the spell of Kant's rhetoric, would, contrary to what Kant claims, find Kant's principle by just looking within.

That supreme principle is, of course, the categorical imperative. It is first formulated in 4:402 and then repeated in various forms several times in a sixty page work. In 4:396 we have another example of Kant's rhetoric. We are told that reason 'finds its own kind of satisfaction' in establishing an end which only it determines. This pathos is taken up again in 4:410 where Kant says that reason can have an influence on the human heart and 'become conscious of its dignity'. Is not his feeling of self-worth, this elevation of soul, a pathos, or emotion?

In Kant's view we cannot command love because it is an inclination. The doctrine of sympathy so much stressed by Adam Smith and David Hume, is set aside, for, as an affect, or emotion, it cannot be commanded. This ignores the fact that morality is at least as much concerned with managing our appetites and aversions, as with issuing commands. One cannot, say, read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* with sensitivity without undergoing such an education. Morality involves not just pure cognition and ratiocination, as Kant wishes, but the application of cognition to the emotions to judge of their appropriateness to the persons and situations to which they are internally related.

The categorical imperative is given the following formulation in 4:402 '*I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will my maxim should become a universal law.'* This is supposed to be a synthetic *a priori* proposition, a concept which has given rise to enormous controversy. Fortunately it is not my task here to enter that controversy. My task is to show the inadequacy of Kant's account of morality.

**Kant**

Both J.S. Mill in his essay *Utilitarianism* and Franz Brentano in his *The Foundation and Structure of Ethics* claimed that the categorical imperative is of no use as a foundation for morality because any line of conduct could be deduced from it. Mill pointed out that it could be used to sanction universal selfishness. Brentano took Kant's favorite example of something which is absolutely prohibited, namely lying. According to Kant we are not supposed to take the consequences of our actions into account, Yet Kant himself seems to do so when he claims that if everyone lies no one will trust anyone and so lying will be pointless and disappear. This is surely a consequential consideration, even if rather an odd and paradoxical one. This, in turn, brings out the empirical impracticability of the prohibition in the first place. On page 34 of his book Brentano writes: 'Above all it is erroneous to suppose that a law which is not applicable to anything is thereby nullified. This is true neither of laws of nature nor of laws in the sense of norms.' In the case of a norm, for example, he writes: 'A penal law which obligates the judge to mete out a certain punishment for a given offence is not rendered null, because, for fear of the punishment, no one commits such an offence.'

In 4:406 Kant acknowledges that we can never be certain that an action has been done purely out of duty, that an impure motive does not lie behind it. The depths of self deceiving cannot rule out that self love is lurking behind it somewhere. We can see an action, but not the inner principle behind it. This contention perhaps brings out a residual Cartesianism in Kant. It assumes the moral life is a hidden and private one. But nothing is necessarily hidden. We can often see in an action itself all we need to know. A person's ambition is not hidden. It is evinced by what that person does in various situations. However it must be conceded that the problem of mixed motives makes it difficult for both spectator and agent to judge with surety whether the motive acted on was morally justifiable.

Kant also, unlike many poets and moralists from Homer and Aristotle onwards, denies that morality can be taught by examples. He concedes that examples can inspire, but denies that they can ever provide moral justification. ((4:403).But surely the justification of the moral stance chosen is implicit in the way the example is presented? Many instances in, for example, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* show this. Even Kant himself gives much later in 4:455 the example of 'the most hardened scoundrel' who will wish that he might behave like the self sacrificing benevolent figures in the examples put before him. But how then can his will to reformation be 'a will free from impulses of

sensibility' when it is his sensibility which has been moved by such examples?

In 4:414 Kant states his distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. If I want to get fit I might reason that the means to do so is to take more exercise and so I must take more exercise. That is a hypothetical imperative. It will produce a good consequence contingently. If I want to act rightly I must follow the categorical imperative. It is categorical because it is independent of any contingent consequences.

Wittgenstein makes use of the same distinction in his very unsatisfactory *Lecture on Ethics*, hoping by doing so to free himself from the contingent world of happenings, of things merely 'being so'. In 4::418 Kant rejects happiness as an aim. Happiness is not 'an ideal of reason' but rests on purely empirical grounds. Kant ignores the fact that happiness is not a univocal concept, but can have very different meanings. For Epicurus and Bentham it meant having pleasant sensations. For Aristotle the term eudaimonia meant the successful pursuit of worthwhile aims. Aristotle, unlike Kant, rightly recognized that an axiology, or an account of what is good, must precede and be the basis of morality.

Kant is seen at his worst in his treatment of suicide in section 4:422. He treats this act as purely self-regarding and motivated by self love. Surely persons suffering from intolerable pain, or persons fearing the loss of reason (the faculty Kant prizes so highly) because of some physical affliction, can hardly be condemned as immoral because they choose to commit suicide. What about other-regarding suicide, as when people elect to kill themselves so they will not become a burden, or a soldier falls on a grenade to save his companions?

In 4:428 Kant makes a distinction which I do not find very perspicuous. He writes: 'The subjective account of a desire is an *incentive;*

**Franz Brentano**

the objective account of a volition is a *motive*.' He does not explain the basis on which he makes the distinction. An example would have helped.

I find the claim that every rational being is an end in itself (4:428) and not to be treated as a means very obscure. What does it mean to say I am an end in myself? An end is an aim or purpose. I may have many purposes, not all good ones, and with the bad ones rightly impeded by others. But how can I be an end in myself? My mother had the end or aim of nurturing me and bringing me up, but in what way did she regard me as an end in myself? Would this be anything more than a rhetorically impressive way of saying she cared for me? Care, as a pathos or feeling, would in itself be of no intrinsic moral value according to Kant.

The only thing which is really good according to Kant is 'an absolutely good will'(4:426). This perhaps corresponds in the moral world to frictionless motion in the physical world, i.e. there is no instance of it, and Kant himself seems to suggest that we can never be sure it has operated (4:406). Kant waxes even more


Grundlegung
zur
Metaphysik
der Sitten
von
Immanuel Kant.
Riga,
bey Johann Friedrich Hartknoch
1785.

*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

**Hume**

rhetorical when he reaches the concept of 'the kingdom of ends' and the issue of what he calls 'the autonomy of the will' (4:440). What does the kingdom of ends amount to? Surely the kingdom consists of those concerned with only one end, namely the formulation of and obedience to the categorical imperative. A plurality of ends would surely take us into the empirical world of contingency, the world in which we live and move and have our being. Kant wants to take us out of this world, just as Wittgenstein in his Lecture on Ethics does. It was said of Wittgenstein that ' he prized goodness out of this world'. The saying could just as truly be applied to Kant, his mentor in this matter.

To validate the sort of freedom he wants Kant resorts to the two-world theory he had developed in *The Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 four years before the *Groundwork.* This theory differentiates between the phenomenal world of sense and the noumenal world. In the noumenal world we are free, but in the phenomenal world our actions are causally determined.

This solution to the vexed problem of free will and determinism seems to me to be a merely verbal conjuring trick. An intelligible idea of freedom is that it is a 'concept of experience', as when we are not constrained by threats or by physical means of some kind, such as chains. But for Kant freedom is not 'a concept of experience', but 'only an *idea* of reason.' As usual he takes us into a region of rhetorically impressive obscurity. Infatuated with the concept of a deducible faculty, Kant elevates the will to a faculty which he then, with his fondness for the repudiation of the sensory, contrasts with desire. Hobbes seems to me much nearer the truth when he says in chapter 6 of *Leviathan: 'Will is the last Appetite in Deliberating'.* But then Hobbes lives in the real world.

Kant concludes by saying that though we cannot really comprehend the necessity of the moral imperative: 'we nevertheless comprehend its *incomprehensibility'.* Isn't this rather like saying that we cannot comprehend the impossible, but only why a possibility is not possible?

# Tariki *

(*Embracing Despair, Discovering Peace)*

*Hiroyuki Itsuki:*
*'In this terrible world of ours, all that counts is that you mentally clasp your hands in gratitude and say your thanks for being alive. Do this every day; do this to keep yourself aware and open whether you are in the grip of terrible suffering or are experiencing boundless joy.'*

Around, the world, the earth, the sky: all is.
But is it? Only my perception can tell.
There is this world, this life, the blood that runs
through veins and warms the body to life's spell.

Yet at the same time, nothing is. I am
the hollow vessel wherein life, a breath,
fills emptiness, brings silence into sound,
creates my world and life form out of death.



The movement of a hand, some falling leaves
distract with loveliness, enchant, delight.
Yet when the evenings approach, the darkness
is wrestling fiercely in the fight with light.


Night will arrive, as sun and moon will circle,
infallible the rise and fall of flesh!
And when my eyes are closed to earth and sky,
life will leap boundlessly again afresh.



*Jiriki and **tariki** (他力 **meaning** 'other power', 'outside help') are two terms in Japanese Buddhist schools that classify how one becomes spiritually enlightened. In Pure Land Buddhism, **tariki** often refers to the power of Amitābha Buddha.

***Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws***

# Roles

CHRIS **NORRIS**

As an actor, to conceal his blush of embarrassment, enters the stage masked, so I step forth onto the stage of the world, masked.

**Descartes**

Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing.

**Nietzsche**

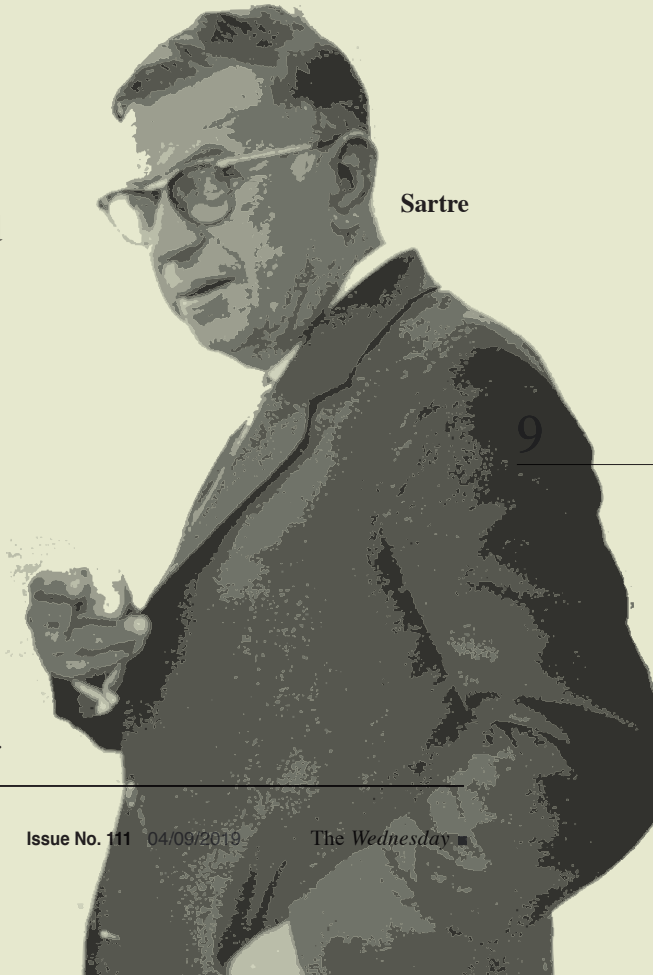
*Just think: I've played a role my whole life through*.
They've changed, but not my need for roles to play.
Adopted one by one, each served my need.
I fashioned them anew from day to day
As mood or circumstance decreed.
No falsehood where no selfhood to betray.
My plea: *'Count me the sort of person who . . .'*.

The roles proliferate, the masks accrue;
How choose from such a limitless array?
'O friends, there is no friend': the case I plead
Tears pages from the old-friends dossier
Though role-change can, if opportune, succeed
In keeping friendship's treacheries at bay.
*Just think: I've played a role my whole life through*.

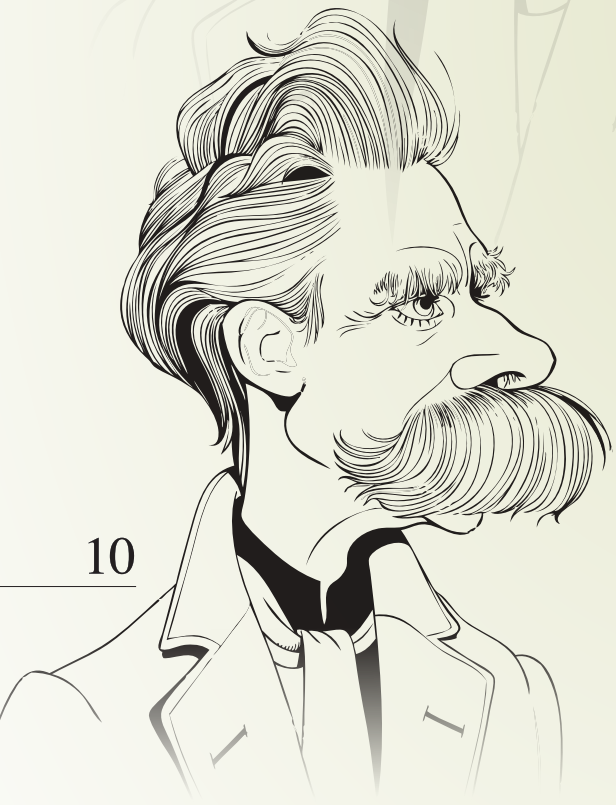
**Playing a role**

Fly high and fast: you'll get an overview
Of my big roles, reprise them as you may,
Though he who runs is likeliest to read
Amiss and tweak the living cabaret
At whim or will. Take heart my friend, you're freed
To switch roles momentarily and say,
Like me: *'Count me the sort of person who . . .'.*

You ask: 'what when the life-account falls due,
When roles run out, when there's a price to pay?'
There's how it ends to reckon with, agreed,
But also how, for shifters, there's no way
To dodge the choice, hold fast to last year's creed,
And have fixed dance-steps block their next sashay.
*Just think: I've played a role my whole life through*.



**Sartre**



Nietzsche

The ‘Strictly’ code finds room for me and you,
Lead-partners, while we hold the floor and they,
Those out-of-focus couples, take the lead
Only in some role-switch-about ballet
Of their imagining where all concede
That role-play’s everything, so no roles stay
The course: *‘Count me the sort of person who . . . ’.*

I switch them constantly: the me you knew,
Or thought you knew, now deems that role *passé*
And tries another, one more up to speed
Or better placed to cap my résumé
Of selves, or alibis, put up to feed
My appetite for bit-parts that convey
This truth: *I’ve played a role my whole life through.*

It comes of asking always ‘Will this do?’.
It comes of having past-role ghosts to lay.
The ghosts say ‘Your old errors, pay them heed!’.
The question hovers like a bird of prey.
Yet it’s fake satisfaction guaranteed
When fictive roles appear beneath the sway
Of self: *‘Count me the sort of person who . . . ’.*

The oldest lie: ‘To thine own self be true’.
No home address, all selves tagged aka,
‘Existence before essence’, first the deed
And thence the doer; heady stuff but, hey,
It’s Nietzsche’s view (and Sartre’s too) so we’d
Best shape a role round each new sobriquet.
My truth: *count me the sort of person who*
*Concludes he’s played a role his whole life through.*

# *'Freedom'*

## By *Mike England*

# Social Norms: They Have To Be Empirically Defined

**Social norms are usually defined as informal rules that govern behaviours in groups and societies. There are inherited norms. But they are all open to a challenge according to our intuitive sense of good and bad, but they need to be tested in practice. There should be a law to protect the weak. The danger is that in some societies social norms could be authoritarian and repressive. We may have to step outside our culture to compare it with other norms.**

DAVID **BURRIDGE**

When considering Rousseau in a previous paper, which I called: *Tinkering with the social contract*, I was impressed by the way he depicted both 'reason' and 'compassion', as the defining qualities of mankind. Human beings have the faculty of self-improvement and this in turn is empowered by their capacity for reason. But to prevent them becoming monsters they also need to deploy the compassion that nature bestowed on them. Compassion must be stronger in order that the violence of the self-love can be moderated. I considered this a valuable starting point for considering human ethics. But of course, we need to move on and determine what we understand as 'social norms'.

Social norms are usually defined as informal rules that govern behaviour in groups and societies. We share in varieties of values and beliefs because there may be an endogenous inspiration, which we wish to share in. Or it maybe we just need to belong and regard these norms as the ticket to allow us to be part of the social group concerned.

Classically we have divided society into *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (community and society), seeing these as a dichotomy. The community has informal values and norms and society has clearly defined social norms through laws and other forms of written rules. This separation is somewhat superficial. Social norms, in a free and democratic society, should be the motivation for establishing laws that are in keeping with democratically held values. We might have a strong belief in the community that people should not be allowed to carry guns. A law might be formulated to reflect this belief. There is more of an interaction of the formal and the informal in a healthy society.

We have a complex of notions in our minds that might have been shaped by our family and early experience. What we learn from our childhood experience has a powerful lifelong experience, even when we later discover that a particular norm doesn't stand up to actual experience. Religious leaders seek to teach children their beliefs to embed those beliefs in the unconscious, so retaining them as believers through their lives. The Jesuits, as an example, were famous for seeking to train the young.

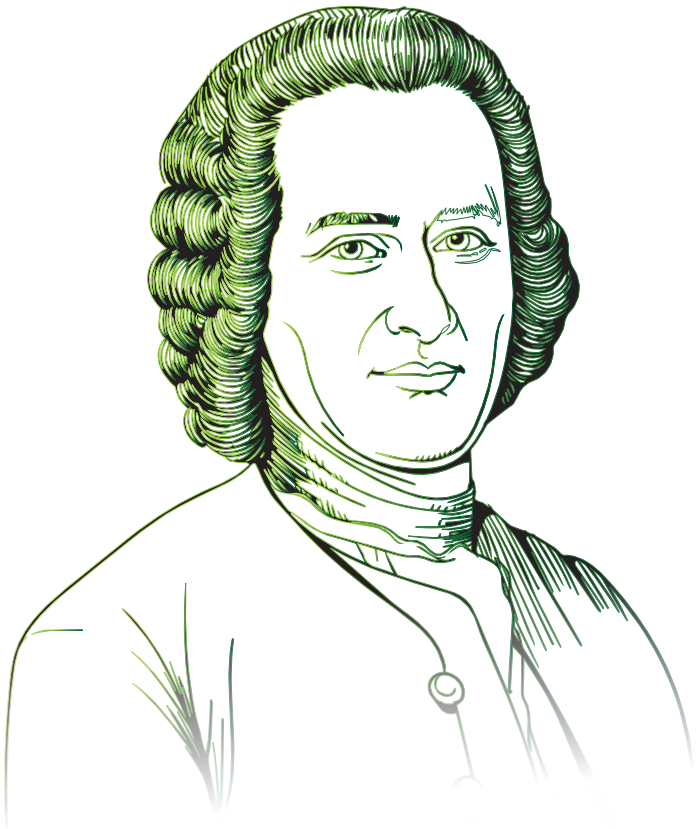
Social norms are open to challenge and change. This is particularly the case when there are substantial economic changes. I may have been brought up to be a loyal employee staying with an employer all through my working life and being proud of my devotion. If, however,

the ownership of the company changes and the rules and values that I have always admired are cast aside by the new owner, I need external rules to protect me. (That is why TUPE or Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) is an important piece of employment legislation).I have always worked in a culture where the industrial social norm is that all employees should be entitled to a written employment contract, which defines their rights and restricts an employer from arbitrarily dismissing them. An American might regard this as an unacceptable restriction of an employer's freedom. Their social values find it acceptable for an employer to dismiss an employee when it suits the employer and without notice. ('At will' employment)

There are social norms from our inherited beliefs and rules written and defined by society, which one hopes to have been developed through a careful consideration of social need. This brings us to the more general values in society. We seek to reinforce the social good with laws. That should mean the vulnerable and innocent are protected. Those who would seek to dominate and enslave others must of course be prevented and punished for even trying. Whether that is workers' rights, gender rights, social norms and values must be articulated to make a fair and just society.

Social norms have to be evaluated and empirically defined. I can have an intuition of what is good, based on my upbringing, but that needs to be explored and tested to see how my belief works in practice.

There are of course hard beliefs that, to quote Rousseau, 'everywhere men are in chains.' This hasn't changed in the modern era. We see religions and ideologies seeking to control adherents in a way that would have probably shocked their founders. There is in every society the problem of authority. There is an ingrained tendency in many societies



**Rousseau**

to suppress individuality and block off any sense of freedom. Of course, as an alternative, people who crave comfort and social stability want to push away freedom. The desire to limit immigrants is a classic reaction. Social norms, which we would normally call racial prejudice, block our fundamental duty and desire to be part of humanity. I would argue that if we step outside our culture there is an immense amount to learn about humanity. Different social norms help us to draw comparisons, look at the different takes on similar situations and then try to understand why there are differences.

In conclusion, I maintain that treating social norms as unconscious values that should be left undisturbed, is a false attitude. We should bring them to the surface, through language, to compare and contrast and always search for values that work pragmatically and empirically in the best interests of everyone.

# The rule of law is subservient to the act of love

## *Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 28th August 2019*

PAUL COCKBURN

David Burridge presented a paper on social norms (see the previous pages 12-13). It was followed by a long discussion. In our discussion, we wondered if social norms are in fact guided by compassion. We need to think about the motives behind them which may not be altruistic. There may be unconscious factors governing our social norms, and tradition becomes embedded in our consciousness. The 'other' is often regarded as an enemy rather than a friend. Human nature is divided, compassion may not be strong enough.

In looking at the laws which are laid down in society, we would hope that they reflect the good values embedded in our society. However personal ethics are harder to follow than laws, we follow an internal law of conscience, while the external law is using fear of being caught and the threat of punishment to control our behaviour. The use of the legal system should be a last resort. Jesus held that the rule of law is subservient to the act of love. If we want better values to prevail in our society, and social norms to change, we need voluntary moral community actions to grow. We also need wisdom to determine whether we should root out bad practices when we see them, or sow seeds of goodness which can grow. This wisdom is contained in two of the parables Jesus told: the parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) - let the tares grow as it is best to leave them till harvest, and the parable of the sower sowing seed. In the light of these parables, it might be better to look for gradual change in terms of improving society rather than revolutionary change.

What are the limits to our compassion? We enshrine human rights in law, but should animals also be treated with compassion and have rights? What about plants? In these areas, it does seem that philosophy follows rather than leads moral discussions.

We moved on to discuss the law in Britain which governs workers rights. It is good that workers are protected when another company takes over their company, or a contract is transferred from one supplier to another. These situations are covered by TUPE legislation which guarantees the rights of workers in these cases. We now need to use our reason to understand how to improve the situation in terms of worker's rights in these situations, as in practice many firms have now outsourced many of their non-core operations, and the outsourcing companies often pay low wages and give workers poor contracts. We don't want to return to the days when dock workers, on low pay and working in harsh conditions, turned up at the docks every day with no guarantee they would get work. In terms of inequalities in terms of pay in the work-place, one idea was that as well as there being a law governing a minimum wage, there should also be a law limiting the maximum wage that can be paid to somebody.

Should we punish those found guilty of crimes, or try to rehabilitate criminals? We can of course do both, and this is probably the best course in terms of limiting and reducing crime. It is of course possible that some people commit crimes because they are mentally ill.

**David Burridge**

But it is difficult to lay down hard and fast rules: it is sometimes difficult to tell if someone is mentally ill, as in the case of Anders Breivik, who carried out a terrorist attack in Norway in 2011.

**Mike England adds:**

I do agree with David that social norms should always be looked at to see if they need updating to fit to today's global needs. Surely decisions and laws should always be made for the benefit of community or society. Crowds are made from individuals, and as individuals we're all human beings first and foremost, regardless of cultural differences. It is only by working out what a human being needs to flourish, from the womb to the tomb, that laws and social norms can and should reflect this.

We as a species need to find a way to radically think outside the box. We keep on justifying ourselves by past social norms. But very rarely do we live in the now, in the moment. We are either thinking in the past or the future, and it is this that divides opinions, people, cultures, nations. It also depends on one's age and the position of influence (type of power) we find ourselves in.


*The Wednesday*

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