

the publication of Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* in 1937, lies precisely in his stressing the limited, incomplete, tentative character of much socially acceptable thought in traditional African societies, rather than seeing it as characterized by elaborate paradigms¹ of hypotheses, highly consistent with each other, and hence very difficult to refute. If we bring Goody's argument in his present book into relation with the arguments in *Literacy in Traditional Society*, it can be argued that the publicly accepted set of ideas in an oral culture is likely to have this conversational quality, hence a good many blurred edges, hence also a considerable capacity for adjusting to change, and absorbing new beliefs and ideas. The limited, sacral, quality of early literacy, on the other hand, is likely to promote rigid adherence to accepted patterns of thought. Obviously, this raises all sorts of questions about the way people in both oral and literate societies change their ideas or for that matter relate thought to action.

A word should be said in praise of Dr Goody's work as editor and translator. The shoals which earlier printings of African sacred texts have hit seem to have been avoided. News (as Dr Goody puts it) has been distinguished from views. The social setting of the text has been satisfactorily indicated. The LoDagaa text used has been printed in order to provide hatchet-carrying critics with every opportunity. We are even given some comments by a LoDagaa on text, translation, and rituals. Readers of Christine Brooke-Rose's *The Languages of Love* may remember a remark to the effect that creative art requires a gift of sympathy, whereas selfish people should stick to translating. Reflection on *The Myth of the Bagra* suggests a very different view; that effective translation requires a very considerable degree of self-sacrifice and self-effacement.

Morality is Marxism by Denys Turner

Morality and the science of society

I have written this paper on the basis of the hunch that there is something very misleading about the relationship, as Marx sometimes

¹For an interesting attempt to relate T. S. Kuhn's scientific paradigms to the way anthropologists have discussed the relation of beliefs to social structure, see S. B. Barnes, 'Paradigms-scientific and social', *Man*, March 1969, pp. 94-102. Perhaps further studies will show some oral cultures 'think' paradigmatically, others conversationally. How this presence or absence of sharply marked boundaries in beliefs relates to the presence or absence of social boundaries is yet another question.

describes it, between the scientific analysis of society and morality. I have the hunch, also, that many of Marx's followers have been misled in the way one would expect them to be, given his false clues. I should say, however, that this suspicion of confusion concerns more what Marx and his followers call by the name 'morality' than what they offer as a method and a substance for the analysis of society. This misleading confusion is that Marx and subsequent Marxists more or less explicitly define their stance as scientists by way of contrast with the status the moralist or moral theorist is, on their view, supposed to have. I shall not discuss in any detail the various ways in which this false contrast has been made out. Rather I shall mention some guiding lines of thought which lead to it.

The hypothesis which I will offer as an alternative to this contrast is simply that it would best serve both clarity and the history of moral thought if we were to agree on the following proposition: Marxism, as the science of society is, if a true science, nothing but morality and morality nothing but Marxism. Hence, the judgments about how to act which may be based on the results of that science, if true, are moral judgments. If, however, the science has produced more than trivially false results it is nothing but vice to act, or want to act on the judgments about acting which are entailed by them. The question, therefore, whether Marxism is or is not identical with morality is, to my mind, an empirical question, to be settled one way or the other by reference to the very same facts which show it to offer either crucially true or else false statements about contemporary society.

Is there a special 'moral' good?

It is possible, however, that Marxists will be at one with various species of opponent in finding this hypothesis somewhat paradoxical. It is if, and in so far as they find it so, that I think Marxists are misled by their opponents. The question, it may be said, of what morality is, is a formal or conceptual question, even if—and many would doubt this also—the question of what moral judgments are true is an empirical matter. But at least in the form most often advanced by its proponents, this view cannot be right, for there is no such distinction as that between what makes a moral anything *moral*, be it agent, judgment, motive, reason for acting or whatever, and what makes it good to be an agent of the kind, or to enact the judgment, or to act for the reason or motive in question. Marxists, on the other hand, *may* be thinking in terms of these notorious distinctions if they insist that their science denotes the relevant agency and the judgments, reasons and motives relevant to that agency's actions, but not *moral* ones. Indeed, on my view of the matter, they can genuinely eschew morality only by also eschewing the idea that they offer the relevant sense of these notions; which is to say in short that they eschew morality on pain of eschewing science.

Nevertheless, the Marxist might reply—and if so with some fairness—that they have no axes to grind on behalf of or against the word ‘moral’, and that they merely want to be understood as far as concerns their own methods. The word ‘morality’ has become attached to forms of thought which are quite incompatible with Marxist scientific methods, and if clarity is to be served it is served best by respecting dominant usage and by denying any connexion between Marxism and morality as construed by that usage. Marxism is, indeed, a doctrine about what those conditions are which entail judgments about how one should act, but morality as currently conceived of is based on the denial that any set of conditions can, logically, entail judgments of that sort.

Though I recognize that there is something in this view, what there is in it is hardly sufficient to justify the wholesale disregard Marxists appear to have for the history of moral philosophy, and, which is more, for the role in its development which, willy-nilly, they have played. What there is in this self-ascribed amorality can be simply stated: in so far as it has become merely a matter of terminology what one calls ‘morality’, nothing hangs on the question of whether Marxism is to be identified with it. Matters of terminology are not matters of substance, and, furthermore, given the anti-scientific associations of the word, nothing justifies calling Marxism ‘morality’, short of some quite arbitrary *prescription* to do so. Thus, if my hypothesis amounted to nothing but that prescription it would certainly be better to get along without it, as, in quite general terms, it would be better if we could drop the entire conceptual apparatus of the ‘moral ought’ and its allies and get down to the question which alone counts: how are we to act, given the facts?

Morality has a classical meaning

I would readily grant this point, therefore, if indeed it were only a matter of terminology what one called ‘morality’. But of course it isn’t just a matter of words. It is an error of substance to call by the name ‘morality’ what has been done under that name by philosophers from Kant to Hare. For what we now call ‘morality’ has no continuity, as regards the development of the *idea*, with that classical conception which was—exactly as is the idea of the Marxists—of a scientific investigation of the social order which can generate norms for action. This discontinuity of the contemporary with the classical conceptions is, therefore, important at the very least from the point of view of the study of ideologies. But one of the chief points which any such study will be constrained to make is that it is not an accident, historically or sociologically, that we cannot now call by the name ‘morality’ Marx’s scientific work. It is not an accident, but the result of a deeply-rooted need felt in contemporary society to defuse the moral import of the study of society by the charge of amorality. In a word it is very important for Marxists to realize that the word

'morality' in contemporary usage has been taken over from the classical conception of morality and has been redefined so as to work against it; it has become an ideological instrument for suppressing the connexion between the science of society and judgments about acting, which connexion was the cornerstone of the classical view.

Locke, Kant and non-classical morals

It was Kant who laid the basis for this possibility. It was he who first explicitly advanced the view that the special claims which moral reasons make—that they are, as we nowadays say, overriding—derive not from the fact that they are the reasons that they are, but from their being, whatever their content, abstractly *moral*. Put in another way, his argument was that moral reasons command categorically but on no conditions of an empirical sort, in particular, they command categorically quite independently of any agent's personal or social desires or interests. It is not hard to see how, given this detachment of the moral 'ought' from empirical interests and desire, Kant's argument is made into the persuasion that those whose interests and desires are non-conventional and are suppressed by the *dominant* morality should nonetheless accept it: they have, it is said, *moral* reasons. If they cannot act morally because they want to, or if it could not possibly be in their interest to do so, then they ought to, nevertheless, because it is *moral* to do so.¹ Conversely, Kant's arguments deprive the non-conformist of any concepts with which to formulate a reply. For, in Kant's view, one is not motivated morally if the sufficient reason for one's wanting to act in a given way is that it is in one's interest to or that one desires to do so. But how else than in terms of suppressed interest or desire could the non-conformist reply?

The one-sidedness of liberal morality—the manner in which it is always permissive on the side of self-interest and disabling of critical arguments against it—begins, I am told,² with Locke. If, as Locke held, there are no nominal essences, then no attribute is any more essentially a constituent of human reality than any other. From which it follows that there is no reason why one should not regard any particular attribute as being essential. Hence, both the argument for and the argument against, e.g. racism, within liberal thought is equally based on the same assumption: on the side of toleration, if no characteristic essentially defines a human person, then there is no reason why colour should be taken as doing so. Equally, and this is the permission granted to the racist, if any characteristic can essentially define a human person, then there is no reason why

¹This point was suggested by Mrs P. Foot in the course of seminar classes given in Oxford in the Trinity term of 1972. Other points in the same spirit are set out in her paper 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' in *Philosophical Review*, June, 1972. The title of her paper suggests for me an alternative title for mine: 'Morality as a System of Categorical Facts'.

²By Professor H. Bracken of McGill University, Montreal, to whom I owe the substance of the points made in this paragraph.

colour should not be made to do so. Generally, if every difference in point of fact is equally a matter of indifference in point of morals, it is never possible to show why I should not take any difference I choose as making in point of morals *all* the difference.

Hare: the commitment to an overriding reason

Thus it is that Hare's moral theory¹ manages to combine the features both of Kant's moral imperativism and of Locke's psychological phenomenalism. Hare defines the Kantian moral 'ought' in terms of the agent's commitment to take some reason for acting as overriding. But the test that some reason I offer I have, genuinely, taken to be overriding is that I act upon it. Hence, there cannot be any reasons for acting which are *in the nature of things* overriding, given that the test of overridingness is actual performance. For that would amount to saying not only that judgments about facts determine moral judgments (which Hare would not accept anyway) but also that judgments of fact logically constrain *action*. And nobody accepts that it would be impossible to accept some judgment of fact and not actually act in a certain way. Hare's alternative is to say, therefore, that what makes reasons for acting moral reasons is my decision to take them as overriding; which is to say that no considerations of fact are any more relevant than any others except by virtue of some decision to make them so. Consequently, all Hare can say to the racist is that, logically it is not incumbent upon him to see colour as a morally relevant consideration; he cannot say to the racist that it is incumbent upon him *not* to so regard it.

The discrediting of morals

It is pretty obvious, then, why a Marxist can have no truck with this moral 'ought', and it might appear that I have unnecessarily laboured the obvious in discussing it. The reason why I have done so is that the upshot of recognizing what is involved in the Kantian 'ought' taken together with the assumption that morality is, and always has been committed to some doctrine similar to that embodied in this 'ought', is the view that morality always and necessarily has been a sort of ideological reflex of given social conditions; and that it is, therefore, chronically incapable of providing a basis for a scientifically guaranteed critique of those social conditions. This, however, is an unhistorical view, and in the worst sense of the word, Platonic.

More than that, the result has been that Marxists have felt it necessary to deny that their scientific critique can, *qua* scientific, be touched by moral considerations of any sort. Consequently, in their accounts of their own methods Marxists have tended to play down, indeed sometimes to write out, so far as they consistently can, some crucial features of classical morality, above all teleological features.

¹*Freedom and Reason*, Oxford, 1961.

But this omission, as I understand the matter, Marxists cannot afford without dangerously misconceiving their own methods. If, on the other hand, Marxists could be got to see that they are, in fact, nothing but the historical successors, for their own age, of the great moralists of earlier ages, then I think that they might be more disposed to learn from those moralists truths which they nowadays seem disinclined to recognize they need to learn. They would not, in particular, offer strongly positivist theories about their own methods, as some do, where in consort with their opponents, they pose the question of the possibility of social science in terms of the rejection of all forms of teleological consideration.

It is in illustration of this view that I wish now to offer a reading of the origins of that classical conception in the debates about morals in sixth- and fifth-century Athens.

II

In the *Protagoras* Plato has the sophist of that name report a version of the myth of Prometheus. Zeus, according to Protagoras, created moral creatures out of varying mixtures of earth and fire and charged Epimetheus and Prometheus to equip them all with appropriate powers. Epimetheus persuaded Prometheus to let him do their job, which he does, as Protagoras tells, 'on a principle of compensation, being careful by this device that no species should be destroyed'.

However, Epimetheus stupidly exhausts all Zeus's gifts, all the possibilities of inhibition and suitable aggression, on the brute animals, leaving humans 'naked, unshod, unbedded and unarmed'. They have, when Epimetheus has finished the task, neither the inhibitions needed to prevent them destroying each other nor the aggressions which would enable them to destroy their enemies. Prometheus saves the day by stealing fire from Hephaestus and Athena and together with it the 'gift of skill in the arts'. Through these gifts 'man had a share in the portion of the gods' and thus 'men soon discovered articulate speech and names, and invented houses and clothes and shoes and bedding and got food from the earth'.

But they had, for all that, no political skills or virtues so that, in one way, the gifts of Prometheus did more harm than good, for they only made men more expert in their tendencies to social dislocation. 'They sought, therefore, to save themselves by coming together and founding fortified cities, but when they gathered in communities they injured one another for want of political skill, and so scattered again and continued to be devoured. Zeus, therefore, fearing the total destruction of our race sent Hermes to impart to men the qualities of respect for others and a sense of justice, so as to bring order into our cities and create a bond of friendship and union. Hermes asked

Zeus in what manner he was to bestow these gifts on men. 'Shall I distribute them as the arts were distributed . . . or shall I distribute justice and respect for their fellows . . . to all alike?' 'To all', said Zeus. 'Let all have their share. There could never be cities if only a few shared in these virtues, as in the arts.'

Sophists: Individual initiative versus social restraint

This, as should be obvious, is a characteristically sophist version of the myth. It is significant above all that we have in this version the germs of that classical sophist doctrine of the contrast between nature and culture, between *physis* and *nomos*, between the socially disruptive individual energy represented by the gifts of Prometheus and the countervailing force of a common social order represented by the gift of Hermes. It is significant, furthermore, that the Promethean gifts are guilty, are stolen goods. The theme of the 'unhappy consciousness' is a common one, but again Protagoras gives it a consciously individualist twist. It contrasts, for example, with Rousseau's version for whom it is civilization which represents both an achievement of consciousness and a moral decline. For the sophist, on the other hand, the Promethean gifts are pre-social, they represent the divine element in man as a form of *anti-social* guilt. The self-consciousness which is the unhappy consciousness is both what raises man above the non-conscious order of the brute animals and that which provokes him to inhuman anarchy. It is both the human secret of nature's power and the source in nature of man's guilt.

For nature, according to the sophist, is brute, pre-social animal-like instinct, a biologically rooted datum. It is value-free, and in that sense the Promethean self-consciousness of nature is a guilty force, in itself it is anti-social because its premisses are pre-social. The gift of Hermes, by contrast, is extra-natural, or rather is a praeter-natural remedy for a defect in nature, that defect which is the combined result of Epimetheus' stupidity and Prometheus' rapacity.

Now Protagoras heavily emphasizes the universality and equal availability of Hermes' gifts. Men may be by nature similar, he seems to say, but the instincts which they share in common as natural are, in their pre-social form, forces of disruption. What men receive from Hermes is sociality, which is not, however, the capacity to review and revise the natural in terms of social forces, but simply the capacity to contain the guilt by the virtues of collective contract. The *polis*, for Protagoras, is not a redemption, but a contrived backlash. In being man's creation, at least in the sense that political virtue has to be learned, the *polis* is contrasted with the natural as conventional. The capacity for political virtues which Hermes distributes he distributes equally, which being so Protagoras is quick to point out, they become a possible object for instruction. Indeed, it is that conventional, potentially common knowledge of political virtue which

is what the sophist professionally claims to teach. For the sophist claimed to be able to teach men the knowledge they would need to be good members of any *polis*, of any social order.

The gap between social reality and social knowledge

But if political virtue is in any case a gift from Hermes which he makes equally available to all, why does it *need* to be taught? Why does Protagoras both say that it is unlike the Promethean arts, not a specialized skill and, on the other hand, that the sophist fills a real need by exercising his skill in teaching it?

The answer to this question shows, I feel, just how far the sophists shared with Plato and Aristotle, indeed with all Greek intellectuals of the time, a perception of the rapidly changing role of social knowledge consequent upon a variety of factors including the development of inter-city commerce and the ravages of the Peloponnesian war. Let me illustrate this by reconstructing as a model that paradigm for a perfect social order which tended to operate as a pre-conception for political argument at the time. The chief methodological directive for this task of reconstruction is that in this model of society there is no distinction available between social knowledge and social reality—for the society is such that everything in it is exactly as it is understood to be. Nowadays, by contrast, we are unceasingly and embarrassingly reminded of the fact that this is not so. The fact is that what we think about our social relationships can be quite inconsistent with what, in some sense, they ‘really’ are. Indeed, much social science is actually premised on the existence of that gap, for it sees itself as having the role of filling it. Whatever the causes of it may be, we cannot take it for granted that what we understand our relationships to be is the chief factor in determining what they are. We recognize, at another level, that personal knowledge is not only not social knowledge, but can even be inconsistent with it and that thus we can, individually and collectively, be ignorant of, mistaken, deceived or mystified about the nature of our social relationships. We do not necessarily know our society by knowing ourselves. Hence, we need to be informed by specialized techniques about the nature of our social relationships, we need, in a word, to create a dimension of symbolic activity, by means of systematically guaranteed knowledge, which will be adequate, in a way that the everyday symbols are not, to the reality of our society and therefore of ourselves.

But imagine, I suggest, a society in which this possibility of discontinuity between personal and social knowledge does not exist. Here the true nature of all social relationships is immediately available to every member of the society through his initiation, in the course of his personal upbringing, into the symbolic forms in terms of which those relationships are understood. Each one understands what he is and what his society is in a single act of individual and

shared perception. There are, therefore, no social mysteries, at least there are no mysteries in the sense that the myths which are metaphors for social relationships could be a source of deception about the true nature of those relationships: for, on this model, those social relationships are always acted out accurately in terms of those myths. All social relationships would be an immediate expression of the social interpretations of them and the social interpretations of them an immediate expression of the actual nature of those social relationships.

In such a society each man would, furthermore, have immediate criteria of action available, for they would be implicit in his transparent understanding of his society. The given social world and the moral world would be identical, not because they would have been identified, as by a conventionalist, but because they would not be distinguishable. A man would be good if he performed well his role in the social order and no distinction would be apparent between being a good member of one's polis and being a good *man*, simply because, in the social role-governed language of evaluation, there would not be any distinction between the role a man might have *qua* man and the role he has as a member of his community.

Imagine, then, the perfect simplicity of this society beginning to break down, for whatever reasons. Social changes begin to alter actual roles and relationships while at the same time the symbolic representations of them do not change in the same way, or at the same pace. The result is that the beginnings of a discontinuity between self-understanding—individual and collective—in terms of social reality and actual social reality itself for the first time emerges. If the simple model I described could be taken to describe what the later Greeks understood Homeric society to be like, then the social world which confronted the fifth-century sophist was this world in the course, or rather in the final throes of collapse. It presented the sophist with a challenge and it is in taking up this challenge that the sophist offered his most characteristic doctrines.

The problem: What, in an age of transition, counts as the Polis?

The challenge was offered by the inconsistency which had appeared in Greek culture between a level of conceptualization, the level of conscious evaluation, which retained its connexions with the fulfilment of social role, and the level of social reality where the old roles and relationships had disappeared. To put the matter somewhat more simply, if the moral question was to be answered by the simple definition: a good man is a man who is a good member of his *polis*, it was no longer just obvious what counted as one's *polis*. Put in yet a different, because contemporary way, moral language retained its prescriptive, action-guiding force, but it was no longer clear what descriptive force would give it content. Thucydides has a very vivid description of just how far this process had gone by the mid-fifth century. 'The meaning of words', he says, 'no longer had the

same relation to things, but was changed by (each man) as he thought fit. Reckless doing was held to be loyal courage; prudent delay was the excuse of the coward; moderation was the disguise of unmanly weakness; to know everything was to do nothing.'

(The second part of this article will appear next month)

Faith and Imagination in the University

by Peter Dale

This article takes as its point of departure Roderick Strange's interesting article 'Faith and Theology in the University'¹ but it is not really intended as another contribution to the somewhat closed debate on the place of Theology in the University. That is a fairly specialized question which theologians tend to worry about when their public relations have grown particularly remote, but has little reference to anyone outside their context, and may reasonably be left to them to resolve.

The problems implied in it, though, are not confined to the University context for several reasons; first, the privilege of having sufficient time to give thought to the health of one's own religion is not the prerogative solely of dons and undergraduates; secondly, a lot of people read books which have been conceived and realized in the context of the University but are not themselves in a position to take account of what that genetic context has had to do with the making of the book; and, thirdly, the tensions between faith and reason do not confine themselves to professional theologians, but are part and parcel of every man's consciousness.

Roderick Strange's solution to the question, 'Should the academic theologian permit his own faith to be involved in his professional activity?' seems to me to be based on treacherous ground in the form of Dr Ian Ramsey's rather unsatisfactory contribution to the problems of religious language. This latter debate has not yet made any real progress I think, and will continue to be unsatisfactory so long as it remains an eclectic science taking only piecemeal ideas, now from linguistics, now from literary criticism, with the result that it does justice to neither and leaves its own problems unresolved. The point is surely that the mere act of giving a name and a set of linguistic credentials to a variety of language, however copiously

¹*New Blackfriars*, July 1972.