

# THE GROUND OF MORAL JUDGMENT

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The prevailing conception of present-day intellectuals is that no objective principle of value can be found and that anyone asserting otherwise either has not freed himself fully from old authoritarian thinking or maintains an absolutistic position because of his ignorance about, at all events, his failure adequately to appreciate the findings of, ethnology, anthropology, history. For what we find there is that men in different places and at different times judge of moral things in many ways. What is good here is not good, even evil, somewhere else. This difference of opinion concerns not only a few matters but touches every type of act and object. It is characteristic of the entire value sphere. Judgements differ as between historic epochs, societies, classes in society, even among individuals in the same class and the same society. This fact argues that there are no inborn moral ideas, no self-evident moral principles, no innate moral forms or mind-laws to be found in men as absolutists have often supposed. If these were present in the minds of all men, we should expect agreement, at least in respect to a number of basic moral ideas. But no agreement exists among men even as to what we might take to be the most elementary of moral ideas. The position upholding inner principles innate to the minds of men, in any form, is untenable.

The absolutist has another approach to the problem directly opposite. He argues that the facts stated are true. Men do not know how to judge of moral things. Of themselves, they are incapable of such knowledge. The moral law is not in us but comes from without as the law of God or as the law of nature. But this approach has long ago been shown to be fallacious. These speak of the will of God; but as to what this will is turns out to be anything but obvious. Authorities everywhere disagree and throughout history have disagreed in the interpretations of it. The fact that there are religious authorities already proves the subjectivity of the idea since if the will of God were surely known by all men, as men definitely know what their earthly sovereign commands, no authority would be needed. Instead of having the law of God, you merely have what some men think the law of God is, which brings it right back to men who judge without principle, as is manifest in their disagreements as to the nature of this will. Much the same could be said about a supposed law of nature which is after all, merely a substitute, made by a skeptical world, for the will of God. But nature is a vast, blind, causal mass of matter, forces, energies, which follows no moral law; hence does not contain it, so cannot be found there. There are no objective universal moral laws.

With the denial of universal moral principles in the forms either of inner or outer law, there is only one out left for the absolutist which can, however, also be disposed of with ease as a result of which he is left without anything upon which to stand. He may argue that value is objective in the sense of its being a quality inhering in objects, just the way, let us say, the orange qualities of

orange smell and taste inhere in an orange. Objectivity here does not refer to a law of thinking. In this case, no thinking whatever is involved. We do not reason out the orange qualities. They are there and we apprehend them immediately. All men tasting, smelling the orange will say this is an orange, and they will agree in this because the qualities experienced are there to all of them in that object in the world. So there are different kinds of value objects in the world. Some are good, others are bad. The good are always good and the bad are always bad. Each in its way is a value absolute. Faced with these various objects, men immediately sense and perceive things that are fine and things that are opposite.

But the absolutist is altogether mistaken in his views here. In the first place, it is doubtful whether objects have qualities at all. It may well be that all are subjective so that the qualities we think objects have out there in the world are nothing but qualities we imagine them to have and which we attribute to them. However, assuming objectivity of quality in the sense that these are not merely in our mind, the absolutist still fails to establish the thesis that value judgments are universal. He fails in doing so for the reason that he overlooks the obvious fact that the value of our object is relative to a situation. The hardness of the wood which makes it an excellent object of use here makes it worthless in another connection. The identical quality of a thing good here makes it not-good there. This is true of every single quality you may name. Not a single one is an exception to this law. Hence, it is impossible to pick out a single quality or combination of qualities in which value will be found to inhere always and permanently. And where you have no permanent value qualities, you have no value objects as absolutes. All of which now adds up to the insight that there are no value absolutes and no universal moral judgments.

Having demolished completely the absolutist, the question is as to what now, if anything, is left to the relativist. We may say value judging is absolutely subjective. To say it is absolutely subjective is to say it is absolutely arbitrary. For no reason whatever we say this thing is good and that thing bad. But if evaluation is absolutely groundless, then there is no possibility of making that act of judgment intelligible. Nor is it possible to make intelligible the history of man, which reveals his efforts to define value in religion, art, philosophy, ethics, law. These things are meaningless and can be accounted for, if they can be accounted for at all, under the assumption of vast mind illusion and insanity. To proceed in pursuing such groundless activity makes no sense. Evaluation is insanity.

While the subjectivist opposes the absolutist, he, ordinarily at least, does not want to go so far as to identify value judgment with insanity. Something is supposed to be left of the idea of value judgment even though it is not to be absolute. Just what is left and how much is left becomes his big problem. It is pretty hard to get a firm footing on this shaky ladder based on insanity and reaching to absolutes and not easy to decide on which rung to perch permanently.

One perch is this. The subjectivist argues that he would not go so far as to say that our pronouncements of what is good and what is bad connect with no reasons whatever. There are reasons. But the reasons are psychological, not logical. This may be illustrated by the old ethical question which asks as to whether things are good because men desire them or whether men desire them because they are good. To declare for the latter means that somehow objective value

may logically be determined as a result of which we are influenced in our choice. This is impossible because there is no base discoverable from which man can make moral judgments. That leaves us with the only other alternative. The value of the object derives from our state of mind. The reason that the object is good is because we have feelings of love toward it, prize it, desire it. But have we gotten anywhere? What is the sense of me choosing one object, loving, prizing it, if by assumption, there is absolutely no difference between this object and another? To make great distinctions among things not distinct is a sign of a disordered mind. So it comes to appear that when principle is abolished we cannot escape the logical implication of a mind that has no relation with a healthy human mind. Even the appeal to psychology helps us scarcely at all. The subjectivist gets on another rung.

His argument now is that elements of principle are involved. His argument with the absolutist reduces to the contention that there are many principles and not one as his opponent contends. But like his, he states these principles as being, once outer, then inner. As outer, the principle tends to be called situation. That is, he argues, acts and objects have value relative to a situation. The situation is the objective ground of value judgment for all men. The men who know and understand the situations will agree that this act is good in this particular situation while in another it is bad. They know this positively, or at least may know this positively, and will regard any men as ignorant who fail to see that a certain kind of good act done here simply cannot be assumed to be good in a situation altogether different. Moral life and action is here made dependent upon rational insight. Without a knowledge of the peculiar situations in which we live and act, moral life is not possible. But the situations are many and varied with the result of having before us many objective fact orders and so many ground principles.

But there are serious difficulties here. What is meant by a situation? Where does a situation begin, where end, when is it different? No answer is ever given to these questions. On the one hand, the situation in which men live and act is always identical. They live upon the same earth, below the same stars, in the same world of nature with its unchanged laws. This situation, the same for all men, ought to give a universal principle. Some situations, like that of an historic speech, are vast though lack the universality of the former. Other situations in which we act are yet more limited until we come down to the unique individual time and place of action which has never existed before that moment and will never repeat in all history. Which of these situations now am I to view as the ground of action? Each may be seen to lie in a great number of quite different object connections at the same time. That is, I act in many situations at the same time. If so, which of the many principles is to guide me? With reference to which one I am to define my object? Viewed in this connection, the object has such value, while relating to other existing facts, it has other value. Taking my situations one at a time, my object becomes one of many values and contradictory values which leaves my action without any ground on which to proceed. Then there is also the question as to how we apprehend the peculiarity of any situation in the first place. I apprehend a situation as critical, important or unimportant, crucial, decisive, etc. This means that the object and act whose value quality is said to derive from a situation derives it from the situation only because the situation itself is viewed as a value object. The relativist here ends up with the same error as the absolutist. While the latter makes the object in its qualities an absolute, the relativist tends to do the same with situation, making of the world a series of

absolute situations each of which are apprehended in their immediacy of quality. He overlooks the fact that situations, too, are relative. But relative to what?

When this question arises, the answer tends to be that situations are relative to the individual. Individuals may differ widely in the way they define situations. That is, minds are differently constituted so that the way we view things and judge of things is a function of the nature and character of mind. So the law is inner, not as one universal law but as law multiplicity. There are as many laws as there are minds. Since each mind is distinct and separate, so each principle and law is separate from every other. Each is an absolute. This is expressed by saying that what is true and good for you is not necessarily true and good for me. Hence, there are many truths and goodnesses. This raises the question as to what this inner mind principle can possibly be. Mere pronouncements on my part that this is true and good may be absolutely arbitrary and have no relation to principle whatever. The only way the idea of this inner mind principle seems to be intelligible at all is to assume an inner relationship of ideas and judgments such that a judgment is expressive of my mind when it fits in with my ideas. That is, the principle of mind is that of internal consistency.

At this point, one might turn the relativist's argument against absolutism upon the relativist himself. He denied the reality of an absolute and universal mind principle on the ground that the fact of men disagreeing with each other proved its non-existence in human mind. Suppose we ask whether the individual, in fact, always agrees with himself. The answer will be he does not. Today he may say things quite differently from what he said years ago or even yesterday. If that is true, then there is no individual mind nature or principle any more than there is no universal to mankind. Which also means that the individual does not have a single mind any more than has society. In different moods and mind-states, the individual may look at things very differently. Hence he has as many minds as moods and mind-states. With that, we are back into absolute subjectivity. Our relativism loses the stable reference of individual mind and becomes one to evanescent moods and flitting mind-states which turns out to making views and judgments relative to nothing at all. And having no relevance at all, each judgment is an absolute decree or fiat standing in total isolation from all other thoughts and from everything else in the universe, so absolutely unintelligible.

The fundamental conception of truth underlying the relativists argumentation is the subjective conception of truth as idea agreement. Coming back to his original argument, we might ask, suppose we did find general agreement among men; would that prove the existence of a universal inner mind principle? Are ideas valid simply because men agree about them? We should answer both questions with NO. Confining ourselves to the latter, here we would say that all men may agree as to a certain conception, say in the idea of ghosts or in the idea of after life, which would not be validated by the fact of general agreement. Conversely, we may ask as to whether the fact of disagreement proves the absence of all ground for truth and value judgment. Let us say A and B disagree in the judgment, what follows? What logically follows is that both judgments cannot be true. Logically, there are several possibilities which may explain the contradiction. It may be that A is right and B is wrong, or B is right and A is wrong. There is also the possibility that both are wrong. Whatever the difficulty may turn out to be in a given instance of dispute, it never

follows that valid knowledge is impossible. From the fact of ignorance and not knowing we cannot infer anything about the nature of objects in the world, including the nature of logical thinking. To assume that logical knowledge is impossible destroys not only the absolutist opponent but destroys the relativist argument itself. The fact of disagreement in judgment is itself a logical inference. Two judgments quite different as that the orange is yellow and again that it is round are not contradictory. Whether judgments are or are not contradictory is a logical inference following upon an assumption of the nature of the object the judgments involve.

We may agree with the relativist that the absolutist position is false though we should not agree to that for the same reasons. Since his own reasoning, in the end, leads into an absolutism no less absolutistic than the one he is criticizing, his position is equally unsatisfactory. That raises the question as to what the underlying difficulty is in all this thinking. We should answer that the debate as to whether valid value judgments are possible will never be solved by our typical pro and con arguments. Nothing will ever be settled here until we first settle the question as to what we mean by judging or thinking in the first place. Our discussions go their monotonous way because we assume that anybody and everybody knows what we mean by thinking. Also, we assume that when anybody prefaces his remarks with "I think", then what follows is an expression of logical cognition even though all the man says is a repetition of the editorials of his morning newspaper. We even assume that the mere presence of an idea in the mind is there only because it has been thought, though it may be dreamed or may have been implanted by suggestion and hypnosis. The fact of an idea in our minds as mere psychological fact means nothing. The problem is whether ideas arising or developed are valid. That is a question of logic. But what logic is we do not know. All we can do here is to suggest its nature.

The basic fact is thinking. One thing this means is that the basic fact is not mind, at least not mind in the way it is ordinarily conceived. The notion seems to be that thinking is a function of mind, that mind is the source and cause of thinking. First we have a mind all complete with thought capacities and powers which, then, upon occasions, at least, engages in a characteristic activity called thinking. That is, mind and thinking are really two distinct and separate things. Where this thing called mind comes from and upon what its nature and growth depend is a mystery. It explains the way the individual thinks and judges; but the way the mind is constituted, left unexplained, reduces our explanation of thinking to a mere pseudo-explanation. We should argue that the mind has its being in thinking and that its nature and character derives from the nature and character of thought. To give an example, we would say that we did not first have the scientific mind which, because of its peculiar constitution, just could not help itself from looking at things in the scientific way, but that this mind came to be analytic, and through the development of scientific thinking. To think of this mind as an absolute entity to which objects have an immediate relation is completely false. Objects as scientific are defined not with reference to an abstraction called scientific mind but to the whole system of objects built up by science which constitutes the world of the scientific thinker.

What is thinking? According to the most popular logic, thinking is an arranging of ideas in our mind according to definite rules called rules of syllogistic construction. There are other logics besides the syllogistic. What this type of logic tends to assume is that thinking is a matter of

rightly relating the internal mind objects called ideas. The big problem is how they are to be related so as to make our conclusions valid. The problem that arises here is how it is possible to get valid ideas out of mere idea juggling when, perhaps, our ideas were quite inadequate or even completely wrong to begin with. Obviously, thinking involves ideas. But the nature of thinking cannot be clarified apart from a notion of what we mean by idea. The usual view is that ideas are mind objects which have a one to one correspondence with objects in the world. The idea category in the mind is a duplicate of object category in the world. Reality, then is double with outer objects making up the world and the duplicate mental objects making up the mind. Hence mind and world are two distinct and separate entities and the big problem is the relation of mind to world. Careful analysis would show such a view to be contradictory throughout. We should say the content of the mind are the objects of the world. We do not develop ideas about ideas, but have ideas about objects. When we think we think something. What we think about is the house, the bank, war, works of art. If the content of the mind is objects, then what do we mean by ideas? The answer is we refer to the object in its meaning. By the meaning of an object, we mean its implication, not to mind, but to other objects in the world.

Our argument is leading us into some of the most fundamental problems of metaphysics. Obviously, the next quests that arise would concern the meaning of the concepts object and world. Are there really any objects outside our minds; if so, what is their nature. Do they possess qualities; are their forms in them or in the mind? All of which, again, demonstrates the fact that no concept can be made intelligible in terms of itself but comes to involve a host of concepts all of which must be defined in relation to each other.

We cannot here pursue these metaphysical inquiries. (Already, previously, we have stated our fundamental assumption of the world as principled by unity and continuity.) Stated negatively, we said it meant that the world is not made up of discrete and separate objects each a world unto itself. Objects are not distinct and separate from each other. Our positive statement formerly was essentially in terms of individuals. We should say the same for objects. All objects are part of a whole which we call world. Objects constitute the world. And talking now not of the abstract object schemata of natural science, but in terms of concrete objects, we would say that every object qualifies every other object so that each object is what it is in and through its relation to every other object. Each object, then, is of the other object, in a sense, is the other object.

It is this fact which is the ground of meaning. Meaning is objective. A shade-tree in the yard before a house has meaning in its world, and its meaning is to be found in the way it qualifies that little world of a house-place. A saloon, a church, a school gives color and tone to a neighborhood affecting the entire life. These things do so whether we are conscious of them or not. It is in this connection that positivism has made its important contribution in its opposition to modern subjectivism. It emphasized the fact that objects are part of a dynamic world and that given objects and object orders had implications to other objects and object orders. While positivism tends to cleave reality as between object reality and mind reality, we are arguing in the direction of an identity relation.

Coming back to the problem of thinking, we are now ready to say that thinking is the

construction of objects. All objects are "thought out" as we say. This is true all the way from the elementary perception which constructs the ordinary sensory objects on up to a construction of the world. And, further, it means that thinking defines its objects in terms of each other and in terms of the world these objects constitute. Nothing is defined in terms of itself. If objects are what they are in and through their relations to each other as this relation is mediate through the world of which every object is a part, then objects must be so thought, if we are to have thinking related to realities. If this conception is right, our modern notion of fact isolation and study is false. Things cannot be understood piece-meal. It is this fact which makes all knowledge pursuit difficult. To construct any idea of a thing rightly, we must develop ideas of other things related which always gives us some sort of world as of nature, culture, art, etc., ultimately of course, the universe. It is only as we build up a world of life that we grasp any part of it. Through the whole, we understand the part or think the part, a fact so difficult of comprehension today.

Thinking is following out objects in their mutual implications to a world. Thinking is world building. Then what is mind? Mind is world order. Mind is no separate entity nor does it possess unique laws, constitutive of a unique mind object apart from objects of nature and culture. The principles constitutive of a world are the principles constitutive of mind. Things mechanical must be thought in terms of mechanical laws constitutive of the mechanical world; things biological must be comprehended through biological principles. The ultimate ground of thinking is the world. Every idea and judgment of ours is pushed against that. The criterion of validity is whether we have a world. And we do not have it if one object built up through its implication negates another. What we know of contradictions and inadequacies of our mind efforts is known only through the world built up and in terms of criteria that make it a world. There are no mere inner or mere outer principles mind follows. Its law is the law of the object it creates. And in that creation, it has its being, is one with it. Apart from that, it is nothing. To order a world in thought is to order mind. A reference to mind is a reference to a world of ordered fact.

Of course, our mind may have little relation to reality. By that we mean that our thinking rests on assumptions of the nature of things that have not been thought out. Working from false assumptions, we build in a world confused and contradictory. This is not so because we are endowed, say, with a sociological mind which in its nature can't see things straight and for which things are so which for normal minds are quite different. That mind is constituted by ideas and its ideas are objects of the world it builds up. But, actually, it has world objects and has no world with any recognizable features. The world it constructs in its meaninglessness and contradictions is the measure of its thinking. Mind is known only through the world. The same holds true for the other minds -- primitive mind, Medieval mind, business mind, and the mind of Cephalus. All are thought constructions of the world and rest on assumptions. We understand them only as we understand their assumptions and we judge of these minds in terms of the implications of their basic ideas to a meaningful world.

We have touched upon the idea of mind absolutely subjective. That is a mind making pronouncements without any logical ground whatever. No human mind is ever purely subjective. But the point is that to the degree to which we approach subjectivity, objects of our world reduce to mere things, stimuli, sensations; which means that we no longer have a world, which also

means we no longer have mind. The pronouncements here just have no meaning. To know the meaning of a judgment is to know its world implications and that is the only way to know its meaning and the only way to judge its validity.

Value judgment, we are saying, is the definition of an object in its meaning. Give the meaning of an act, object, institution and you have its value. But, again, the meaning is never found in the thing itself -- nor is its nature found. You may study facts of crime, facts of war, yet never know their nature and meaning; in short you simply fail to make these things intelligible. You fail because you do not see them in terms of the world to which they belong. They have their being in a social-cultural world. What the objects are that are constitutive of this world we must know. Just like the organism, society may take many forms. But, also like the organism, there are essentials present in corporate life that must be there if that life is to maintain itself and flower. It is the task of social and cultural theory to work out of the constitutive principles of the culture world. That world is not dreamed out but is worked out speculatively and logically. The ideal state of Plato is not the expression of a wish nor is it an ideal in the sense of some beautiful but unrealistic conception of society. That state is a logical construct founded on hard realities. It is that world which is the ground of meaning and value, hence the ground of value judgment. Good is everything that maintains the world, evil the contrary. The popular notion that we know the value object intuitively for what it is, or that we can bring some abstract standard existing independent of everything above us or in our souls to the things one at a time and gauge their value, is meaningless. The implication is we can know the value of things without thinking; all we do is hold against them the ready-made yard stick of God's will, conscience, freedom, happiness, etc. To know what is good involves knowledge not only of this particular thing but of the cosmos itself. Ultimately, everything is known and judged through the cosmos. So moral insight and knowledge of the world are not two different things. It takes all knowledge and the highest wisdom we possess to judge of anything. And the reason our value judgments are so varied and often times so meaningless is not because there are so many different minds judging. It is because we stand before the world and can make neither head nor tail of it. The confusion isn't just between minds but internal to every mind. The so-called mind we refer to is some confused and fragmentary view that connects with nothing else. We talk about many minds today because of mind disintegration and fragmentation may turn to the leader who as an authority pronounces what is right and wrong. We are again in the day where we seek leadership, which means authority. But the leaders are as blind as the people. So the blind are led by blind. And that will be the case until man again learns to think a world in which acts and objects have meaning in reality instead of in and for our subjective states which give meaning to nothing because they are in relation to particulars and not to a world, so mean nothing. The world as meaningful is mind and as such, the ground of value of all its objects.