

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF BELIEFS AND VALUES

by *Edward Walter*

Professor Wall calls upon the "specter of Hume" to bring to submission the philosophical heretics who suggested that the wall between fact and value, science and ethics, is a gossamer. Having read Professor Wall's paper, I remain convinced that there is no mistake in the general view expressed by the papers contained in the March 1969 issue of *Zygon*. Nevertheless, Professor Wall's paper is useful as a means of focusing on the reasons for the fact-value dichotomy. I would like to examine and then present my reasons for rejecting them.

Hume's apparition is used to remind us of several facts:

1. Evaluations can only be deduced from premises that contain evaluation either stated or latent.

2. Moral obligation rests on the approval of individuals. Approval is based on desire, not reason.

3. What individuals approve is culturally determined, but since man's cultures are diverse, his value systems will be diverse; therefore, there can be no universal moral ends that all people will seek.

4. If there were to be a "science of ethics," it would have to rest on an "underived normative moral judgment." This follows from the application of Hume's logical rule that a value judgment is not derived from facts but rests on the approbation of the evaluator. In other words, if it could be shown that all people utilized the same fundamental moral principles, which are underived from any other, then ultimate moral disagreements would not occur.

In light of the early sections of Professor Wall's paper, I take it that ultimate moral agreements rest on changes in desires if people become "sufficiently informed" about what means to ends are available. Present diversity would be the result of the lack of information among people. Finally, I suspect that he, like C. L. Stevenson, would not hold much hope for ultimate agreement on ethical matters. On this point, he is silent.

Professor Wall's invocation of Hume's rule stands on the claim that desires expressed through approbation lead to values. If this is so, then he is right—science would be of no use in discovering value. Whatever

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is desired for whatever reason would be a good reason for holding a moral principle. Moral conflicts, most likely, would be unresolvable. If the fascist *really* desired the elimination of a minority group, say the Jews, the blacks, or whomever, nothing could be said of his value except that others do not share it. The liberal who opposed arbitrary uses of force would be impotent to defend himself against fascist aggression by applying his own principle, since the fascist's act was not a moral wrong. The fascist's aggression is wrong by liberal standards and would be morally wrong for him, but since fascists approve of aggression, denial of minority rights, etc., they have, by their own standards, done right.

As Paul Edwards argued, what else could be said about sincerely committed fascists other than that they disagree with liberal traditions?<sup>1</sup> R. M. Hare consoles the liberal with the promise that fascists are mere "fanatics" who are rarities.<sup>2</sup> Where was he during the Second World War?

I do not mean to win the argument by arousing the emotions of a liberal audience. My recital of the application of the Humian theory is to remind the reader of what is at stake in the debate. Ethical relativists do not always think of the consequences of their thesis; they often console themselves with Hare-type suggestions.

#### BELIEFS, VALUES, AND LOGIC

In a paper entitled "The Rationality of Facts and Values," I discussed Hume's logical rule separating facts and values.<sup>3</sup> There I argued that the logical rule rested on Hume's beliefs about the nature of emotional processes and reasoning processes. According to him, emotions, being active, are not affected by reason, a passive process. Put as directly as possible, Hume believed that knowledge could in *no way* affect the development of emotions and, hence, the development of values. In other words, what an individual *feels* about another person or thing has nothing to do with his knowledge of that person or thing. The two processes, feeling and reason, are totally unrelated except that the latter informs the subject of the presence of objects of interest and indicates means of attaining them.

When Professor Wall endorses the Humian rule on the grounds that ethical obligations stand on "sheer approval" based on the desires of individuals, he commits himself to the same beliefs; that is, he indicates that he believes that there are no reasons for approval but desire and that there are no reasons for desire but feelings of the individuals. This

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is why he also suggests that a moral system must rest on an underived moral judgment. That moral judgment is *felt*, not reasoned.

But the Humian-Wall view is tenable only if innate ideas are resurrected or if desires are direct expressions of biochemical states. Both are doubtful, since biochemical processes, as far as science knows, are qualitatively different from either. Furthermore, the possibility of innate ideas has been successfully discredited many times over in philosophical history. If they are to be reconsidered, new arguments must be made in their favor.

The alternative suggestion, that biochemical processes directly produce values, defies credulity. How can a biochemical process account for desires like the desire for sexual intercourse with a large-breasted woman, the desire to read poetry, the desire to engage in political debate, the desire to possess furs and jewelry? Even more, how can such processes account for complex desires like the desire of the social worker to better economic conditions for the disadvantaged? This would seem to require the introduction of beliefs about the equality of the individual, the extent of economic possibilities, the varieties of political structures, and the possibilities of future development.

All of the examples of desires which I have mentioned seem to require beliefs for their existence. It seems to me that the evidence of social science supports this contention. In fact, *it suggests that desires are impossible without prior beliefs. This being the case, it can be said that, as a matter of logic, values depend upon beliefs.* If I am right about this, then the major tasks for philosophers of ethics are to explain how beliefs are connected to values and to develop a system by which one can predict values as a consequence of knowing the belief structure of the individual and the constitution of the environment.

### VALUE DEVELOPMENT AND BELIEF

As I have said, I believe that beliefs are logically prior to values, attitudes, and emotions. In this section, I would like to explicate this claim. But first, I must briefly clarify the relationship among values, attitudes, and emotions. I do not accept the Humian view that emotions directly lead to attitudes, which I suspect Hume would treat as habits, and values. The traditional criticism of emotivism holds here. It is an obvious fact that value judgments sometimes contravene the feelings of the individual making the judgment. Attitudes express the proclivities of individuals which are often ignored when they conflict with the commitments of individuals to moral principles. Attitudes tend to be identified with the desires of individuals; feelings and emotions are imme-

mediate reactions of individuals to stimuli accompanied by bodily effects; value judgments involve the application of principles which, at times, differ from the pulls of the aforementioned states. While the three are different, they are related. Again, as a matter of logic, I would reverse the order of the Humian picture. Since all, as I will argue, rest on knowledge, values—what ought to be the case—should determine human tendencies (attitudes) and emotional states.

Study in the social sciences makes evident the relationship of beliefs to values. It is generally held today that moral principles (and values in general) develop in response to social and physical environmental conditions. They are not born in us; they are not necessary bodily reactions to stimuli. They develop as a consequent of particular experiences of individuals. In the first stage of its development parents or guardians train the infant to respond to the environment. Psychologists are fairly well agreed today that if infants were left to make their own value choices, they would not develop beyond the retarded level.

In the process of development—which includes training and the pulls of individual experience—the individual develops a concept of self and an interpretation of the environment which give him knowledge of possible actions and their consequences. From this knowledge, he develops *ends* and means to them. (This separates my view from all variations of contemporary empiricism. I reject the Humian notion that ends are not derived rationally.) He begins with the values of his teachers, who express their beliefs about human nature, the environment, its choices, and their consequences. But as a result of his own specific experiences and his ability to understand them, he can modify, alter, or reject those values. As a consequent of his own developed conceptions of human nature and the social and physical environment, he can develop his own values.

So, while these facts support the claims of the cultural relativists, they do not support ethical relativity, for it is possible that values are contextual, as John Dewey suggested, yet not ethically relative, for rationality determines what ought to be done in a given context and anyone in that context could be obligated to follow that direction.

The ethical relativists are right when they say that there are no necessary human ends, not even pleasure or survival, but they are wrong when they conclude that human ends are whatever individuals desire. Desires may be based on misconceptions about the environment, the choices it presents, human nature, etc. Human ends are derived from our *knowledge* of self, the environment, and its choices. They are not what we desire but what we *would* desire if we were fully informed.

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This clarifies the reason for the conflict that might occur among moral principles, attitudes, and emotions. The latter states express our training. Moral principles express our beliefs and may change with knowledge; attitudes and emotions move more slowly. The emotional lag is quite prevalent in Western society because we invariably believe that belief changes are not reasons for emotional changes.

If I am right about this, two of Professor Wall's objections can be answered. First, his claim that different societies value different ends—for example, the Hindu does not seek survival but release from the cycle of life—does not mean that all of the ends sought are justified. The Hindu desire might be based on mistaken beliefs about human nature and environmental choices. His view might change if he were aware of scientific knowledge about these matters.

Professor Wall treats the Hindu's value as if it were not preceded by beliefs about the nature of reality. Is he not aware that the Hindu's desire for *Moksha* is based on his belief that the only reality is *Brahman*, that ordinary experience is an illusion, and that true happiness is achieved when one is freed from ordinary experience? Certainly, knowledge is relevant to these claims, and certainly, these claims *are* relevant to the Hindu's values.

Second, Professor Wall asks how knowledge of facts and norms will lead to resolving value conflicts. By correcting mistakes about human nature, the environment, choices, and consequences of those choices, one can alter ends and means to them. This is how knowledge relates to moral principles. It ought to be apparent to Professor Wall that Ross and Dewey, for example, disagree about values because they have different conceptions of how knowledge is attained. Does Professor Wall doubt that Ross's intuitionism and Dewey's pragmatism have considerable bearing on their ethical differences?

Furthermore, it is not at all apparent that all ethical theories will guarantee survival with equivalent efficiency. As Professor Wall admits, survival alone is not desired, but the quality of life while we live is important. To suggest that all desire-systems will do equally well in meeting environmental problems is simply false. For example, if one seeks immediate gratification of his desires at all times, he will not live long or effectively. In fact, he will not gratify many desires.

### SOCIAL SCIENCE

The evidence of social science indicates that values develop and change as a consequent of knowledge. Is it not generally accepted that racial and religious bigotry is most prevalent among the uneducated? Edu-

cated men and women are the least prone to foster such values because they are most familiar with the knowledge that explains away the bigot's beliefs about the biological differences among races and establishes that different social customs do not imply different human values, that is, that even though one group may enjoy different pastimes, they may still express human feelings such as love, sympathy, etc. Similarly, sociopolitical values change as more information is attained. For example, as sociological studies indicate that social position often determines social behavior, rather than the reverse, more and more people become converted to democratic processes and convinced that government "ought to" control capital. The "laissez faire" value is most supported by those uneducated in social science. The patrician conception of government, too, has died with increased knowledge that human potential is restricted by rigid social structure, that social mobility improves human potential.

A historical survey of value change invariably turns up evidence of changing conditions *and* changing beliefs about social institutions as a consequent of investigation.

#### GENERAL ENDS AND THE RESOLUTION OF ETHICAL CONFLICTS

A final problem must be dealt with only briefly. It might be countered that my argument supports the view that rationality and science are applicable to the development of individual values, but that unresolvable ethical conflicts will result because temperamental differences, which I have admitted, guarantee ethical differences.

The fact that temperamental differences guarantee different interests—one person pursues sedentary occupations like listening to music, another pursues energetic activities like playing tennis—does not affect the claim that social conditions of peace and harmony are necessary for the pursuit of individual interests. The role of an ethical system is to develop individual ends and means to them, but it is also to develop means to resolve ethical conflicts among people. If the ultimate end of ethical activity is the attainment of self-interest (broadly defined), it requires that social conditions are such that individuals can succeed in their endeavors. A social ethic is one which maximizes the potential of each individual to seek self-fulfillment. Enlightened self-interest requires a modification of selfish interest in light of the interests of others.

What I have said indicates that at least one general end motivates those who engage in ethical activity: the pursuit of self-interest. While I agree with the view that there are no specific ends which satisfy self-interest, there are those which are usually called "fundamental ends,"

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which invariably arise in a civilized state: survival; pleasure; avoidance of pain; sexual, physical, and intellectual exercise; and rest. While these may conflict with each other or the developed social means of attaining them (education, although originally developed as a means to control the environment in order to attain fundamental ends, becomes an end in itself to many), they invariably occur. The role of reason is to determine what gets precedence in a given context.

Lastly, to the argument that if the attainment of self-interest is the end of ethical activity, then there must be instances in which an individual's selfish desires can be served successfully, it can be pointed out that we live in a society which operates in accord with this belief. Because this "Machiavellian approach" to values dominates, our society is paranoiac to the extent that no one trusts anyone (witness the extent to which we psychoanalyze all of the statements of our closest companions as well as strangers—we never believe anyone; we always look beneath their words to their purported real meaning), ulcers are the product of our relationships with others, social progress stagnates, and international problems threaten nuclear annihilation of the human race. These unhappy conditions continue because individuals and individual states operate on Machiavellian principles. Can anyone doubt their failure as a method? Machiavelli recognized that his method could succeed only so long as a few citizens used it. It is apparent that it is impossible to "fool people all or even most of the time."

Over and above the failure of Machiavellianism as a method, it overlooks human potential to develop feelings for others. If happiness is the end of the Machiavellian method, then its proponents are unaware of the depth of happiness that accrues to those who enlarge self-interest with the love and interest of others.

In conclusion, I admit that I have only touched on these problems. To explicate my thesis fully would require more space. Here, I have attempted to outline the general view and to indicate the direction of my defense of it.

### NOTES

1. Paul Edwards, *The Logic of Moral Discourse* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955), p. 231.
2. R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 184.
3. *Zygon* 4 (1969):53-64.