

6. Once I acknowledge this possibility, it would be muddleheaded and querulous to cut short my years before checking it out. Very well, check it out. Put those pieces of yourself together and see if the result makes music. And peace.

7. But how does a man really do that? How, I want to ask, does he will unconditionally to be the one he is? So there can be no sham about it, he wills it for as long as he lives. And the furtled white flag he's been carrying in his knapsack gets a ceremonial burning.

8. And he gives that critical and caring side of himself a full say in all the decisions that count for anything. A costly move, this, because that side won't let me do less than my best at any task that has my name on it.

9. The cost of trying that alternative! Disarm myself and get on speaking terms with the Damon who seems to find more than a Cracker Jack prize in this life-package. Get on friendly terms with the side of me that's already warm toward Damon and would monitor my life in that warmth. I may act against its advice on this or that, but this won't be the same as carrying it out of existence—against its will. (I'll be pretty shamed, I suppose, if that side of me turns out to be *interesting company*.)

One thing this pause has taught me. In the first rush of thoughts I was of one mind: end it. But what was the hurry? Well, I had to end it before the other side could get a word in. So ending it meant smothering and brutalizing the side of me that would be Damon K. with a passion if it had its way. Suffocate it and scatter its ashes—what a formula for generating myths about restless spirits!

COMMENT

It is risky to generalize from a single example, but one may be enough to raise a few suspicions about Margolis's position. The unclearness of his proposed basis for suicide—a person's deciding that life is utterly meaningless—infuses any inference drawn from it.⁴ Rhetorically it fluctuates anywhere between a pessimist's cliché and a moan of despair. To suppose that someone can believe the sentence "sincerely" does nothing to remove its unclearness or make it more like a bona fide description of "life," its grammatical subject. As Damon begins to notice in the entry dated February 19, this is where the confusion lies in Margolis's formula for a rational suicide.

Classroom use of such extended examples, at least in my own experience, provides a helpful balance to the often abstruse and rarefied literature of value theory.

4. For a more systematic discussion of this point, see Erwin Stengel, *Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (New York, 1964), pp. 112–14.

Book Review

REASON AND MORALITY. By Alan Gewirth.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. Pp. xii+393. \$20.00.

What can one say of Professor Gewirth's book, if not that it is an incomparable philosophical performance! Massive, powerful, and thorough, it seems to move onto the contemporary philosophical scene like some great tank—not necessarily with guns blazing, but certainly with multiple defenses all intact, and seemingly ready to take on all comers. The better to understand the fundamental stance of the book, it might be well to begin with a somewhat superficial sketch of the way the land lies in contemporary ethics, at least as this must presumably appear to Gewirth as he looks out from behind his heavily armored turret. What first strikes one, of course, in such a view is that ethics, in its contemporary phase, has decisively abandoned the splendid isolation of the metaethics of a time not so long past, and having come down from its one-time heights, has started to maneuver directly within the world of present-day politics and society. Nor is it hard to discern at least the major rival sets of ethical theoretical principles that seemingly inspire the different moral philosophers who carry out these maneuvers. For suppose one asks whether it might perhaps be something like the old traditional natural law principles that guide our latter-day ethical generals and field marshals in their marches and countermarches. The answer can only be a decisive "No!" For it has come to be taken as an absolute if jaded truism that there just is no way in which an 'ought' can be derived from an 'is.' Hence not even the most exhaustive knowledge of nature, be it scientific or otherwise—no, not even a thorough grasp of the known facts about human nature—can shed light on questions as to what human beings ought to be, or how they ought to act. Instead, when it comes to current rivalries among those who inhabit today's academic establishments, these seem to be confined almost entirely to such issues as whether moral rules and moral values are to be conceived in terms

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of teleological or of deontological principles. For instance, assuming that no knowledge of the realities of our human situation can ever disclose any naturally grounded rights and duties incumbent upon us in virtue of our nature as human beings, an obvious alternative for moral philosophers is then to have recourse once again to mere utilitarianism: "Why worry whether we have any naturally grounded responsibilities or obligations merely as human beings? Rather, our concern need be with no more than getting what we want, and getting as much of it as we can, and for as many of us as possible, and regardless of whether the various goods and goals that we thus happen to fancy have any authorization in nature."

One trouble, though, is that the attractions of such a utilitarian alternative have tended to pale rather perceptibly in the last few years. "For is it not a scandal," so the objection runs, "that the maximizing of happiness for the greatest number could well be purchased at the price of the misery and suffering of the lesser number—at least when these are additively considered?" And so considerations such as these have recently boosted the stock of various deontological alternatives to utilitarian teleological theories. And indeed, so far as Gewirth is concerned, there would seem to be no mistaking that it is his intention to maneuver his mighty armament in such a way as to bring it ultimately around to the side of the deontologists.

Yet Gewirth would be the first to insist, and rightly so, that his is a deontologism with a difference! For the trouble with the mine-run of deontologisms, stemming as they do from Kant, and then flowing down into the mud flats of Oxford, and eventually broadening out into the messy, muddy delta of the many curious current varieties of deontologism—of Frankena, of Rawls, of Nozick, or of whomever—is that apparently none of them seems to deal adequately with the problem of justification. And after all, the problem is one that is forced upon the deontologist by nothing less than the very logic of his own moral language game. For supposing it to be a question of categorical, and not mere hypothetical, imperatives—and the former are of the very essence of any proper deontology—immediately, the one who is subject to such obligations as are expressed in the imperatives may well ask, "But why and on what grounds am I thus bound by such imperatives? What is there about them that makes them binding upon me, or for that matter upon anyone?"

To be sure, hypothetical imperatives pose no such problem. It is entirely intelligible why someone might be said to be obliged to do X, given the condition that he wants or is desirous of Y, and X is the best or only means of attaining it. But by definition a categorical imperative to do X can never be justified on the hypothesis of the moral agent's wanting something else, Y. In other words, there just is no way in which the binding force of a categorical imperative may be made evident through any appeal to ends or purposes outside of and extrinsic to the imperative itself. But if the binding force of a categorical imperative cannot be made evident by any appeal to extrinsic purposes or considerations, there would seem to be no alternative

but to hold such imperatives to be somehow self-evident—that is, "You ought, just because you ought." But how can this be? How can the binding or obligatory character of any imperative be held to be literally self-evident?

Of course, Kant's answer was that a categorical obligation, like that of never making a lying promise, is a self-evident obligation, just in the sense that for one to deny it, or to try to exempt oneself from its force, can only involve one in self-contradiction. And yet this Kantian way of construing the self-evidence of categorical obligations has scarcely carried much conviction. Hegel is not the only one who has felt that while it might be true that a categorical imperative was one whose self-evidence could only be manifested by the fact that to deny or repudiate it would involve one in self-contradiction, nevertheless Kant was singularly unable to come forward with any concrete or specific examples of such categorical duties or obligations. Hence Kant's ethics has seemed to many to be an empty formalism, with no concrete moral content of any kind.

Moreover, to move from Kant to the Oxford Kantians, it appears that they simply gave up trying to exhibit the self-evidence of categorical duties by showing that to repudiate them would be self-contradictory. Instead, they contended that categorical duties and obligations had to be simply intuited, there being no other way that their self-evidence could be made manifest. But the seeming arbitrariness of such appeals has meant that the deontologists who have taken this line have been scarcely able to hold their own, much less to sweep the field, in the contemporary struggles between rival ethical theories. And so it is at such a juncture, and against the background of these many failed attempts to justify our categorical duties and obligations, that Gewirth would have us think of himself as entering the lists on behalf of the faltering deontologists. For he is convinced that what all earlier ethical thinkers of a deontological persuasion, from Kant on, have never succeeded in doing, he, Gewirth, can now bring off, and bring off successfully. Indeed, for well over the first half of *Reason and Morality* he is concerned with explicating and defending a single supreme principle of morality, which he terms the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC), and which he contends is subject to just such rational justification as Kant strove for but never attained. That is to say, it is a principle that can indeed be evidenced by the fact that one can deny it only on pain of self-contradiction.

Moreover, in passing, it perhaps should be added that it is not merely the ethical deontologists whom Gewirth feels able to set right by invoking this supreme principle of the PGC. No, contemporary teleologists, no less than deontologists, have all flunked Gewirth's key test of whether or not they are able to provide a rational justification for moral principles. Thus as Gewirth understands morality, it is "a set of categorically obligatory requirements for action that are addressed at least in part to every actual or prospective agent, and that are concerned with furthering the interests,

especially the most important interests, of persons or recipients *other than or in addition to the agent or the speaker*" (p. 1, emphasis added). Or again, "morality, however, is primarily concerned with interpersonal actions, that is, with actions that affect persons other than their agents" (p. 129). Clearly, though, if morality be so conceived as being primarily, if not wholly, other directed, then teleologists must face the problem of the rational justification of their moral principles, no less than deontologists. That is to say, it can never suffice for a teleologist to offer, by way of a justification of his moral actions, the fact that such actions are those that he wants to perform or that lead to the attainment of his acknowledged ends or goals. No, for strictly "moral" action, as Gewirth understands the term, can only be justified on the ground that it benefits others, and not on the ground that it benefits us, or is somehow what we ourselves want to do. But why and on what grounds, then, may a teleologist suppose that we have duties and obligations to promote the good of others? With reference to such a question, Gewirth has an easy time disposing of the likes of Mill's questionable "argument from each individual's desiring his own happiness to the conclusion that the general happiness is desirable" (p. 203). And if Mill be not the one to set the standard that teleologists are to follow in the matter of moral justification, what other standard is to be put forward? Can one any longer simply posit with Hume the presence in all human beings of moral sentiments, or sentiments of benevolence, as supposedly providing the warrant for our other-directed actions and behavior, and in this sense of our moral behavior? Worse yet would be to invoke a so-called moral point of view à la Baier, and then say that moral behavior is justified just to the extent that we give ourselves over to the let's-pretend game of being moral. Or is the moral language game somehow one that we cannot avoid playing, with the result that morality gets its justification by virtue of a kind of transcendental argument? Or we might follow R. M. Hare, and by a kind of hocus-pocus of universalizability, try to transform such actions as we happen to be personally inclined toward into actions of a truly universal, and hence moral, import.

Clearly none of these alternatives would seem to do. It is not surprising, then, that as he surveys the field of moral strategies, as these have been developed by either teleologists or deontologists, Gewirth is able confidently to affirm that in no instance, either in history or in the current discussions, has anyone been able to come forward with anything that even approaches an adequate rational justification of moral behavior. Moreover, it is precisely in this light that he would have us see his own Principle of Generic Consistency: It is a principle that is not to be thought of as revolutionizing ethics so much as one that for the first time in history provides ethics with a truly rational basis and thus turns it into a respectable discipline, not to say an honest woman, at long last.

Needless to say, these are no mean claims, and to substantiate them Gewirth offers a most thorough and searching scrutiny of his PGC. Re-

duced to its simplest terms, what this scrutiny discloses is that human action, all of it and any of it, is distinctive just in the fact that it cannot be other than voluntary and purposive. Indeed, the argument here, at least in its general features, is not unlike Aristotle's argument to the effect that change or motion must involve at least three principles. That is to say, how could one possibly conceive of change—supposing there to be such a thing—that was not somehow a change of something, from something, and to something else? So likewise, Gewirth argues that an action would not be an action, or an agent an agent, if such action were not free in the sense of being uncompelled and uncoerced, and if it were not directed toward some end or purpose, of whatever sort that might be. And not only, Gewirth goes on to argue, must an action be free and purposive, but also as agents we cannot but value such freedom and purposiveness as necessarily attaches to our actions. True, it is conceivable that an agent might seek to renounce his freedom or surrender it or otherwise deny it; but in doing so, he would literally and in the very act be doing so freely; and in thus freely renouncing his freedom he cannot but value that very freedom just in the sense that without it he could not possibly carry out even his own act of freely renouncing it. And so, Gewirth concludes, there just is no way that a human agent can repudiate or disvalue his freedom as an agent without thereby affirming the very thing he is denying, or without valuing that which he is pretending to disvalue.

Moreover, like considerations would apply to that other distinctive feature of action, its purposiveness. For an action to be purposive simply means for it to be aimed at something that the agent thinks to be in some way or other beneficial or as making for the agent's own well-being, however diverse may be the conceptions which different agents may have of what their well-being might consist in. In other words, however varied and divergent the purposes of different agents, no agent could act or be an agent without purposing and valuing his very being, and hence his well-being as an agent.

And now for the next step: just as actions could not be actions, or agents agents, without such actions being free, and without their purposing the agent's own well-being, so also that very freedom and well-being, which agents cannot but value in and by their very actions, must also be things which agents cannot think of themselves as having anything other than a right to. After all, if as an agent I cannot but value my freedom and my well-being as being the absolute prerequisites of my being an agent, must these not be things that I therefore cannot but consider myself as being entitled to? Or, to put it still differently, since I could not even claim to be what I am without being free and without my enjoying a certain well-being just qua agent, then surely my freedom and well-being cannot even be conceived by me in any other light than as things to which I am basically and absolutely entitled. But no sooner is it thus established that I have rights just as an individual, than Gewirth there are established all of the

correlative duties and obligations of all other agents, past, present, and to come, to respect these rights of mine. Not only that, but just as I have rights, qua agent, so also will all other individuals have the same rights, qua agents, as well. But this means that just as all other agents have duties to respect my rights, so also must I acknowledge that I have duties toward each and every other agent to respect just those rights that he has qua agent. And with this there emerges that basic condition of all human agents, which Gewirth likes to call "egalitarian universalism" (p. 127): it is a universalism, because it extends to all rational agents just insofar as they are agents; and it is egalitarian in that the reciprocal rights and duties extend to agents, not in virtue of any special status or condition or qualification that any other agent may happen to have, but rather in virtue simply of his being an agent, and in this sense of his being on an equal footing with any and all other agents. Yes, Gewirth conceives of the exercise of human agency in the world as involving what he calls "transactions": the agent as actor acts, but in the normal human situation there are other agents, who within the context of that particular action may be said to be its "recipients." In other words, whether it be buying or selling, doctoring or lawyering, soldiering or conscientious objecting, philandering or practicing chastity, philosophizing or playing the ponies—in all such instances of human acting, there are bound to be both actors and recipients.

And so with this, the way is at last prepared for the *grande entrance* of the Principle of Generic Consistency: "Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as yourself" (p. 135). "But," you will say, "does this not sound mightily like the now-hackneyed first formulation of the categorical imperative: Act so that you can will that the maxim of your action shall be a universal law?" Well, of course it does. For the matter of that, Gewirth's formulation of the PGC sounds not only like the categorical imperative of Kant; it also sounds like the second part of the so-called Summary of the Law which Gewirth's own colleague at the University of Chicago, Alan Donagan, in a book published scarcely a year before Gewirth's, has most ingeniously undertaken to exploit as a possible supreme principle of morality: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." And yet the point would seem to be not that Gewirth considers his formulation of the supreme principle of morality to be so radically different from such other comparable principles as may have been put forward by other deontologists. Rather, what Gewirth would claim is that he has managed so to construe and explicate his principle that it comes off as being in a quite literal and precise way self-evident and self-justifying. Thus Donagan, for example, would say that his supreme principle rests on intuition, and hence is not such that its very denial turns out to be self-contradictory. And as for Kant, we have already remarked how questionable it is whether he was able to make good his claim that for anyone to go counter to the categorical imperative would involve one in self-contradiction. In contrast, Gewirth, with his very careful and sustained analysis, is able to show that if one

denies to another his generic rights either to freedom or to well-being, then it needs only to be pointed out how the very person who denies these rights to another cannot avoid claiming such rights for himself, just in virtue of his being an agent. But if one must think of oneself as having such rights, and on no other ground than that one is oneself an agent, then one must also acknowledge that any other agent has exactly the same rights as oneself. Hence to deny such rights to others is to fall into a patent inconsistency, so far as one's own rights claims are concerned. Q.E.D.!

Nor is that all, for Gewirth would also no doubt wish to insist that even if Kant were able to maintain that the Kantian categorical imperative cannot be challenged without involving oneself in self-contradiction, there nonetheless is the further difficulty that attaches to Kant's way of conceiving his moral first principle, in that apparently for Kant the principle remains purely formal and resists all application to concrete cases. Not so, though, with Gewirth's principle. For given Gewirth's analysis of human action, it follows that any and every agent is committed to the specific recognition of the concrete values of freedom and well-being. Accordingly, in the second half of his book (chaps. 4 and 5), Gewirth spells out in elaborate and painstaking detail various of the specific ways in which human agents have sought either to deny, or to question, or to look the other way when it comes to facing up to the generic rights of others in specific concrete cases. And in each such case Gewirth is able to show, with remarkable ingenuity, how one has but to invoke the PGC, and at once the various evasions of the generic rights of others turn out to be self-contradictory.

Unfortunately, in the comparatively narrow limits of even this long review one cannot begin either to outline or to give adequate illustration of the richness and intricacy with which Gewirth works out his account of the manifold and varied applications of the supreme principle of morality. But just by way of giving a foretaste of what may be found in this second part of the book, consider how Gewirth attempts to sort out some of the specific obligations that human beings have with respect to others' rights to well-being. Such well-being, he suggests, must involve a variety of so-called goods. For instance, there are basic goods—things like "life, physical integrity, health and its various contributing factors, general freedom, mental equilibrium and the like." These are "attributes of an individual without which he cannot act, either at all or beyond some minimum relative to his pursuing and achieving purposes" (p. 211). Besides such basic goods, there are also what Gewirth calls "nonsubtractive goods." Thus "a person has a nonsubtractive good when his status quo as to his possession of good is maintained so that his level of purpose-fulfillment is not lowered through his being made to lose something he views as good" (p. 230). And finally there are additive goods. These "consist in the means or conditions that enable any person to increase his capabilities of purpose-fulfilling action and hence to achieve more of his goods" (p. 240). Now with respect to each

and every one of these varying sorts of goods, there arise rights and obligations on the part of any one agent as regards the possession of these goods, both by himself and by others. Thus specifically, in Gewirth's eyes, the PGC requires not merely that agents not interfere with the freedom and well-being of their recipients; in addition, they have a duty to contribute positively to the well-being of others, considered as recipients of their actions or possible actions. Thus the drowning man has a right to be aided and succored, assuming that others are in a position to save him without undue risk to their own basic goods of life and health, etc. Or when it comes to additive goods, as opposed to basic goods, agents have an obligation actually to forgo some of their own additive goods, in order that others' lack of these goods may be made up for: "In certain circumstances, when prospective agents are unable to provide for their additive well-being through their own efforts, the agent's obligation extends to assisting them to have such well-being . . ." (p. 241). Yes, when it comes to questions about private property and property rights, Gewirth unequivocally declares that "the right to property is limited by the PGC's requirement that agents also act in accord with their recipients' rights to well-being" (ibid.). Need it be added that Gewirth finds himself having to tread very warily here, considering that some of his own most loyal students are libertarians, and, while wholeheartedly accepting the PGC, they tend to be no less insistent that it scarcely commits one to thus helping others, as opposed to merely not interfering with them or injuring them?¹

Particularly interesting, too, is Gewirth's concluding chapter, which he entitles "Indirect Applications of the Principle" (i.e., of the PGC). What he means by indirect applications as contrasted with direct applications is that while in many instances an individual's actions and behavior are directed toward others, considered simply as individuals and as possessed of their appropriate rights and duties directly under the PGC, at other times our actions are directed toward others in terms of the roles that we and they may have, as these are determined by various social rules. For example, given the fact that in a context of such social rules a judge may sentence a criminal to prison, or an umpire declare a batter out (p. 273), would this not seem to involve a measure of actual coercion or of harm being meted out to recipients; and how is this ever to be justified in terms of the PGC? In meeting such a challenge Gewirth wishes to avoid both the extreme of a libertarian individualism and anarchism, on the one hand, and that of a mere utilitarian calculation of aggregate benefits as over against aggregate harms on the other. In general, his tactic is to argue that "all persons have a prima facie right to participate in activities or associations whose rules they have freely accepted" (p. 286). For is this any more than a specification of any agent's right to freedom under the PGC? However, if an agent has

1. See the interesting series of articles by Roger Pilon that is scheduled to appear in the *Georgia Law Review*, vol. 13 (Summer 1979), and is entitled, "Corporations and Rights: On Treating Corporate People Justly."

voluntarily accepted the rules of a given association, then, Gewirth argues, if he refuses to accept "the adverse impact of procedurally justified rules on himself and others, or if he violates any of the rules, then he contradicts himself" (p. 287).

But then, it soon turns out that the principle that is here involved needs to be considerably nuanced and qualified, depending upon whether the social rules that are thus voluntarily accepted be the rules of some mere voluntary association like a club or professional society, or those of the so-called minimal state, or those of the supportive state, etc. Nevertheless, Gewirth never once draws back from a careful and thorough examination of all of these situations and circumstances, showing in each case how the relevant sorts of social rules may be justified or not, in terms of an ultimate appeal to the PGC. For instance, the differences between the spheres of "retributive" and "distributive" justice, between the methods of consent in the case of, say, a basic social contract as over against specific items of legislation within a state—all of these questions are taken up and dealt with in an incredibly thoroughgoing and systematic fashion. In short, the very last accusation that could be made against a deontological ethics such as that developed by Gewirth is that it reduces to a mere formalism without concrete applications in our individual and social existence.

Nevertheless, this will have to suffice by way of indicating the extent and the subtlety of Gewirth's concern with how his PGC may be applied in concrete cases. For inadequate though our summary of this part of his book may be, it should enable one to see that however much one may be inclined to agree or disagree with Gewirth's specific applications of his principle, there can be no question of his having so construed his supreme principle of morality as to make it eminently susceptible of such application. Gewirth's ethics, in short, is no formalism. Far from it! But even though it can thus escape the charge of formalism, is it, as an ethics, really a basically successful achievement after all? For there is no mistaking the claim which *Reason and Morality* makes. It is true that Gewirth's inherent modesty forbids him to articulate the claim in all of its stark reality. And yet there is no mistaking that his book claims to do what no other major figure in modern ethics has succeeded in doing—not Kant, not Prichard, not Ross, not any of today's worthies or unworthies, whatever their stature or nonstature, be it Rawls or Hare or Frankena or Brandt or Donagan or whoever. For Gewirth would surely say that he for the first time has managed to establish a supreme principle of morality on such a footing as to make it absolutely unshakable: it cannot be denied without self-contradiction; and upon this one absolute first principle the entire edifice of ethics can be erected. Still, is Gewirth's claim in this regard really justified?

With no little hesitation and reluctance, I feel that I must answer this question in the negative. It is true that, considering the very carefully worked out dialectic that Gewirth has developed to exhibit the self-evident and self-justifying character of his supreme principle of morality, one can-

not but feel that in criticizing it one may have overlooked or missed a point somewhere. But for whatever the following consideration may be worth, is it the case that he really has succeeded in showing the indefeasible right of each and every human agent to freedom and well-being? For granted that every human being does in fact cherish both freedom and well-being—yes, granted even that every human agent must value such things not just in fact, but necessarily and unavoidably, as being a part of the very notion of what it means to be an agent—still how does it follow from this that every human agent has a right to such freedom and well-being? Is there not somehow an illicit process here from fact to right, or from 'is' to 'ought'? Merely because I or anyone else happens to have or cherish something very dearly, surely that does not mean that I therefore somehow have a right to what I thus love and cherish, or even that it is right for me thus to love and cherish it. Recall how Hume sought to argue that all men do, as a matter of fact, tend to approve such actions as are useful or agreeable either to the agent himself, or to others. And yet surely the fact of such approbation, assuming it to be universal, still does not make it right that human beings should bestow their approbation upon such useful or benevolent actions. After all, suppose that, just as a matter of fact, human beings were inclined to approve, not so much benevolent or useful actions, as rather malevolent or sadistic ones, that of course would not serve to justify such actions or to make them right.

Of course, one knows what Gewirth's reply to all of this would be. He would say that as long as human beings just happen to approve of freedom and well-being, it certainly does not follow either that it is right for them so to do, or that they have rights to such things. But the case must be different when we recognize that as human beings we cannot avoid esteeming our human freedom and well-being, when our so esteeming them is no less than the very condition of our being agents in the first place. In other words, Gewirth would insist that it is precisely the necessity and absolute inescapability of our thus valuing our freedom and well-being that make such things a matter of right for us, and not merely a matter of liking or choice or inclination. But again, why should something's being necessarily the case make it any more a matter of right or obligation than its merely being actually the case? Is an inference from 'must be' to 'ought' any more valid than one from 'is' to 'ought'? Indeed, suppose that an old-time psychological hedonist were actually to bring off a demonstration to the effect that human beings not merely do not, but cannot, seek anything but pleasure. That still would not mean that pleasure was for that reason a good, in the sense of being something that human beings have a right to.

Supposing, then, that there is indeed something questionable, if not downright faulty, in Gewirth's key argument in justification of his supreme principle of morality, might we perhaps go a step further and presume to offer a possible diagnosis of just where and how and why he may have gone astray in conjuring a rabbit out of the hat—or a matter of right out of a

matter of fact (or necessity)? Might it be that what Gewirth failed to do was to apply what some have been wont to call "the Euthyphro test": Is a thing good because it is desired, or is it desired because it is seen somehow to be good, and quite independently of its being desired?² Now imagine Gewirth to have applied this test to the objects and items of value, which, as he seems to feel, are necessarily associated with all human action, namely, freedom and well-being. And imagine further that having applied the test, it should turn out that freedom and well-being, so far from being things of worth and value merely because we cannot help desiring or cherishing them, but rather because, like them or not, they are things that we ought to value and to cherish, just because in themselves they really are valuable or worthwhile. In other words, what if Gewirth's freedom and well-being were esteemed to be values, not because there was something about our situation as human agents that makes such things appear to be of value to us, but rather because they really are of value, whether they seem so or not?

With this, would not the entire situation change radically for Gewirth, so far as the grounding for his ethics is concerned? No longer would he be forced into any dubious moves from the fact of men's valuing certain things to their having a moral right to what they so value. Instead, prior to any fact, be it necessary or otherwise, that men do desire certain things, is the more basic fact that certain things just are desirable as being naturally and intrinsically good for us. And from this it would follow that such things as are naturally desirable are for that reason things which we ought to desire, and which it is therefore morally right for us to desire. In other words, whatever is thus a natural good, and thus a natural end for human beings, whether they be aware of it or not, will necessarily be something which human beings will have a natural obligation and responsibility—and therefore also a moral obligation and responsibility—to pursue and try to attain. Moreover, whatever it be thus naturally right that any human being should try to do and be—for example, to be free and to enjoy such a natural flourishing or well-being as is appropriate to his nature as a person—this may also be something which a human being may be said to have a natural right to. Does this not, then, provide us—and had he availed himself of it, would it not have provided Gewirth as well—with an entirely proper and defensible transition from nature to ethics, and from the natural to the moral? Indeed, such a transition could hardly be faulted in the way in

2. Richard McKeon once remarked that this was a principle particularly dear to moral philosophers in the eighteenth century. For example, see Kant's formulation of the same principle in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. W. Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), p. 61, n. 2: "The expression *sub ratione boni* is also ambiguous. For it can mean: we represent something to ourselves as good, if and because we desire (will) it. Or it can mean: we desire something, because we represent it to ourselves as good. Thus either the desire is the determining ground of the concept as a good or the concept of the good is the determining ground of desire (will)."

} impossible...
ought imply...
can...
etc.

which from our earlier analysis it would seem that Gewirth's own attempted transition is only too open to fault.

But no, for Gewirth such a line of argument would never do! True, by following such a line, he might be able to get himself off the spike on which he would seem to have got himself impaled, namely, that of trying to derive a matter of right from a matter of fact. But to get off in this way could well seem to Gewirth to be an even worse fate than that of being impaled! For in his eyes it is absolutely essential to the success of his own variety of dialectical demonstration of the supreme principle of morality that the freedom and the well-being, which he considers to be necessary conditions of our human agency, be things which as individuals we are impelled toward out of purely prudential considerations (see esp. pp. 71-73). But this amounts to saying that freedom and well-being are, in Gewirth's eyes, things of value only because we desire them; they are not things that we need to value, and hence are obligated to value, because in the first place they are valuable in themselves. In other words, our original esteem for freedom and well-being does not proceed from any sense of obligation or duty at all. Instead, the obligation and the duty come later, when from a necessary inclination toward our own freedom and well-being, we are supposedly compelled to recognize that we have certain duties and obligations to promote the freedom and well-being of others.

But there is an even deeper reason why Gewirth might wish to look the other way, when it comes to applying the Euthyphro principle, and particularly to invoking that one feature of the principle according to which certain of our human ends and purposes—like freedom and well-being—so far from being valued merely because we desire them, are rather things that we should or ought to desire because of their inherent worth. For no sooner might Gewirth resort to such considerations, than he would suddenly find himself in an entirely different ethical ball game from the one we are all accustomed to today between teleologists and deontologists. Or rather than a different ball game, it might be better to stick with our earlier metaphor and speak of an altogether different battleground, namely, that of traditional natural law ethics, as one might call it, the type of ethics associated with Plato and Aristotle in the ancient world, or with Aquinas in the Middle Ages, and possibly with Hooker in the modern period.

Unfortunately, on such a battlefield Gewirth's otherwise magnificent armor would seem ill-suited and out of place. For how would he deal with a type of ethics which refuses to take for granted what to him appears so evident as to be beyond question? Thus in the context of a natural law ethic, morality is not to be thought of as being primarily, not to say exclusively, other directed; rather, it is fundamentally, and in the first instance, self-directed. The properly human good, or the good for man, is man's own natural or proper telos; and unlike the telē of modern teleological ethics, such an end consists not of such objects of desire as are good only because they are desired; rather it is desired because it is seen to be good. Not only

that, but a man's telos, conceived as his fulfillment and perfection as a human person, is something that the human individual has a moral obligation to try to bring about. And after all, is it so strange that, as less than perfect individuals, we should have a responsibility, as it were, to make something of ourselves, and to become that which as human persons we are naturally ordered to becoming? So it is that our development of ourselves in our jobs and in our professions, in our community and in our religious life, and indeed in our entire lives as persons, so far from being the sorts of things that can be written off as having to do only with so-called nonmoral goods, is rather that which is the very substance of the moral life itself.

And as for others—that is, our neighbors and fellow human beings—is it so far-fetched to suppose that we need to recognize that we are by nature political animals? For the matter of that, who knows but that by nature we may be children of God as well? (After all, the thing is at least conceivable!) Very well, then, our very duties and responsibilities to ourselves as persons must incorporate countless duties and responsibilities to our neighbors, to our families, to our professional associates, to our fellow citizens, and perhaps even to God. How different, and even in a way how alien, all of this is from what one finds in the context of a deontological ethics like Gewirth's. For there, having recognized that our own freedom and well-being are of course things of value to us, we must at the same time recognize that they are of value as nonmoral goods. And then, from the fact that we value these as nonmoral goods for ourselves, we are supposedly bound to recognize the equal value—but this time a moral value—of the freedom and well-being of all other human beings. But even supposing the logic of this connection to hold, is there not something questionable about such a dissociation of the objects of our duties from all objects of our love and interest? For logic aside, how binding are duties going to seem to be to us, if the objects of those duties are quite dissociated from all concern with ourselves as persons and with what we ourselves want to be and ought to be as individuals? Must not a mere duty for duty's sake eventually appear to be not really a duty at all?

Clearly, though, all of this is another story from anything that Gewirth seriously addresses himself to in *Reason and Morality*. But then, no less is it all another story from anything that contemporary moral philosophers, either teleologists or deontologists, are inclined to address themselves to either. Why, then, should Gewirth be expected to have bothered with an entire approach to ethics which is no longer à la mode, and the issues of which are scarcely heeded at all anymore? Besides, it must surely seem not just captious, but even churlish, that we should wish to fault Gewirth's achievement in *Reason and Morality*, when we would be the first to admit that what he has attempted to bring off in this book, and in such painstaking detail, is something that no other contemporary moral philosopher, be he teleologist or deontologist, has ever been able to bring off at all. Granted! Yet for all that, while we cannot deny that Gewirth's achievement

would be something absolutely non pareil, if he has really succeeded, has he entirely succeeded? And if he has not succeeded, might he not then be well advised to look to another, even if seemingly outmoded, type of moral philosophy, which though conceived very differently from his, might nevertheless provide him with a possible issue out of his difficulties? Indeed, the very "stone which the builders rejected" could well be the "one to become the head of the corner."

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Notes on New Books*

ADORNO, THEODOR. *Minima Moralia*. Translated from the German by E. F. N. JEPHCOTT.
London: NLB, 1978. Pp. 251. \$11.95.

Magna Moralia is generally regarded as being the work of a student of Aristotle's who listened carefully to The Philosopher's lectures on the good for man in the fourth century, B.C. Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, on the other hand, takes leftist pokes at the charred remains of the good life in the twentieth century, A.D. "What the philosophers once knew as life has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption, dragged along as an appendage of the process of material production, without autonomy or substance of its own. . . . Our perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer" (p. 15).

Written between 1944 and 1947 after Adorno had fled Nazi Germany, the book is a loose collection of aphoristic reflections whose starting point "is the narrowest private sphere, that of the intellectual in emigration" (p. 18). While not following a set mode of development, the subject matter of these aphorisms (which include such diverse topics as marriage, the family, furniture, movies, and contemporary philosophy) gradually become broader in scope, touching on Adorno's varied interests in sociology, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, politics, philosophy, and the role of the intellectual in modern life.

The personal and aphoristic style of *Minima Moralia* clearly sets it apart from other works in a Hegelian or Marxist tradition. At times the tone echoes Nietzsche and even Kierkegaard, as when Adorno inverts Hegel by claiming "the whole is the false" (p. 50). The justification for critical theory's extended dwelling in the private sphere is itself based on a criticism of Hegel's neglect of the life of the individual and the confession that "part of the social force of liberation may have temporarily withdrawn to the private sphere" (p. 18). This last remark would seem to apply even more directly to the "rise of privatism" in the current American situation, making the arrival of the new U.S. edition of *Minima Moralia* particularly well timed. (And yet, as the passage from p. 15 implies, in withdrawing to the private sphere critical theory condemns itself to ideological false consciousness.)

Originally published in Germany in 1951, this translation was first released in Britain by New Left Books in 1974 (five years after Adorno's death). This edition is being distributed by Schocken Books, the American and Canadian distributor for New Left Books.

*The notes in this issue were written by Burt Loudon and David Trickett.