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MORALITY: OLD, NEW, AND JAPANESE

THE BATTLE LINES are now pretty well drawn up for the war over the New Morality. A new way of thinking is sweeping the nation, the continent, perhaps the world, and the shape of things is emerging much more clearly than could until recently have been imagined.

As little as five years ago the main propagandist for the new cause seemed to be the editor of a men's magazine called *Playboy*. No intellectual or even emotional giant, and apparently an irreparably disturbed divorcee who surrounded himself with a harem of pneumatic beauties and tried to obliterate the distinction between day and night, he churned out a seemingly interminable string of turgid editorials called "The Playboy Philosophy". The gist of these was that the lust of youngish and well-to-do people is not only not immoral, but is sophisticated and advanced, and that the tiny minds of legislators and preachers must somehow be made to recognize this, and to agree to liberate this beleaguered class. Many people bought the magazine, probably because of the large size and excellent quality of the nude photographs. The nude photographs in most men's magazines are not very good.

Now the movement has reached the stage where it has so many spokesmen that most of them are obscure. A number of things combined to produce this great diffusion of the new thought. The civil rights movement in the United States not only raised a number of specific questions of ethics, but also created a mood of questioning and rebellion that has not dispersed. The ruminations of theologians, usually well hidden by jargon and buried in expensive theological journals, suddenly burst into expression in popular print, beginning with the publication by Bishop Robinson of *Honest to God*. It was a hazy book in many ways, and it seemed to ignore the central issue for Christians, which is the meaning of Christ. But it was the first to really talk about Christian atheism, the death of God, the collapse of the old moral foundations, and so on. Then a whole range of authors got into print with elaborations or rebuttals, most of it in a language readily intelligible to a high

school graduate. It seemed as if the death of God, long since suspected by some and discovered by others, had just been publicly announced, and it knocked the props from under a lot of morality.

People like Camus were suddenly found, and their ideas widely disseminated. The message was that God is dead, that morals must be begun again from the beginning, and that in the beginning is rebellion. The teenage rebellion customary in each generation took on a new scope and intensity, and suddenly became horribly articulate when some highly respectable theories of communication filtered down in the form of a dictum that all problems are resolvable into problems of communication. Moreover, several spokesmen for teenage views appeared, and perhaps the most influential was J. D. Salinger, whose *Catcher in the Rye* captured perfectly the vague teenage perception that the adult world is phony.

Added to these were all the specific issues that were raised. The perfection and wide use of contraceptive drugs, for example, suddenly exploded the practical moorings of sexual morality. If girls could have intercourse without fear of becoming pregnant, why not? The advent of hallucination-inducing drugs destroyed the boundaries, always vague at best, between real and unreal experience, and raised a lot of thorny questions about the relations between experience and art and morality. Political events such as the involvement of the United States in Vietnam, which seems so at odds with American ideals and aspirations, have made a shoddy mess of the certainties of political morality.

Perhaps a future historian will merely include the New Morality as part of the democratic movement begun a couple of centuries ago, when values and privileges once the preserve of an aristocracy began to be taken over by social classes that were lower and lower as time went on, until the time came when nearly everyone had access to the same information and values. This, the final stage in a kind of democratization (or vulgarization, according to one's viewpoint), is the Mass Age. Its most important single feature is the re-interpretation of morality for the masses by the guardians of morality, the churches.

Re-interpretations have always been made in the churches, but in the past they were private and hidden, and made little impact upon the public. A preacher who smoked tried to conceal it from the vigorous, overweight, middle-aged ladies who were the real power in the churches. In the Mass Age, a preacher may not only smoke, and fornicate; he tells the ladies that he does and recommends his practice to their own experience. The new attitudes

are most conspicuous among younger ministers, closer to the college and the great arguments that rage there. But the amazing thing is that they are not confined to the new swingers, but have been taken over and systematized by older men, long in the pulpit, with settled ways and settled thoughts. In some cases the effort has been visible, the grunting of exertion faintly audible, and the effect somewhat ungainly, but there is no denying their sincerity and honesty. This entry to the field of an older generation of keepers of the public conscience is clearly a more important movement than the mere confusing invasion of the painfully constructed world of teenagers by adults professing a liking for the Beatles.

What are the advocates of New Morality saying? Chiefly that the old morality is inadequate to meet all the demands of modern life; not only that, but that adherence to old morality at one level leads to or causes immorality at another. Adherence to the Ten Commandments, they argue, does not make one a moral being. The Ten Commandments were a local response to a local need long ago and far away, and were not even particularly advanced for their time. Nearly everyone can think of situations in which there seems to be less harm in killing than in not killing. The old morality, they point out, merely gets us tangled up in inextricable dilemmas, for life is so rich and complex and varied that rules cannot be followed without at some point bringing the rules themselves into conflict with each other, creating only confusion and guilt. Rules for moral behaviour cannot be legislated in advance.

The old sanctions for moral behaviour are also no longer tenable. Scarcely anyone fears hell or the wrath of God—not even those who believe in His existence. Everyone is being encouraged, as well, not to fear the disapproval or punishment of society: that is what rebellion is all about.

The New Morality proposes to do away with sets of rules and external sanctions. Most of human behaviour is no longer ordinarily considered either moral or immoral, except by people with obsessional neuroses. Most of what we do falls into a grey area of mere habit or following of inclinations, and it only occasionally shades off, because of intensity of activity or unusual circumstances, into the realm of morality or immorality. For the rest, rules are not adequate. Only judgement and discernment, the application of practical reason, can be much help in areas where morality is involved. And these are applied in the light of the guiding general principle of Christian love for one's fellow—which is an altogether different thing from the commonplace, sentimental notion of what love is. Christian love is emotional, but also more

than that. It is cerebral and tough; it serves as a corrective to the emotional and sentimental love that can destroy as easily as cruelty can destroy; it sees things steadily and whole and in proper perspective.

So in case daughter comes home with the admission that the pills have failed her (or she the pills), it does not help to turn her out into the street as punishment for sin. Nor does it help to have enormous rows, split the family (or even families) into factions, and wind up with a reluctant compromise of some kind about which half feel bitter and the other half guilty, and all feel disgraced. Rather the solution is to be tough if necessary, and even bellicose if necessary, but rational; to junk all the half-baked notions of absolute wrong and secret fears of divine retribution; to work out something that will be least likely to reduce to tatters the physical and mental health of the greatest number of people involved.

A New Moralist would probably, in some cases, even recommend abortion. This would not be a defiance of the prohibition of killing, but simply a recognition that the prohibition is not the most relevant factor in the situation. And he would not make a new rule and recommend abortion in all cases.

As sanctions for morality, the New Moralists would do away with extra-terrestrial possibilities and even with social pressures. One cannot have morality enforced by society when society must be rebelled against. Instead, what moves one to a solution in a moral problem such as illegitimate pregnancy is rationality. One simply sees that a moral question has arisen, and moves towards a rational application of Christian love. In sum, it is a flexible morality of special cases; a situational morality appropriate to mature people.

Opponents of New Morality can take their stand on a variety of grounds. Some opposition appears to be simply atavistic, the immediate and indignant reaction of conservative minds that long ago lost access to new ideas. Others regard it as simple immorality operating under cover of a vapour of high-sounding words, and insist upon calling a spade a spade: If the New Morality people want to be immoral, let them; but let them cease to call it moral. This particular attitude of opposition boils down to begging the question in dispute. It helps little to protest loudly that the swinging minister is supposed to be teaching *religion* and is paid a very good salary for it, so why isn't he? He says and manifestly believes that he is.

Other opponents argue upon the same grounds of utility and prudence as the advocates. Perhaps the most telling criticism is a simple observation

that there is really nothing new here, that New Morality really opens up no new ways of behaving. The alternatives in any particular moral problem are not changed by saying that the Ten Commandments are obsolete and that one must act in context according to a principle of love. The problem still has to be boiled down to a set of specific statements, and it is idle and foolish to expect the vast majority of people to formulate alternatives in any shape other than the traditional rules. The result of liberation from the rules can be only floundering by people too young, too old, too stupid, or too sick to work out an answer with nothing to guide them but a foggy notion of love compounded from Sunday School lessons, adolescent experience, and a thousand passionate scenes observed in the communications media of a sexually overwrought society. According to Machiavelli, "A people accustomed to live under a Prince, should they by some eventuality become free, will with difficulty maintain their freedom."

The New Morality therefore amounts to nothing but a destruction of authority. Actually, the masses have always been more or less indifferent to issues of morality. They have merely lived. All this talk about formulating moral alternatives is silly, for the masses have never been capable of it or interested in it. The upper classes, devoted to their own more sophisticated immorality based on cynical disregard of a well-articulated traditional morality, have professed to be shocked at the masses. One has only to think of the views of the working class held by Victorian ladies. But the truth is that the extreme poles of the social order have immorality in common: only the masses have never noticed the fact. Therefore in taking away the sets of rules enforced by authority, one is really only taking away the authority. This is dangerous and should not be done, for the masses need authority.

This opposition, then, is really opposition to the spirit of rebellion. God may be dead, but the fact should not be announced and obituaries should not be written. The social order may be a tortured construction of mass neurosis produced by the primeval murder of the father, but it is well to make out that it began from an act of divine creation, or at least from a social contract made long ago by forgotten people.

This destruction of authority seems all the more surprising in people who got their start in revulsion from immoral behaviour. The New Moralists do not recognize, or have forgotten, the satanic aspect of man's life, the drive to evil that bursts through any set of rules. They have blamed the rules instead, and missed the real point. Almost without exception, they see

man's nature as basically good; see man as a creature amenable to sweet reason, capable of articulating the good and then doing it, without any sanctions. They are optimistic. It is no accident that they do not speak of sin, and that in their declarations concerning the corpse of God, they pass over the corpse of Christ. The person and meaning of Christ receive little attention from the New Morality, save as an example of a man who pioneered a New Morality in his time. Few see him now as killed by that satanic drive in men; few see his death as the ultimate condemnation of man, the sickening revelation of a world radically bad at its core. At most, the death of Christ is one of the worst examples of a failure to communicate, or of what can happen when people (Pilate, the Jewish leaders, the mob) follow strictly the rules of a legalistic morality.

They are, in short, making once again the greatest mistake in history, the mistake that has been recurring since the Renaissance, the mistake of believing that man is good, rational, perfectible. Such a view can never explain the Nazis; or something harder to understand, the persistent bombing of a tiny country by the greatest, most powerful nation in the history of the world, which does not want to do it.

Where do we go from here? Historically, the odds are in favour of the liberals rather than the conservatives. Once an area is staked out by the liberals, it is hard to get it back. Barring a catastrophe, they manage to sustain forward momentum. It is likely that we can look for a continued general loosening of old restraints, the abandonment of ideas of former times. Once people have ceased to believe in God and Good, it is pretty hard to make them go back to it, just as we can no longer go back to the days before social welfare. The conservatives must recognize that they are being pushed back, if not already left behind in a race, chasing after and sniping at the vanishing rear of the movement.

It is at this point that a comparison with Japanese morality—of all things—becomes interesting. Odious, but interesting, if done in a rather unofficial way and without illusions about practical applications. If we are moving towards a situational ethic, then it is reasonable to look at places where situational ethics prevail, and see how it works and how things turn out in that society. Japanese society is the one with situational morality *par excellence*.

Scarcely any two people agree on what makes the Japanese tick. There are a number of rather heavy books on Japanese behaviour, especially in rela-

tion to social psychology, language, and things like that. They seem all right in their place, which is mostly in the discussions of earnest graduate students with a big interest in communicating between societies, but somehow they are often beside the point. Japanese go to such wild extremes in behaviour that it scarcely seems possible to attribute any universal ethic at all to them. It hardly seems credible that all those bowing, polite people, always smiling, could turn into such beasts when they got into a position of power in China. Or that such furious tigers, determined to fight with sharpened bamboo sticks to defend their homes, could suddenly surrender and wave happily at occupation troops who entered the land without incident. What was wrong with them, anyway? How could they be so conservative and so radical, so xenophobic and so receptive, so complex and so disarmingly simple, so bad and so good?

The answer is that this wildly inconsistent behaviour was itself the only consistent thing. This was adherence to the principle of situational behaviour, not total lack of principle. If the situation changed, behaviour not only might change, it must change. If it did not, one was being "insincere", playing the wrong role, doing the wrong thing in the situation. Insincerity was not failure to adhere without change through all to a noble motivating principle, it was failure to change when the situation required.

When the recognition of this dawns upon a North American, he is shocked and offended, inclined to make accusations of hypocrisy, lack of principle. He cannot believe that a Japanese friend he treats as equal can be the obsequious servant of another, and the bullying brute lording it over yet another, without being a hypocrite. It is more than the mere role-playing into which we enter in order to observe respect for categories of age, sex, and status. It is a transformation of the person, a visible change, and it scarcely seems possible. But the Japanese defines it as the very essence of sincerity.

Situational thought pervaded old Japanese society, which began to crystallize after about 1600. Society was a hierarchy of slots into which each person had to fit himself at well-defined times. Slots were first defined by ancient Chinese Confucian theory—some of it, at least—which described society in terms of five sets of relationships: ruler-minister; father-son; husband-wife; elder brother-younger brother; and friend-friend. Behaviour in each situation was different, though all had in common a superior-inferior axis, except the last. Most discussions of these sets of relationships are very ho-hum, and do not bring out with sufficient force the important point that in each case behaviour must be

different, and that this was morality. In practice, Japanese society was not fully described by these five relationships; there were innumerable situations besides these. But they were all governed by the same principle of appropriate behaviour.

Specific injunctions said that the ruler must be benevolent and the minister loyal; the father must be responsible for his son and the son must be obedient, and so on. These ethical injunctions were grounded in and applied to society; there was never any question of a divine handout of ready-made commandments. The origin of morality was society, not divinity; so it was also with the enforcer of morality. Sanctions were purely social. In the feudal age the government actually tried to enforce them all, but in modern times the government has moved back a step to enforce the law mainly in connection with the ruler-subject relationship. The rest of morality was left to informal institutions, and it is remarkable that studies of conflict resolution show that people were, and still are, less ready to use the public courts than Europeans or North Americans. They sought informal resolution or conciliation instead. In other words, society in itself had a strong hold over the individual. Its disapproval, its scorn, its heaping of shame on the individual were enough to enforce conformity with the whole hierarchy of norms.

Almost completely lacking was a concept of divine punishment for wrongs. Offences were not offences against the law of God. They were breaches of proper conduct, roundly condemned and cruelly punished, but they were not sin. Guilt had little place in Japanese psychology, though blame and shame did. It has even been said that the Japanese have no sense of sin; this is no doubt an exaggeration, but there is much foundation to the charge by the eminent professor of political science, Masao Maruyama, that the Japanese went awry in the twentieth century because they were incapable of recognizing the force of the satanic in their society.

The old Japanese morality, then, approached the nature of the New Morality insofar as it was totally situational and totally secular. But it differed in not having a guiding principle such as Christian love. This was not necessary because of the presence of something else that New Morality regards as excess baggage—sanctions imposed by society. The social sanctions eliminated altogether the need for a general principle to be applied with discrimination in differing circumstances, because the social sanctions themselves supplied a mode of behaviour for every conceivable situation. The world was a completely known one. Every situation was defined, and had only to be recog-

nized for the norms of behaviour to come into operation. There was no need to think through one's position; one learned from childhood the behaviour appropriate to every position.

Any advocates of New Morality would immediately insist that there is very little similarity here, that it goes against the entire spirit of their undertaking, that Japanese morality clearly amounted to following rules, and that the rules were much more detailed and rigid than Western morality ever was. This is not what they meant at all. Japanese morality, they could point out, might better be placed under another Confucian term altogether—ritual. The Chinese word *li* is variously translated—ritual, rites, ceremony, etiquette—but we all recognize what it means. So detailed, so pervasive, so mighty is ritual that it threatens to become the reality. Emotional mobility is discarded completely; there are ways to protest and to grieve, as well as ways to conform. It is a far cry from the intelligent maturity advocated by New Morality.

So far the New Moralist would be quite right, but he would do well to consider the modern condition of affairs. The question faced by modern Japan is whether socially-oriented situation ethics can survive the disappearance of the society that formed it. Can it survive social change, which amounts not only to the dissolution of many old situations and the creation of many new ones, but to the establishment of change itself as a permanent reality? Some people have said that when a Japanese is thrown into a totally new situation, he flounders. The man who ran in the well-worn paths of a meticulously defined world is at a loss when the paths disappear. He must either interpret his new situation as a variant of an old one (and thus welcome American occupation soldiers as tourists) or strike out, release his anger and fear and frustration (as the entire nation did in World War II, which was essentially a delayed reaction against being forced into the new, different world of the West after 1868). Neither course is very realistic or satisfying. Society is changing too fast and too constantly to try to cover every situation in it with a formula; the inadequacy of the second course is self-evident.

But there is some reason to think that modern Japanese have retained the *habit* of situational behaviour without the social sanctions. Japanese society so far has not cracked up, though anyone can point to strain. To confirm the impression that the habit can survive without the society, one need only look at Japanese abroad. Immigrants to North America tend to disappear without trace into society. There are no Japanese ghettos; no one ever heard of Japantown, whereas everyone has heard of Chinatown. Japanese scattered

in North American society and adapted to it, and in order to intern them when they were believed dangerous it was first necessary to have them all rounded up.

The behaviour of Japanese abroad also tends to be lacking still in some great guiding principle to be adapted to differing situations. But this lack of a great principle has no visible effect: they are not conspicuously wicked by anyone's standards. On the contrary, they are mostly conspicuously good. The habit of changing gears to suit the speed of things around them appears to be self-operating. Ken Tsuruta, a Japanese professor at the University of Toronto who likes to think about these things, describes their behaviour as that of a chameleon. Nothing more than a change in the surroundings is required to cause a change in the colour of their actions.

Perhaps all this is only to say that Japanese are flexible, adaptable, realistic, and pragmatic people. Perhaps that is all that advocates of New Morality are saying: we must be flexible, adaptable, realistic, and pragmatic. Whether the habit can be learned without the training, whether we can attain the goal without going through such a long period of rigid social pressures as did the Japanese, is a question we can turn over to philosophers of comparative history, or to prophets.

NOTE

The most useful survey of Japanese behaviour is R. P. Dore, "The Japanese Personality", in *Asia: A Handbook*, edited by Guy Wint (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 491-496. Major statements are provided by Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan*, revised English translation edited by Philip P. Wiener (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1964); Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946); and E. O. Reischauer, *The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, rev. ed., 1957), part III. Collections of views are found in *Japanese Character and Culture: A Book of Selected Readings*, edited by Bernard S. Silberman (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1962); and *Japanese Culture: Its Development and Characteristics*, edited by Robert J. Smith and Richard K. Beardsley (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1962).