

14 Universalism, Particularism, and Moral Change

Reflections on the Value-Normative Concepts of the Social Sciences

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INTRODUCTION

It is worth beginning any discussion of the trends of universalization and particularization of value-normative systems with some reflections on theory. Theories about values, norms, and morality are themselves closely related to the moralities they explain and to the moral outlook of those doing the explaining. A choice of a value is an act of faith, which echoes the Lutheran salvation doctrine of "justification by faith alone." The distance between these concepts and the "moral" ideas of Oceania, such as the idea of *tabu*, whose violation produces a mechanical consequence of harm to the violator, is obviously large.

There is a confusing methodological issue that results from the use of these concepts. Talcott Parsons, whose thinking about modernization is in the background of sociological thinking about these issues, conceded that there was a problem about objectivity with the thesis of the uniqueness of Western modernity "for a student who is part of the system he is trying to evaluate" (1966: 3). Parsons nevertheless thought that he had transcended such issues. He concluded that modern societies had central value systems and that these tended to converge on the same values, or at least converged on the same role for normative control systems in society. As he put it in his distinctive jargon,

[P]rogressively greater differentiation increasingly frees the cybernetically higher factors from the narrow specifics of the lower-order conditioning factors [i.e. material conditions and economic constraints], thus enabling the basic patterns of the cultural system to become more generalized, objectified, and stabilized. (114)

This meant that "values and norms, especially legal norms, stand higher than political and economic interests" (113–114). The dominance of these norms in the cybernetic control system was characteristic of modernity. The United States, the then Soviet Union, and Japan were his principal

examples. He believed these all had the same origin: They were developments from Medieval Europe or, in the case of Japan, reactions to this development that incorporated its elements (3).

These judgments now seem idiosyncratic and ideologically driven. Indeed, they seem wrong, especially with respect to the leading role of the United States, the idea that the Soviet Union of the Brezhnev era was converging with it, and the idea that Japan "incorporated" Western values. Globalization driven by economics has empowered globalized elite: It is their values that purport to be universal. So it is appropriate to revisit the general question of what sorts of universality are at stake in these discussions, and to separate what Parsons ran together.

The key issues I will explore here involve the three major ways in which "universality" with respect to morality can be understood. One is the minimal or empirical sense in which humans share some sort of common features, needs, feelings, and capacities that are elements of what is normally understood as morality. A second is the maximal (and perhaps normative) sense in which one could claim that there is a process of moral universalization presently operating that is eliminating or competing with moral particularisms that are engaged in a reaction to the threat posed by the claims of moral universality. A third is false or *de facto* universality: the appearance of universality under such labels as "modernity" that is the result of ideas about what society is the most "advanced."

The basic "sociological" issue that is posed by the second kind of universalization is this: Is the process of universalization, one in which a genuine common core of humanity is revealed by the elimination of irrationality and prejudice? Or is it the third type? Is it merely another ideology, promoted by the cultural and economic dominance of the West? Or are the values we take to be universally valid merely those of wealthy international elite, associated with modern technology and modes of organization? Is this elite the bearer of universal values? Identifying universalism with secularization seems to suggest that the elite represents common humanity at its highest, free of prejudice. And if it is not an ideology, universalism can be nothing other than the final normative truth itself. But to arrive at such a conclusion, given the actual content of the ideas in question, raises many problems. If it is an ideology whose apparent "universality" is the result of contingent and perhaps temporary facts of Western political, economic, and military domination, it has no such implications. Its "universality" tells us nothing about what should or must be accepted as inevitable or final, either in a moral or sociological sense.

The first kind of universalization, the minimal sense, seems to have little to do with the problem of universalization. This kind of universal is consistent with all existing moral orders. But a reasonable understanding of the contents of the actually universal elements of morality turns out to have some important implications. These implications are obscured by the usual language for dealing with the normative elements of human life—especially

the term "value," and by the leftover elements of neo-Kantianism contained in the concept of culture. The issues with culture are well known in the evolutionary psychology literature, where they are discussed under the heading of "the standard social science model." This model is the one which holds sway in much of conventional social science more or less to this day, and is found in exemplary form in "cultural sociology," which derives from Parsons himself. The model holds basically that most of affective life can be accounted for by culture, which is understood to consist of more or less arbitrary presuppositions that are determined by the processes of reproduction of the culture through media, education, and the like. Morality is the concept which evolutionary psychologists are particularly concerned to take away from sociology. They propose to account for it in terms of evolutionary processes and neuroscience. The standard social science model is reductive: Everything comes from culture. The evolutionary model is reductive as well, but considers large parts of "culture" to be explained as resulting from neuro-structures rather than arbitrary inputs. But even this model must conclude that there is contingent variation produced by other variables. Both accounts are afflicted with a common problem: It is unclear what about morality comes from non-social sources and what comes from "social" sources.

THEORETICAL PROBLEMS

Parsons was right to raise the question of whether one could objectively understand these processes from within. The concepts used by social scientists—values, norms, and the like—are philosophical concepts with specific sources in philosophical traditions. One cannot simply use the concept of value as a descriptive term without taking on the baggage of the philosophical theory that produced it. The concept of norm is modeled on law and comes with the baggage of the Kantian idea of the moral law engraved in our heart, and a more distant echo of the law of Rome. It is a cliché that social science theories about morality reproduce prior ethical theories, which in turn reproduce theological accounts of morality. Durkheim's key idea was that people came together and performed rituals which bound them socially. The actual content was unimportant. What is important about rituals, and morality generally, is not the truth or validity of the beliefs involved, but their power as a source of collective feeling (Durkheim ([1912] 1965: 431–433).

It is interesting that Australian totemic society should have been Judaized by Durkheim and should have come to resemble one of those small communities, no longer agitated by waves of mysticism or Messianic fervor, that Durkheim, born in 1858, must have known in the Alsace-Lorraine of his precocious and earnest childhood. (Momigliano 1994: 176)

Max Weber was a product of an intensely Protestant family with strong interests in theology and moral issues. His mother was a devotee of William Ellery Channing (Weber [1926] 2009: 28). Consequently, he would construe moral questions in terms of ultimate values and value choices, and apply this framework more generally.

These core ideas of conventional twentieth-century sociology pulled in conflicting directions. One core idea associated moral systems with “society” and treated them as integral to the functioning and distinctiveness of these societies, and equated “socialization” with the internalization of these systems. Morality was assimilated to culture, and culture was treated as part of society, and therefore relativized to societies. Another direction involved ideas about modernization that equated it with universalization, and equated modernization itself with the rise of individualism. Individualism in turn was understood as the exercise of individual choice, which was understood as value-choice.

The philosophical model for this concept of culture is neo-Kantian in origin. It is the idea of shared presuppositions. The reasoning is this: Something becomes meaningful only in the light of presuppositions that organize reality; moral reality is organized by moral presuppositions, shared meaning, communication, and common morality and thus requires shared presuppositions. Because there is common morality, communication, and so forth, there must be shared presuppositions. Without them we would be morally unintelligible to one another, as though we were from different cultures. So there is a sharp divide between those who are part of our culture and share these presuppositions, and those who do not. In their full sense, these propositions are shared only among the members of a given group. They are fundamental, in the sense that they are ungroundable. They cannot be justified in terms of other presuppositions. They must simply be accepted or inculcated by socialization. The “values” model works in a similar way and can be reconciled to this model by treating these ungroundable presuppositions as themselves being value choices. This is how Weber treats the worldview of ordinary life.

These models are unhelpful for understanding morality. They supply an illusory understanding that ends up in a dead end, especially with respect to moral change. The problem with the shared presuppositions model is that it is unable to account for, or even to allow for, change with respect to the shared presuppositions themselves. The model of “value-choice” understood as the ungrounded decision to accept an ultimate value, which is the “solution” to this problem, is no solution at all. There are only mildly plausible examples of this as an actual mechanism of moral change. With the example of the French Revolution in mind, Durkheim describes moments in which the collective consciousness is in flux and a new collective order of normative presuppositions emerges after a period of collective effervescence (Joas 1993: 241–244; Pickering 1993: 64). Weber has a similar model of charismatic law-giving performed in a moment of crisis, and a more

individualistic model of individual commitment to a charismatic leader who embodies or commands a new system of values, having in mind Jesus (Weber [1968] 1978: 1115.).

People do not groundlessly change their “worldviews,” and even if they did, it would be a problem to explain how these groundless worldviews, arbitrarily chosen, could ever come to be shared. Durkheim’s model, in which the new order is introjected in a moment of mass semi-hysteria, is at least an attempt to answer this question, but not one that corresponds to ordinary situations of moral change. Nevertheless people do change their moral views, in a variety of ways. Contrary to the models given in Durkheim and Weber, there is ordinarily some sort of continuity or bridge from one view to another.

The theory of moral change that preceded Weber and Durkheim, best represented by W. E. H. Lecky’s *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Western Rationalism in Europe* (1866) and *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* ([1869] 1955), was more effective in accounting for change. The moral was divided into two elements: intuitions, which were universal, and beliefs, which were mostly in the form of superstitious ideas that could be corrected. The history of morals could then be depicted as the emancipation of mankind from superstition. Change in *belief*, in short, was the thing that could be explained. But explaining change of *beliefs about the world* doesn’t help with anything specifically moral. In contrast, the main claim for intuitionism was that it explained the distinctively “moral,” meaning the non-instrumental goods that could be intuitively known and were not reducible to utilitarian ends.

The problem with this account, however, was with intuition itself, and what it delivered. The exemplary talking point for intuitionists—this being the Victorian era—was the supposedly undoubted fact that we know intuitively that chastity is morally good. Claims like this undermined intuitionism when it became clear that they were not genuinely universal or indeed anything more than English obsessions. At the same time in France, the newly developing psychiatry regarded a man lacking a mistress as a danger sign of mental illness. Spencer’s great contribution was to sociologize intuition by arguing that intuition itself evolved. What undermined his account was the recognition that cultural diversity could not be fit into a single developmental scheme. This is what set the stage for Durkheim’s neo-Kantianization of the same phenomenon.

Even if we discard the Durkheimian form of the presuppositions model of culture, the problem of intuitions, or something akin to it, remains. We do have moral feelings, or at least feelings that seem like intuitions and correspond to something like the category of “moral,” however problematic it is to define it. Where do they come from? Are they important parts of a general understanding of morality? And what do they have to do with evolution?

The Durkheimian answer was that if they varied they were social, meaning part of the collective consciousness of a particular society—in short,

that they came from culture. Our moral feelings, at least those that are culturally variable, just reproduce our cultural inputs. But what about moral feelings that are rooted in evolution and *are* universal? What about the great bugbear of the sociology that preceded Durkheim, namely, altruism? Is it rooted in our neurobiology? The “cultural” answer to such questions was that they didn’t matter: If they were universal, they did not vary from society to society, and thus could not explain anything that did vary. From this, it was reasoned, they could be ignored as part of the explanation of social institutions that did vary.

On its own terms, the presuppositions model cannot explain, or even accommodate, change. The argument for the existence of presuppositions is a regress argument. It begins with some stable fact, such as the fact that we communicate or agree within a group. It is then claimed that it would not be possible for me to understand you, meaning in this case specifically to make the inferences that you make, without also sharing the premises of those inferences. The premises of the inferences have their own premises, which must be accepted for the same reason. And this leads to the ultimate premises, which are the shared tacit presuppositions of the culture itself.

This reasoning, however, leads directly to relativism, of which philosophers then and now have a horror. Durkheim himself found a way out of relativism.¹ Durkheim’s way out involved the notion of representations, a term he used rather than presuppositions and which mostly worked in the same way. But the use of the term “representation” enabled him to make an argument about objectivity and subjectivity that worked differently. He argued that representations were partly objective and partly subjective—not an unusual line for neo-Kantians at the time (Schuhmann and Smith 1991: 455). But he added to this notion something that was novel. He assumed that the subjective elements were local, and the objective elements were universal. The universal elements would be revealed as such through the process of internationalization and integration between societies. They were, he claimed, never completely isolated, and international collective life—cosmopolitanism—was increasing in importance (Durkheim [1912] 1965: 474). He added, “It is this international life that has already resulted in universalizing religious beliefs. As it extends, the collective horizon enlarges; the society ceases to appear as the only whole to become part of a much vaster one, with undetermined frontiers, which is susceptible of advancing indefinitely” (493). Tekiner puts it as follows: “[T]hrough processes of inter-societal interaction, then, there is an apprehension of an objective cosmopolitan truth toward which humanity is,” as Durkheim says, “constantly approaching, but which in all probability we shall never succeed in reaching” (Tekiner 2002: 3; Durkheim [1912] 1965: 493).

The mechanisms differ from Parsons, from intuitionism, and from key ideas of Habermas, but the results are similar in all these cases. It is assumed that there is a more or less coherent moral or normative order at the end of some sort of universalizing process. It comes about by the elimination of

superstition, as with the intuitionists, at the end of the non-objective and local elements of collective representations, as in Durkheim, or by the achievement of undistorted communication through critical reflection and social reform, as in Jürgen Habermas (1971: 55, 313–314; 1973; 1975: 113; 1981: 10–11, 25–26, 273–344; McCarthy 1978: 325, 380). These accounts all fail to allow for normative change, as such, but get around this in unusual ways. Durkheim’s argument is especially ingenious: Because we are simultaneously members of multiple collective consciousnesses, from the family, to the local society, to the nation, to the international community of mankind, the only change we make when we become enlightened is to place ourselves under the one with the fewest subjective elements, namely, the highest one. None of them need to change: only our degree of allegiance to it. It is similar for Habermas. The distortions change, but the core normative impulse is the same. Of course they must accept some sort of local normativity. In Habermas’s case he borrows Robert Brandom’s notion of normative practices inherent in the language of a community (Habermas 2006: 412–414). But there is no mechanism for these to change either. Only our apprehension of them changes.

The intuitionists had a reasonable, if false, account of where the core universal normative ideas came from. They were assumed to be part of our psychology, and therefore in some sense a natural fact. If one asks the same question about the universal elements in Durkheim or Habermas, one gets a different answer. The elements are distinct from what is in fact evolutionarily given. They are ideal in character, or “normative” rather than natural. So to accept any of these accounts “sociologically,” one must accept along with them a kind of dualistic metaphysics of norm and nature. So the solution to the problem of relativism is another kind of unchanging normative object. Oddly, then, these forms of universalism end up in a parallel situation to the one faced by evolutionary psychology. There is a common core of the moral that is unchanging, a domain of beliefs, representations, distortions, errors, or subjective elements that accounts for diversity. The difference between the two kinds of universality is with the source of the moral itself.

EMBEDDED ACCOUNTS OF MORALITY: AN ALTERNATIVE, OR A NEW ERROR?

Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981) showed how moral theories are responses to changed social situations in which previous moral ideas are no longer applicable, and represent attempts to salvage some subset of these ideas in the new circumstances. Thus Stoicism, which seems like an odd theory of human life and ethics, can be made sense of as a response to the collapse of a particular kind of public life. In it one could take pride in one’s actions because noble acts could have noble consequences in a public life in which that was no longer possible owing to the chaotic character of public conflicts and the arbitrary power of the emperor (MacIntyre [1966] 1971: 100). A retreat

to the interior life was a defensive reaction to this new situation. A moral or philosophical theory that reinterpreted virtue in terms of one's inner life, and disowned responsibility for the exterior over which one had no control, was a "belief" change. It made sense of this new situation by preserving what could be preserved of the prior tradition of moral reasoning.

MacIntyre gives numerous examples of this kind of analysis, including an explanation of why the Weberian idea of value-choice as a basis for ethics becomes plausible at a particular point in history (1981: 108). He thus contextualizes the very theories with which we analyze the moral world. But this approach to morality leads, for MacIntyre at least, not to an account of universalization, but toward an account of tradition (1981: 206–209). The account resembles the claim that moral doctrines, and morality generally, is "ideology," but differs in the way it handles change. Accounts of ideology, at least in the Marxian tradition, ascribe change to external causes, such as class interests. MacIntyre's account refers to external causes, but explains change by considerations internal to the tradition itself.

The important feature of the account of tradition MacIntyre gives in relation to morality is this: Moral theory, and indeed moral feeling, are elements in, and change as consequences of, changes in the life and experiences of the people involved (1981: 209). There is a mass of tacit background to the moral feelings and theories that is also part of the tradition. Failures or conflicts often produced as a result tacit material that motivates reflection and change in theories. Moral theory is the tip of a large iceberg of "traditional" material, not the ordering principle itself. But the content of the iceberg, so to speak, is not "presuppositions," or anything else that does not change. The iceberg rather contains things that are tacit, part of the social structure itself. They are the roles and activities that are conducted as part of the common life, and the problems and problem situations that are routinely faced, as well as the literature and folklore that express the moral ideas and award merit or disfavor to particular kinds of action.

This account allows for change but also avoids the idea that morals can be invented. In the first place, there is no appeal to some sort of hidden normative substance that does the explaining: normative presuppositions, normative practices, and the like. But what is lost here is a sense of a distinctive category of "morality." There is no boundary between such things as the narrative tradition of a community and its morality. Indeed, an epic like the *Iliad* is an articulation and carrier of community values. Its hearing produces tacit content for the members of the community or tradition in question, expectations that they bring to their new experiences, which may be frustrated or fulfilled by these experiences.

Yet there is a way in which the *continuity* of the "moral," or what is taken to be moral in a given tradition, is preserved. Moral force may be transferred or extended from one category to another. To take a simple example, the abolition of slavery in the West involved very basic moral feelings about the humanity of slaves, empathy with their suffering, and so forth. It also involved changes in the mental categories into which slaves were put, which made them

into humans rather than beasts. Although the basic feelings that were part of the human repertoire of feelings did not, perhaps, change, the actual feelings that people had about the slaves did change. Feelings of this kind lead to experiences that produce other beliefs and feelings, to relationships that lead to other beliefs and feelings, and so on.

We could reconstruct a history of morals from the times of Homer to the present in which these transferences were recorded. Nothing in the way of new morality need be invented. The cases of "new" morality—for example, the morality that one might acquire by example or edict from a charismatic leader—would become comprehensible as transferences to new domains as well. What a leader shows, in this case, would be how to be "moral" in a new sense or new context, but without losing the prior sense of what is moral. Moral theorizing, in this account, has a particular role. It solves problems that arise in the way of life itself—the life of the Roman nobility, in this case—in the face of changes which make previous outcomes of a particular type of action have different consequences. These changes might be changes in belief, such as the change in beliefs about race and the humanity of slaves that were important for the abolitionists, or changes that result from frustrated expectations. The change that faced the characters of Jane Austen's novels when the emergence of capitalist fortunes in a generally rent-seeking class undermined the expectations of what a pretty girl could gain in marriage to a person with a particular annual income from property led to a conflict between "principles." The conflict was between the social prejudices of the previous era and the different expectations of fortune that came with the possibility of marriage to the new rich. The conflicts produced by the change from rent to capital produced moral and philosophical theories: intuitionism, which validated the "principles" known intuitively, and utilitarianism, which justified production.

From the point of view of the theorists who invented the new moral standpoint, the situations that gave rise to the theory were irrelevant. The role of moral theory or moral thinking in this account is to define the category of true morality, or even to assert a new universal moral truth. But the morality they are taking for granted as a subject is a morality and body of moral feelings produced in a particular situation of conflict and novelty, with a particular content and force related to that setting. The taken for granted background is not universal. And the "new" moral ideals, which are moral by virtue of the transfer of moral content—a particular virtue like upholding one's duties regardless of the consequences—into a new moral setting may or may not prove to be attractive to others and have a claim to universality.

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL, AND IN WHAT SENSE?

This embedded account of morality can explain a great deal that the type of account discussed earlier—the kind that involves an asymmetry between a core moral truth that is unchanging and beliefs that do change—cannot.

It seems clear enough that there is actual moral diversity. Moral feelings, beliefs, and so forth change, and these beliefs and feelings are part of some sort of common life and common experience. The account also provides a motive for theorizing, and a subject that the theories need to come to terms with the actual conflicts people experience in their common life as a result of challenges to their feelings and expectations. The transference of feelings to new objects as a result of changed belief accounts for the continuity of the feelings as well as the sense that the issues are issues of "morality."

What the embedded account does not handle well is universal morality. Either universalism is reinterpreted as an ideology connected to a specific tradition, or it is treated as an intellectual error. MacIntyre himself was strongly anti-liberal, and affected to be an admirer of non-Stalinist communitarian communist Russian movements (1962: 68–69). He regarded the universalizing claims of liberalism as a destructive error. Michael Oakeshott, in contrast, saw liberal ideology as a false rationalization of a genuine tradition that was itself fully embedded in a specific practice of political conduct (1962: 27). Yet these accounts *do* allow us to put universalization into a category. It is an ideology constructed of materials scavenged from genuine local traditions—there is nowhere else to transfer morality from—and misrepresented as a universal philosophical or moral truth.

This is clearly the view that enemies of universalism, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, also take the very same Western traditions to be. There are many "sociological" issues here. Is the "universal" merely the view of the enlightened international ruling class? Does it in fact fit with a certain *habitus* and common life, namely, that of the powerful and internationalized? Or is it simply an abstract ideology imposed on others in the name of justice and universal truth, which disrupts and undermines the local traditions that sustain the common life of particular communities without putting anything meaningful in its place? Obviously certain "Western" ideals do have a strong appeal across many cultures. But what exactly does this mean? It is an added complexity that the "particularisms" that react to Western morality do not accept that they are particularisms. The ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood is that Islam is the genuinely universal truth, and that the dominance of the West is an aberration and degeneration that needs to be corrected by the dominance of Islam.

If we interpret these generic facts through the prism of these two conflicting views of morality, the universalist and the traditionalist views, we have two answers to the question "what is universal?" Neither of them is entirely persuasive. The processes of universalization discussed by universalistic theorists like Durkheim and Habermas are described at a highly abstract level, and the outcomes, the sort of moral order that they foretell, is highly abstract as well. Durkheim's use of universalizing religious belief as grounds for thinking that there is a universal morality is revealing about the limitations of this reasoning. The universal elements of religion seem to have little power as religion, and not much more as intellectual

constructions. On the other hand, there seems to be a continuing appeal on the side of people in advanced societies and in the most privileged classes for exotic religions which promise or practice unusual forms of community—Gurus, Zen Buddhists, as well as extreme forms of Islam and Jewish sects. In many of these cases, it is the very exclusiveness of the community that makes it attractive. Religion becomes a form of life-style distinction. To the extent that these are "traditions" they are artificial ones, usually involving the escape from the demands of conventional life.

In short, there are many, and diverse, conceptions of the good. Accounts of the ideal life, of what people aspire toward are highly diverse, as the above list of religions suggests, and the closer one gets to a "transcendental" experience the more diverse they are. The forms of universalism that are most likely to gain general acceptance are largely concerned with negatives or evils. Of Franklin Roosevelt's four freedoms (1941), freedom from want and fear are the freedoms most likely to be unambiguously agreed on, perhaps because there is little agreement on the means to bring about this "freedom." It also seems clear that the list of evils is not enough to generate any sort of universal ethical outlook. The level of agreement on the evils is matched only by the level of disagreement on the means.

We thus come to an impasse: There are at least two ways of understanding the actual processes involved in "universalization." One assumes an asymmetry. One side is the assumption that there is a genuinely universal morality. It has to be revealed or at least approached in history through processes that eliminate the subjective and superstitious or distortive. The other side takes all moralities to be forms of tradition. Thus, it takes their assertions of universality to be false. We also have the fact of the diffusion of moralities and the appeal of (a) some moral ideas to an almost universal audience, and (b) the appeal of some very *recherché* moral and religious ideas, such as Zen Buddhism or the teachings of Meher Baba, across a wide variety of human societies. This usually concerns tiny minorities in these societies, often minorities motivated by special psychological or personal needs. We also have the fact, that underlies all of this discussion, of the diffusion of a set of "Western" and "liberal" ideals. They are the product of the specifically Western experience of the secularization of Christianity. It is marked by the separation of politics from religion, tolerance with respect to religious beliefs, and, by extension, other things such as life-style choices, meritocracy, the rule of law in some form, egalitarianism at least with respect to human worth extended to women, the sanctity of life, and the acceptance of intention as a precondition of guilt.

Each account has a problematic explanation of this diffusion. For the universalists, these are approaches to moral truth. Reactions against these truths are a mystery, which can only be explained by such things as superstition, self-interest and the desire to preserve traditional forms of domination, or the desire to exploit the anxiety produced by change. The reaction that is played by the issue of the erotic and the role of women is central

to the story, especially in relation to Islam, but also in the case of Hindu traditionalism. For the traditionalists, the diffusion is the mystery. Why should any coherent tradition yield to the pallid and abstract “principles” of Western enlightenment and the emptiness that it produces in a setting in which it is not integrally related to other parts of common life, legal forms, and cultural history, as it is in the West?

UNIVERSAL SETTINGS, OR UNIVERSAL MORALS: THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIATE ENDS

The preceding argumentation raises some general questions about the nature of conflicts with Western universalism. What are the specific conflicts with Western ideas that people experience in their local setting? Why and in what settings are they exposed to Western moral ideology? How do these conflicts get resolved, and what models for resolving them are workable and available—convenient to believe—in the setting? Most ethical thinking, and also practice, in the sense of imitated or emulated behavior, is conformist, in the sense that it is like the behavior or thinking of others, not because there is a mechanism enforcing conformity (Haugeland 1998: 149–151, 316), but because this way of thinking or acting works. It works to bring about the intended outcomes or predictable results in the setting in which an action is performed.

The setting in which universal, internationalized elite behavior routinely occurs and in which emulation and common behavior leading to predictable outcomes occurs, is important. It is the organizational life of large international firms, intergovernmental agencies, as well as international business. The international elite, and those who aspire to wealth, comfort, and acceptance at the highest level of their own and other societies, are, by necessity, compelled to conform to these standards. The means for the creation of wealth, as Weber saw, were means that required organizational efficiency. The international elite has been, first and foremost, an elite at the top of powerful organizations, especially in the international banking sector. The Davos conferences are their natural habitat. The organizations they have risen to the top are formally meritocratic, hierarchical, rule driven, impersonal, and so forth, but have an important informal structure that parallels this formal structure. This parallel structure is personal, clientelistic, and trust dependent, and makes for even greater predictability. Mastering this parallel structure, especially at the highest levels, is difficult. One of the reasons the elite prefers to send its children to international or internationalized schools with other members of the international elite is to enable them to master this informal structure by entering into relations of a patron-client type, and to form friendships that enable them to be trusted and helped by others in positions to do so. This is the famous “old boys network” with its “old school ties,” but on a level far more global than the English original.

If we understand this kind of education and the emulation of the results of this kind of education by others, as merely instrumental, we miss something important. And indeed, the means-end distinction, in this context, is another piece of Kantian baggage that gets in the way of understanding the phenomenon. Many “means” are themselves “values.” The values and standards of conduct of the managerial class are acquired because the members of this class have other values: They want to be rich, or fulfilled, or to live up to the expectations of their family, or because they have no clear goals. Nevertheless, they “internalize,” or rather emulate, successful or convenient patterns of conduct and belief in order to achieve these goals.

The ultimate ends may, in fact, change, conflict, come and go. But the intermediate ends of success in the setting stay more or less stable. Unlike the ultimate ends, they conform by necessity to the intermediate ends of others. “Ultimate” ends are, in understanding conduct and the “commitments” of individuals, a distraction. In certain historical settings, perhaps the moment of early capitalism described by Weber, ultimate ends can intrude into the sphere of the economy and make an impact (Turner 1999: 13). And they can intrude into politics in the form of suicide bombings motivated by religion. But for the most part in ordinary life they are outweighed in their significance by intermediate ends, which are intermediate not only for particular ultimate ends, but for a variety of ultimate ends. This is the same variety that one finds in the social world and within a single individual.

The uniformity of the morals of the global elite and those who aspire to wealth of this kind is not a uniformity on the level of individual tastes, though there is of course a world of global fashion that closely parallels the Davos world, and produces its own kind of uniformity. Rather, the subjective experience of the elite and the aspiring elite is one of individual taste and expression. The intermediate ends of organizational success, and the values they represent, are the things that “universalize.” They universalize through settings by ordinary mechanisms of convenience and emulation. No conversions of religious belief, no radical alterations in one’s deepest convictions or human needs, are required in order for them to be accepted and acted on. Nevertheless, they exclude those who cannot master the behavior or accept the beliefs, or, perhaps more importantly, live in settings in which neither the formal ideas nor the behavior relevant to the informal structures make any difference. And by excluding they create a class of the excluded, which has to theorize its exclusion. Often it does so by a mechanism familiar from Nietzsche ([1887] 1992), Max Scheler ([1915] 1998), and Svend Ranulf ([1938] 1964: 199–204): *ressentiment*. The attractive theory for explaining exclusion is one in which the excluded are the virtuous, destined for a greater reward in the next life, and unjustly treated in this life.

But the reactions need not be of this kind. There can be alternative paths to success and modernity, operating with their own intermediate ends as

values. They are theorized in opposition to the "Western" ones, or as preferable to them for people of a particular culture. This is the case with the Singaporean embrace of "Asian Values" in response to Western ideas of rights, with the Chinese revival of Confucianism, but also with Protestant fundamentalist movements in Latin America, which provide values and beliefs that speak to the specific settings of the aspiring middle class in poor countries.

This account of universal morality, however, is itself subject to the kinds of limitations with which this discussion began. To think of means and ends in this context is already to Westernize. Notions of *tabu* are not interpretable as either means or ends. A large class of moralities has no interest in such things as "good intentions." Rabbinical Judaism, moralities that operate entirely in terms of rigid, fixed conventions and shaming, Sharia morality, and many other cases of morality solve the problem of coordination in terms of fixed rules. Typically these moralities resist change. They lack the dynamic conflict, characteristic of the West, between good intentions or pragmatically good ends and rule following that allows for new resolutions through new moral theories (though they were historically formed in this way). So they deal with change through such means as authoritative casuistics that allow the literal words of the conventions to be applied in new situations, or their adherents actively preserve a lifestyle that prevents these conflicts from arising in the first place. It is this strategy that conflicts with "Westernization." Moreover, these "fixed rule" moralities need not depend in any significant way on "ends" as usually understood. They require only familiar psychological mechanisms. Fear of embarrassment, desire not to upset others, reciprocity, familiarity, habituation, and so forth, can keep a system of conventional behavior in place without any need for sanctions, rewards, or larger purposes.

CONCLUSION

Causal accounts of the origin and development of values and norms are obviously controversial. Yet, they do provide some tools for understanding the conditions for the actual developments that we observe in the present global setting, and they point to answers to the question of what the future might hold. In particular, they point to a major issue with accounts of universalization: Is universalization actually a phenomenon of elite or near-elite internationalization, which does not extend to the populations of the countries these elites dominate? Do the media produce the conventionalization of elite views, or are popular morals and values generated and sustained by local contexts that are impervious to this influence or reactive to it? Is resistance to elite influence associated with political grievance, minorities, and immigrant status? These are all empirical questions. But they are empirical questions that can be addressed without appealing

to mechanisms and theories of morality or values that imply philosophical theories of value, such as Habermas's, or Kantian claims about genuine universal moral truths. The universality of evolutionary and neuroscience mechanisms is sufficient "universality" to account for the actual processes of Westernization that can be observed, and similar mechanisms can account for the "particularistic" responses.

Is there a good reason for rejecting alternative accounts of universalism? A large class of these accounts, including the older accounts of Lecky and the more recent approach of Habermas, fall into the category of asymmetric explanations (Taylor 1964: 21–25). They assume that there is a correct result that does not need to be explained. The result might include genuinely intuited moral truths or truth undistorted by communication governed by power. The role of explanation is restricted to the explanation of deviations from the truth. The deviations are facts in the ordinary causal world since the universal moral truth has to come from someplace else. Yet when one considers the kinds of accounts of universal moral truth that have actually been proposed, and compare them with the "moral" patterns of behavior and propensity discussed in neuroscience and evolutionary psychology, it is notable that these patterns, such as reciprocity, preference for one's own group, altruism, preference for equitable distribution, self-interested rationality, and so forth, all have analogues in the world of theory. This applies to game theory, where reciprocity is a favored strategy, to rational self interest in economic theory, to preferences for equitable distribution in Rawls, group preference in the case of some classical sociologists such as Giddings, and altruism in utilitarianism. It is also evident that taking any one of these patterns as ultimate or basic and attempting to "account" for the rest of morality derivatively from them is doomed. The conflicts are themselves generic.

The impulses given to us by our evolutionary psychology conflict in the real world. Loyalty and reciprocity, for example, routinely conflict with altruism and equity. We invent theories, which become basic to institutions, to deal with these conflicts. Feudalism routinized and ritualized the relations of loyalty and reciprocity of patron and client, for example, to the exclusion of general considerations of equity to produce a society of ranks, with Lords and Serfs in mutually reciprocal relations. We replaced them with other institutions when they broke down. This is the case with bureaucracy, which eliminates personal loyalty and enforces equality under rules. We construct theories, such as the idea of the *Rechtsstaat*, to justify these new orders. The fundamental conflicts do not disappear. They are managed and controlled, and in the case of violations of bureaucratic neutrality, punished under law. To believe in universalism in the ethical sense, a universalism not of the evolutionary type but in the possibility of an ideal situation in which all conflicts are resolved, is necessarily to reject this way of thinking.

Moral theories and the theories built into institutions are solutions to problems that arise from conflicting "moral" and other propensities. There is no

complete solution to the problem of constructing a theory and embodying it into institutions for managing these conflicts. Nor is there an ultimately optimal one, one that will never be altered under future circumstances. It is perhaps plausible to move the issue up to the epistemic level and say that there is a moral ideology or theory that one would arrive at in the ideal speech situation, in the fashion of Habermas, or under the veil of ignorance, as in Rawls. But if we take this step we simply encounter the problem on the higher level. What are the institutions that are to produce the ideal speech situation? What theory solves the conflicts that arise with speech itself, such as the conflict between the universal equality of voices and the fact of expertise? To such problems, there are no universal solutions. If this reasoning is correct, the actual universalism of Western forms is itself a contingent product of a particular situation. Once we recognize the structure of the problem as one of solving the conflict between moral propensities, there is no meaningful alternative to the acceptance of this conclusion.

NOTES

1. See Turner (1981) for a variant form of this problem in Durkheim and Tekiner (2002) for a comprehensive introduction to the moral form of the problem.

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