

Values

The Rt. Hon. Lord Hailsham of Marylebone

This lecture is basically philosophical in content, and, as such, is almost certainly outside the curriculum of any of the studies which brought you here. I am sure that at least is an advantage. I do not wish anything I say today to compete with anything you may have learned of the sciences or arts from the staff of the University. Equally, however, when I say that this lecture is basically philosophical, I cannot pretend to set myself forward as a professional in that field. Sixty years ago I got a first degree in the subject, but first degrees do not entitle one to give lectures. Nor, in the main, do professional philosophers commit themselves, as I am about to do, to a theme. This lecture is entitled "Values", and the theme is about these.

It is a commonplace to say that we live in the age of technology and science. But the world of technology and science is specifically a world inhabited by matters which can be measured, observed and calculated, and whose effects can be reproduced if the conditions in which they are first observed can be duplicated in the laboratory or elsewhere. The sciences are the result of centuries of growth, steady development and shared and public knowledge and it is certain that the present age is one in which development and growth in the sciences are more rapid and more extensive than ever before in human history.

What is also certain is that, in the nature of things, though the application of science and technology can improve out of all recognition the quality of life (as an example, one only has to cite the discovery of antibiotics), and at their best form an indispensable part of contemporary culture, there remains a world which is just as real but it is not susceptible of measurement, calculation, nor in the ordinary sense one which can be created or recreated by duplicating a set of ascertainable laboratory conditions.

I call this second world the world of values or, perhaps more precisely of value judgements. Like everything else which is susceptible of discussion, value judgements are capable of being contained in sentences framed in words. But the things described are not themselves words, nor do they simply describe something which can give rise to purely subjective sensations of pleasure or pain, like the feeling one gets at the hairdressers when undergoing a good shampoo, or the

*KG, Chancellor of the University of Buckingham. The Buckingham Lecture delivered 25 May, 1988.

grunts of satisfaction which an animal gives when you scratch his back.

At least that is my contention. Value judgements are essentially about qualities, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust, kind or brutal, in which praise and blame are bestowed, it would seem objectively, despite the fact that none of this group of qualities can be measured or observed, that none of them are capable of definition in terms of the others, or in terms of some neutral qualities *per genus aut speciem*, despite the frequent and virtually age long attempts, at least by Western philosophers to achieve precisely this result. There is a language of poetry. There is a language of music. There is a language of beauty which cannot simply be expressed in words used in their literal sense.

I call the attempts age long. I believe that this is no exaggeration. They go back at least as far as Socrates, and perhaps earlier. Those who enjoyed the period of intellectual euphoria which followed the sequence of victories over the Persians at Marathon, Salamis and Plataea in Greece and at the Cape Mykale in Iona and against the Carthaginians in Magna Graecia may have entertained no such difficulties and sought no such solutions. The self-confident character of their statuary and architecture between Salamis and Aegospotami points to a period of triumphalism, accompanied, no doubt by intense intellectual curiosity, but without the doubts about the value of meaning of life to which intellectual curiosity in the modern world seems invariably to lead. But after the Athenian defeat at Aegospotami it was all different. The bottom seems to have fallen out of the Greek world, the twelve gods cast down from their seats on Olympus. There was no more triumphalism and something like despair took its place. In the arts and literature all the technical skill was there, possibly even enhanced. It may be seen in the statue of the boy jockey in the National Museum at Athens, or in the newly discovered and beautiful series of child portraits dug up at Brauron after the end of the Second World War. But it was never to be self-confident morning again. None of the young men, Adeimantus and Glaucon and their brother Plato and their friend Polemarchus or the poet Agamon, who spoke with Socrates and whom he was subsequently executed for corrupting, could go about life like Caphalus, the father of Polemarchus, living or trying to live what he chose to call a righteous and holy life without questioning what was meant by holiness and righteousness or why an intelligent young man or woman would do well to pursue it, when all the advantages seemed to lie in pursuing a life devoted to self-interest, pleasure or the pursuit of power. And Socrates himself, described by the Oracle at Delphi as the wisest man in all Hellas, adept at exploding the pretentiousness and self-importance of others accounted to be wiser, and himself the model of the virtues as virtue was then understood to be, wandered about the city asking whomsoever he might encounter the meaning of justice and righteousness and at the end confessing that Apollo was only right in attributing wisdom to himself because he at least was aware of his own and total ignorance whilst they with their greater reputations and pretensions were wholly unaware of theirs.

The quest for understanding the meaning of life has continued ever since,

through Aristotle, the Epicureans and Stoics, the medieval theologians, St. Thomas Aquinas, the English empiricists and sceptics, through Kant and Marx (who claimed to have stood Hegel on his head) right into our own time, to Bradley and Bosanquet and Green in the Oxford of my youth. After that it seems rather to have petered out. It was left to a then almost unknown philosopher, later Professor H. A. Prichard, in an article in *Mind* in 1905 or 1906 entitled "Is moral philosophy founded on a mistake?" and answering the question in the affirmative to turn over the tables of the game and scatter the cards upon the floor.

But though he altered the rules of this intellectual game of cards, I do not think Professor Prichard finished the debate or that he would have wished to do so. It remains for our own generation after two world wars, and a disillusionment equal to any of ancient times to reconstruct moral philosophy upon a different basis and establish the intellectual foundations for the objectivity of the value judgements on a different and, I believe, sounder foundation. I do not speak now of the religious dimension, though it would be wrong for any of you to believe that it is ever very far away from my mind when I speak of such things. But, since most of the propositions of the theologian, though they may be legitimately held, are not directly verifiable, it is legitimate to enquire (if they are not entirely self standing), the kind of intellectual foundations on which they may be deemed to be reasonable.

The great mistake, as it seems to me, of the traditional Western philosophers was to seek an intellectual justification for the traditional value judgements of mankind by looking for some kind of definition of them in terms of something other than themselves, and to believe that, unless some definition of this kind or some purpose like pleasure, happiness, wealth, the will of God other than the pursuit of these values for their own sake, a sort of *summum bonum* as it was called, could be discovered, the values themselves became worthless, or purely subjective to the individual and therefore lacking in objectivity, rationality or intrinsic worth.

Strange as it may seem at first sight, I believe the truth to be that value judgements do not require justification or definition, or evaluation in terms of some ultimate purpose or good. They are intrinsically self-standing. It is true, of course, that they are themselves objects for study, pursuit, enjoyment, and are not in themselves capable of verification by external criteria. Persons of different types of experience, different degrees of percipience or excellence in their pursuit perceive them differently and may thus legitimately enter into controversy about their nature and about individual examples of their application. But what is really remarkable about them does not consist in these differences of perception. It consists in the convergence, the congruity, almost the consensus, of wise men of different countries, continents, civilisations and religious beliefs as to their content.

When, in January 1903, my grandfather was found dead in the bath at his flat in the Polytechnic, there was found on his desk an unfinished letter addressed to a young member of the Institute afflicted by religious doubt. "There are some

facts”, he had written, “established beyond the warrings of all the theologians. Forever, virtue is better than vice, truth than falsehood, kindness than brutality.” He could have added “beauty than ugliness”. What he meant of course was not that values were facts, like the existence of protons or neutrons, or happenings like the Battle of Waterloo or the reality of the Loch Ness monster or the Yeti, nor that these truths were capable of being proved by evidence. What he meant was that value judgements did not require evidence to make them objectively acceptable.

I am not, for a moment, seeking to argue that it does not matter what you believe, or that arguments among theologians, or different schools of philosophy, have no importance, or are arguments about nothing. What I am suggesting is that my grandfather’s last words point to a congruity about value judgements amongst earnest seekers rather than divergence, and even more significantly that this congruity points to an objective validity and not to a more subjective feeling of approval or disapproval. I doubt whether Plato or Aristotle, Amos or Isaiah, Gautama Buddha or the Founder of the Christian religion, the author of the Tao, Confucius, St. Thomas or Maimonides, would have failed to subscribe, with intention, to what my grandfather then wrote. Could anyone, viewing for the first time, the vision of Chillon Castle in the Lac Lemman, or anyone of half a hundred views of mountains I could name, or could anyone hearing for the first time some of the most beautiful pieces of music, fail to exclaim in ecstasy on the wonderful beauty of what they had seen or heard. To my mind the appreciation of this value of beauty is something altogether outside the world of Darwin or of Einstein. But does this not indicate a philosophical point of great importance in our perception of things? The so-called problem of evil, why evil exists, or what it consists in, is a true problem. It raises a question one asks and never answers. That I do not seek to deny, and I do not imagine that I will ever manage to solve it. But is not the congruence amongst the wise as to what is good and what is not good an even greater problem? Does it not touch the nerve of an even more important philosophical truth? The problem of good must be to the nihilist a problem more insoluble than the problem of evil to the believer.

I come, to my mind, to the supreme value, but it is a value which transcends the value of truth or the objective reality of beauty or justice or injustice or right and wrong for which I have been arguing in all the others. I choose to call it the ‘L’ factor. It transcends the values of ethics and aesthetics and permeates the whole without altering its own nature. It transcends the careful jurisprudence and case learning of the lawyers. It exists apart from truth or falsehood. It has no survival value from the point of view of the individual or the species. I believe it enters into the composition of the Universe itself, and particularly of living creatures within it.

The difference between value judgements and other judgements of a purely objective kind is that, whereas in matters affecting fact, emotional judgements are both undesirable and basically immoral, in matters involving values, though intellectual honesty is essential, it is neither desirable nor possible to remain totally emotionally neutral. It is obvious, therefore, that, where value judgements have to

be made and the values involved are perceived to conflict, it is impossible to remain emotionally uninvolved. One cannot be impartial between what is perceived to be ugly and what is perceived to be beautiful, or what is perceived to be just and what is perceived to be injustice. Moreover, if what I have said about these values being self-standing is, as I believe, correct, there must from time to time arise a conflict in the application to one set of facts of more than one yardstick, since neither can be defined in terms of the other, or in terms of a common denominator. There can be no common ground between, for instance, the aesthetic yardstick and the yardstick of morality where these are seen to conflict. In the sense that there is no room for self-deception in such matters, intellectual honesty may frequently provide a means of escape. But there can, in principle, be no accommodation between the two sets of principles where the two yardsticks yield opposite answers to the same set of facts. It is for this reason that, without the smallest claim to originality, I say that there must be a transcendent value, not in the sense of a *summum bonum* which I have already rejected, or the utilitarian concept of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, which, for different but not dissimilar reasons, is intellectually unacceptable but one which pervades the whole field and infects the different scales of value by a sort of pervasive osmosis. I think that Plato must have had something of this kind in mind in the *Charmides* where he makes his character say, "It is not the life of knowledge, not even if it included all the sciences, that creates happiness and well being, but a single branch of knowledge the science of good and evil."¹ The trouble is that the difference between good and evil is itself a value judgement and involves weighing in the balance a variety of different and often conflicting facts and factors, and applying these to a single concrete set of facts. The 'L' factor alone pervades the whole mass of conflicting argument and interest. Is this original or am I being unctiously religious? I think not. In the summer of 1978 I was staying in Scotland at the house of a friend. At the time I was deeply distressed in heart, mind and spirit. To give me something to do, my host recommended me to read a biography of the Emperor Augustus by the late John Buchan, later the first Lord Tweedsmuir, himself a serious scholar as well as the author of enjoyable adventure stories. As I read the book I came across a quotation in Latin from the philosophical works of Cicero (in point of fact his treatise on the *Laws*), which contained the remarkable sentence "We have a natural propensity to love our fellow man, and that is the foundation of all law." The more I reflected about this sentence, the more remarkable it seemed to me to be. It was pre-Christian and therefore owed nothing to Christian or Jewish scripture. To Cicero's world, Buddhism and the Vedas were unknown. Although Cicero had more qualification than I to call himself a philosopher, he was not all that original and must have drawn this idea from the intellectual atmosphere of his day. But the more I thought about it the more sure I became, that, whether the thought was original or not, he had hit

1. *Charmides* (Jowett's trans.), p.174.

upon a profound truth. He made his judgement in the course of a defence of the doctrine of natural law, an expression which has become almost a dirty word among lawyers and philosophers alike.

This is perhaps not the place for me to discuss whether the doctrine quite deserves the obloquy which it now generally receives, though it is not at all far removed from the subject matter of this lecture. I will instead pursue the thought behind the Ciceronian quotation. "We have a natural propensity to love our fellow men and that is the foundation of all law." This is not the first time I have used the quotation, and every time I have used it I have come in for a good deal of thoughtful criticism. For this purpose I disregard those who argued that I have mistranslated the sentence. I am sure that I have not. But relevant to my present argument is the criticism which I received from an intelligent lady, who, having read it said, somewhat tartly, "What Cicero should have written was that we have a natural propensity to *hate* our fellow men." I took this criticism seriously, because it was a re-assertion of another doctrine in which I profoundly believe, namely the doctrine of original sin. Whatever else may be said about Christian theology I would have thought that, properly understood, and not overstated as some theologians are apt to do, original sin is the one doctrine of the Church which could be verified empirically by experience. Unlike the animals, which in other respects he so closely resembles, man has a flawed nature. He is the only creature who systematically muddies his own face, breaks his own toys and degrades and humiliates, murders and rapes his fellow human beings. When people call football hooligans or the Belfast murderers animals they do an injustice to the animal kingdom. But this seems to me to support rather than undermine my thesis about the relationship between the 'L' factor and value judgements. In the myth of Eden it was the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and therefore to choose the latter, which constituted the Fall of man. In common with other values, love is at the top of a scale to which there is an opposite and negative bottom. This is characteristic of them all; ugly as opposed to beautiful, unjust as opposed to just, cruel as opposed to kind, and so on. This is an odd feature of the value judgements because although, in one sense evil seems to have a positive nature (it is difficult to think of Hitler, Stalin, Gadafi or Khomeini except in terms of positively demoniacal), in another context it is impossible not to accept the doctrine of the medieval school men (*malum est privatio boni* – evil is the absence of good), just as one can say that dirt is definable as matter in the wrong place, or a weed a plant in the wrong place, or a bad taste joke as a funny remark made at an unsuitable time or in an unsuitable context. Nevertheless, each of these examples illustrates an odd point about these values and value judgements generally. The negative end of the scale (if this is not a question begging description), can be thought of only in terms of the absence of the factor constituting the positive end. The opposite of justice can variously be described as arbitrariness, anarchy or tyranny. But none of these words make sense unless we have a clear sense of what constitutes the positive end of the scale in what is just or unjust. There are various sorts of cacophony, but only

one music. There are various sorts of unkindness, but only one positive kindness, various ways of missing a due proportion in a picture or a landscape, but only one balance, various ways of missing a target (odd man out this time), but only one way of hitting it. It is in the nature of the value judgements to put approval at one end of the scale and disapproval at the other. Thus, with the 'L' factor, love only is positive and hate multifarious. There is, however, something about the 'L' factor which differs from other value judgements. It is not a judgement at all. It is a motivation. It can only be described as a state of mind or rather soul or spirit, and not as part of the world of concrete and particular things and events. It is not a *summum bonum*, a highest good, not an end to be achieved by means, but a *primum mobile*, a first cause, perhaps indeed the cause of Creation itself. It is the leaven in the lump, the salt in the stew, permeating the whole, but not constituting a separate part of it. Of all the value judgements and all values, one end of the scale is positive, the other negative, and, without agreeing in the least to the philistine proposition that such judgements are simply subjective states of mind, one is driven, despite all one's prejudices to the contrary, to assert that the positive values within the human experience are the marks of wisdom, experience, judgement, knowledge, intuitive percipience, proper analysis, intellectual integrity, and scholarly discipline. The 'L' factor is not the same thing as good, justice, beauty, kindness, neighbourliness. Nor is it capable of definition in terms of anything other than itself. It is common to all the values and, in the Socratic world of 'Αρετη, or virtue, it is the mark of the congruence of the wise in opinion, the only republic in which there is no such thing as privilege and no damn nonsense about equality.