

The Expression of Value in a World of Fact

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Abstract:

This article examines the difficulties of expressing values consistently so that others are able to understand and draw conclusions about personal motives and behaviors. Recognized are the hidden and often unspoken beliefs and values found in everyday conversation and in moral theory-making. What is suggested is that seeking common values that are useful and shareable is no easy task. Given the utilitarian hypothesis that moral value is simply a matter of convenience and utility, the expression of value in a world of fact is and remains a precarious vision, but one to which we aspire.

Key Words: critical realism, culture, inference-making, innate, is-ought, intuition, pre-rational assumptions, representations, sensations, social hope, terminal, the not-yet, utilitarianism, value

The Expression of Value in a World of Fact

Thinking that is logical or rational or even thinking based on so-called commonsense has evolved as our humanity advanced encasing us in a multitude of pre-rational assumptions. These assumptions include beliefs and values culturally accumulated; including faith in logic and empirical methods, but, it is suggested that neither of these is terminal. Thinking is woven with cultural assumptions and, as such, is fluid and malleable. Thinking, cognition, wasn't always as it is today and what is called "thinking" will continue to change with our cultural histories. This means, among other things, what we call "character" – temperament, spirit, and/or disposition – is changing and developing and will continue so in the future. Although character defines the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual, it should not be confused with personality. As Alex Lickerman says,

Character, on the other hand, takes far longer to puzzle out. It includes traits that reveal themselves only in specific—and often uncommon—circumstances, traits like honesty, virtue, and kindness. Ironically, research has shown that personality traits are determined largely by heredity and are mostly immutable. The arguably more important traits of character, on the other hand, are more malleable—though, we should note, not without great effort. Character traits, as opposed to personality traits, are based on beliefs (e.g., that honesty and treating others well is important—or not), and though beliefs can be changed, it's far harder than most realize.¹

All thinking involves conjectures and conclusions; the process of representing our world connecting and disconnecting value to fact and fact to value. This process is commonly called

“inference-making.” Obviously, inference-making begins with experiencing our world, but does not stop there; rather, the ideas and often unspoken assumptions of our culture are determiners, subjective antecedents, for applying value to our experiences as we identify, describe, and assess environmental inputs. From similes to metaphors and from the cave paintings of ancient man to a child trying to make sense of the world, we witness inference-making in progress. Inference-making, whether couched in an artistic image or in words and symbols, is basic to understanding.

In everyday conversation we label inferences in various ways: we have ideas and hold beliefs; are able to use our imagination and think intuitively; we have hunches, explanations, and arrive at what we think are rational conclusions; we possess feelings and attitudes, opinions, assumptions, and biases; and we create art the aesthetic nature of which we assign value. We also apply logic and mathematical acuity to our experiences through which we assign accuracy and validation. Involved in all of these is inference-making; this is their common ground. But, the language of thinking is not about logic, theory, and mathematical acuity only; thinking is about people more often than not guided and molded by unarticulated values.

Analytically, in our language – spoken and unspoken – inferring has the underlying structure of “If...then.” This simple formula is often assumed and not explicitly expressed when we engage in discussions and arguments. We commonly say, “If this happens, then this will also happen; if this is true, then this is true also.” Arguably, inference-making expresses a causal relationship, a connection, that begs for reinforcement with substantial factual information making the antecedent (signaled by “if”) referentially important. This relationship, expressed as an inference, is often called a “correlation,” or in mathematics, “equivalence,” and it is within inference where meaning is discovered and expressed. For example, if a child paints a “red bird” gold, blue, or orange, we are wont to ask what meaning the child had in mind. How is this child connecting perception with conception, or does he or she just prefer one color over another? Just what is the connection? Meaning is clarified when we ask for an explanation.

Explanations

In his book, *Philosophical Explanations*, Robert Nozick² suggests an explanatory model of philosophical activity pointing out that “explanation increases understanding” as explanations represent our efforts to organize experiences and make rational our thoughts and behaviors. Important to ethics and morals is that explanation brings clarity and consistency increasing our confidence in moral human possibility. Rational thinking, as “explanation for understanding,” is not terminal nor is it limited to inductive or deductive inference, the scientific method, nor to one moral theory or another. Purposely, explanation for understanding represents conceptual thought and meaning, the interconnecting of ideas and experiences evaluated for consistency, factual reliability, and for the meaning or meanings being conveyed. According to Nozick, the mind is always busy representing what is experienced; there are no unrepresented (interpreted) experiences. Nozick says philosophers often seek to deduce their total view from a few basic principles, showing

how everything follows from their intuitively based axioms, He compares such an approach to building a tower by piling one brick on top of another: if the brick at the bottom crumbles or is removed, everything collapses, and even the insights that were independent of the starting point are lost. A conclusion from Nozick's discussion is that to reduce ethics to one view, one epistemology or another, narrows our value-focus and diminishes the possibility of creating value-based communities, from seeking moral insight in a world of value diversity. There is a need to strike a balance in our formulations of cultural pluralism, and recognize the need for understanding and tolerance as a foundation for a healthier multiculturalism.

Thus, explanation is the activity of interconnecting – inference-making – revealing no single or straight-forward line of reasoning connecting “what is” with what we believe “ought to be” or to our moral understanding of what “ought to be.” We remain concerned for not only articulating what is “good,” but living in communities that are safe, decent, and uplift human dignity. Important to ethics is the question asked by Roy Woods Sellars³ in 1967, “In what sense do value judgments and moral judgments have objective import?” To clarify, Sellars offers a view he calls “critical realism”; namely, “that we decipher the external thing to which we are responding through and by means of, the information fed into us by the same object.” This deciphering involves not just logic, but our cultural heritage of beliefs, values, and hunches about how life should be lived. Sellars comments,

There is a good deal of selective and exploratory activity here. ... To make a long story short, I take ‘perceiving’ to consist of deciphering any referential claims which are constantly being tested. From this we work out our cognitive claims about things, relating them and describing them. ... It is in the recognition of what is involved that critical realism exceeds natural realism. Modern philosophy got off to a bad start because it did not understand the causal circuit in perceiving and made sensation terminal.

Moreover, Sellars notes that critical realism moves between what is *presented* to us by our senses to how we in fact “represent” such experiences pointing to their informative role. About value judgments he says “these are culminations of a way of thinking about referents of all sorts ... a way of thinking essential to the human economy and feeds into choices and decisions. While it interplays with cognition, it is not reducible to it.” He concludes that the reductionism of logical positivism or logical empiricism has forced careful thinking of valuation and moral language where the uniqueness of man must be recognized as a knower, a valuer, and an agent where there are broad patterns of functional feedback-integration. This is where human consciousness emerges.

Understanding Sellars' analysis, the phrase “the expression of value” is burdened with interpretation and validation as is the phrase “a world of fact.” For many, the entire phrase “the expression of value in a world of fact” assumes a fitting of morals into natural philosophy; that is, a fitting of what should be into what is. This was a hidden assumption of David Hume⁴ who simply labeled his fleeting sensations the “empirical self” compressing what many call “human essences” – mind, feelings, beliefs, values, etc. – and encapsulating, among other things, talk about ethics and

morals within the language of scientific verification.

Lying just beneath the surface of this discussion is the old “is-ought” problem and is usually skewed in favor of “is”, interpreted as “fact.” Avoiding these difficulties, Richard Rorty⁵ dispensed with the reality of the “self” as well as of human essences and espoused a bland morality of practical utility and procedural reasoning expressed as a usefulness, efficacy, and convenience. Logical-empiricism tells us there is no valid, rational, or objective connection between what is and what ought to be. From a logical point of view, this seems to be commonsense, but “ought” is more convoluted than what logic claims. A hidden value of logic is its interconnection to scientific validation and its bias towards facts, and doubts about value. But when Rorty offers a “social hope” for a more benevolent society, one can only wonder from where does his hope spring and how social hope can be socially and culturally articulated within the restricted language of utility. Undisclosed is that his moral ought is trapped within an empirical language his own theory is unable to support.

Charles Taylor⁶ reminds us that much in life, in morals and values, is “suppressed by these strange cramped theories” as they “narrow our focus to the determination of action, and then restrict our understanding of these determinants further by defining practical reason as exclusively procedural.” He says, “Having excluded qualitative distinctions for epistemological and moral reasons so effectively, indeed, that it has almost suppressed all awareness of their place in our lives, it proposes a view of moral thought focused simply on determining the principles of action.”

Values’ Interpretive and Normative Quality

Flowing naturally from the scientific enlightenment, it was assumed that logical reason supported scientific acuity and was the best path to knowledge; that is, logic has a practical, utility value in expressing truth. But the question of moral objectivity, initiated by logical empiricism, was not easily dismissed. Again, raised In 1957, G.E. Moore⁷ argued that it is a mistake to try to define the concept “good” in terms of some natural property (thus, the name “naturalistic fallacy” when trying to derive an “ought” from an “is”). Moore argued, defining the concept “good” is impossible since it is a simple concept; a concept that cannot be defined in terms of any other concept. That this is a fallacy, not all agreed. To this utilitarians and pragmatists provided a different course; namely, defining “good”, not as a single, un-reducible appellation, but in terms of “utility.” This of course leaves the prescriptive nature of normal life hopelessly lost in the world of social analysis ignoring the delicate interplay taking place in the human consciousness. Moore called this a “moralistic fallacy” expressing what is, based only on what one believes ought to be, or what isn’t based on what one believes ought not to be. Whether moralistic or naturalistic, Moore argued that “is doesn’t imply ought” and vice versa.

Both Sellars and Taylor remind that “value” has an interpretive normative quality that requires rooting out its cultural as well as its universal characteristics. So too, “fact” (“facts”) is burdened with interpretation. Many do not notice the normative aspect of facts; just accepting “facts” as products of the senses, of what is. But we know better for we are burdened today with so-

called “fake news”, slanted and inadequate reporting, and climate change deniers. Although many scientists agree that climate change is an existential reality, this idea or fact as been politicized and given a normative quality. Many skew “what is” with their own, personal, beliefs and assumptions. “Facts” bear the burden of interpretation and explanation as do values. Value has certainly wormed its way into our experiences making it difficult to wrench loose the connection between the two.

“What is” is more than what is perceived, heard, or reported. “What is” must be interpreted and understood implying the use of reason and critical thinking. Not to logically derive an “ought” from an “is” or an “is” from an “ought,” we are presently weighed down by those who have made *sensation* terminal dismissing the normative and interpretive character of “is” as nonsense and making it difficult to distinguish between justified belief and opinion. This is a natural realism, even commonsense, but misses the importance of value claims. Critical realism, as Sellars noted, understands the *informative role* of sensations. Thus, when value is expressed we are involved in deciphering an external thing or an activity (behavior) to which we are responding as the thing or behavior feeds information into us. There is a good deal of selective and exploratory activity here. Facts too bear the weight of our selection – of means as well as ends – and the assignment of value.

Cognition is seldom terminal as experience teaches. Every thought moves, grows, and develops, fulfills a function, retraces itself, involves hunches, and often unexamined motives and values moving forward to solve a problem. This flow of thought occurs as an inner movement and must begin with an investigation of the different phases and planes a thought traverses before it is embodied in words. Listen to children as they begin to form their first words; watch their eyes, their gestures; listen to their brain struggling to make verbal connections with their physical and conceptual world. An analysis of thought is difficult for more often than not we are not clear where our thoughts originate and often assume their origin gives them credence. But the origin of an idea in no way constitutes its validation.

Pre-Rational Assumptions

This we understand: the pre-verbal and pre-rational assumptions we bring to the table of human discourse, to scientific investigations, to art or to the desire for learning, and to our ethical behavior for that matter are a snarl of cultural habits and presuppositions that are difficult to untangle. Suffice it to say, philosophy gives careful attention to “inference-making,” but often left out of these examinations are the intuitive assumptions – presuppositions – that lie behind the antecedent (forerunner) of any theoretical formulation and the “causal” relationship(s) leading to its consequent. But what is assumed and unspoken often muddles this causal relationship. An example seems in order: The logical formulation “If P, then Q” (modus ponens) appears simple enough where “P” – the antecedent – is the logical cause (commonsense) for “Q” to occur. For example, “*If it rains Saturday (P), the ball game will be called off (Q).*” Although many focus on the result or conclusion of an inference, we should give our attention to the antecedent, the starting place which defines the *iffiness* of the inference itself.

Compound sentences of the form “If P, then Q” can perhaps best be understood as a promise. Truth for the whole compound sentence is decided on the basis of whether you think the promise is kept. Here P and Q are themselves sentences, each of which is true or false (but neither is both true and false). For the compound sentence to be true, both P and Q must be true. But, logically speaking, the compound can be true if P is false and Q is true, or if they are both false. Considering the *inferential* as promise-keeping, “P” could very well be a necessary condition for “Q” to have occurred, but given ulterior motives, motives that are unspoken and pre-logical in this sense, “P” may not be a sufficient condition for “Q” to have taken place. Thus, it’s safe to say that the conditional “If P, then Q” is at best asserting a correlation not equivalence.

To accept this causal relationship at face value may be an item of commonsense, but real life doesn’t always move in this way. Commonsense varies from culture to culture and from person to person revealing built-up pre-rational beliefs and habits. Thus we are often fooled by the decisions others make. There is an inherent limit to logic (reason) as reason can note facts and infer relations, but cannot create values or facts. Also, intrinsic motives are often left unstated, maybe assumed. *Values, like faith and belief are based on pre-rational choices and decisions that more often than not prejudice our inferences in some odd and many times unnoticed ways.*

The compound “If P, then Q” is in reality a projection into a future occurrence and this requires a bit of “faith”—in our above example, faith in the weather for one thing or faith in the decisions of both team coaches for another. Again the antecedal assumption is important for decision-making is seldom straight forward. This doesn’t de-value the utility of reason or critical thinking, only puts us on notice that there is more “there” than our language reveals. Thus, an indecisive quality about inference-making emerges requiring future inductive evidence including the uncovering of motives yet to be revealed in the language of discourse: What if it didn’t rain? If it did rain, was the field still playable or not? What if the coaches got together and decided to play rain or no rain? What if one coach thought his team had a better chance of winning in the rain and mush of a wet field? Clarification and explanation are required and this should engage, but often does not, the transparency of those involved. In life, course corrections are often required, among coaches and even among scientists relying on mathematical and technical calculations.

Hidden Connections

It’s fair to ask, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for an inference to hold, to be counted as true? One must be careful here for we are referring to “pure reason” and in social discourse decisions are often made running counter to what an inference implies or even to the evidence that is presented; we often discover that reason isn’t as pure as we once thought. In real life sometimes there is no perfect fit between the evidence found and the decision made.

There are hidden connections – connections and relationships that define who we are and how we respond to others. These hidden connections can be revealed by reason but reason doesn’t create them. Our commitment to reason is itself a pre-rational commitment, a leap of affirmation

pleading for consistency and contradiction avoiding. Thus, logical reasoning is never “pure reason” as mathematicians assume. Logic is a starting place, but secondary in our thinking, as the reality of pre-existing and often hidden assumptions motivate our behavior.

We learn from E.A. Burt⁸ that presuppositions are the given – the intuitively given – we present to reality that in turn modify reality and become reality itself. And we tend to shape our moral views, perhaps unaware of their cultural origins, by our own cultural genealogy. Presuppositions as culture are the “there” that is “there” but not-yet fully or intentionally realized or openly stated. We know about these presuppositions through the dialectic of discourse and argument, but ever so often they remain hidden and protected so as not to reveal their intended consequences. We witness this in American politics today as the hidden biases (values) moving immigration policies are usually left unarticulated and encapsulated in procedural reasoning and policy-making.

Our cultural assumptions have a motivational quality pushing us to discover the causal links that complete the theory our presuppositions (assumptions) entail. This dynamic relativity calls for discussion – the dialectic of conversation – for agreement and consistency to be sustained. So if it rains, a future conversation between coaches is assumed to take place. And if we are truly interested in world peace, transparency is required as the hidden motives of nations and nation-builders more often than not corrupt the peace process.

Social Hope

When we transfer this conversation to morals and ethics we will notice that the assumptions we bring to the table when answering the question “Why should I be moral?” often determine the answers we give. The theist brings his or her belief in God as law-giver and moral judge; the pragmatist, being oriented to science, recognizes that ethics lies outside of his or her method to procure and provides practical, social reasons for being ethical, the politician often brings the hidden desire for manipulation and control, and the psychologist, with some observations and a bag load of theories, assumes an innate moral compass although often explained sociologically and developmentally. This is the approach of Jonathan Haidt in his book *The Righteous Mind*.⁹ But what is it that motivates either to pursue ethics in the first place remains hidden, lurking in the background of their beliefs and future hope. So, what is the “hope” that they hope for? From where does hope spring?

Noticing this uncertain quality, German philosopher Ernst Bloch¹⁰ formulated what is called “the ontology of the not-yet” which is important to his idea of “social hope” and has significance for science and ethics as inference-making activities. Bloch’s formulation reads, “P is not-yet Q” (strictly, “If P, then not-yet Q”) and explains his commitment to avoid any possible closure to the dialectical interchange between individuals or groups of individuals. Bloch’s “not-yet” encourages an unbiased vision of people and the discovery of better and more creative solutions to urgent social and moral problems.

Social hope implies a vision of *the not-yet* and cannot be contained in logical inference only or in un-exhumed assumptions and ideas. “Social hope” is an interconnecting value, connecting present facts with values and with interpretive force moving us to a moral vision of the future. The

openness of hope is revealed in the vision it embraces and vision is forward-looking where hope, ethical or otherwise, is activated in the existential moment of decision-making. More often than not, hope is situation dependent and contingent, seeking not scientific validation but moral explanation and justification. It is within the murky waters of life as it is lived where hope finds meaning and musters the energy to move forward. Interpretation and explanation are paramount; value is implied.

Thus, logic and science are (or should be) open-ended as they are unable to completely close down the dialectic of exploration which is necessary for ethical decision-making. Both science and ethics are built-up from yet-to-be tested hypothesis – the not-yet – the beliefs, hunches, and commitments we bring to both: in the sciences from hypotheses that are yet-to-be tested (verified) empirically and in ethics from hypotheses that are yet-to-be assessed by one's experience in the social environment and what behaviors meet cultural expectations as to right and wrong behavior. Even in science one cannot discount the motivation of those offering a hypothesis or pet theory. More research and replication are always necessary to achieve objectivity (or correlation).

Thus, both ethics and science have an *iffy* quality about them with reference to that which has yet-to-be discovered and/or confirmed, the motives and unspoken values they entail, and, in ethics, to the decision or indecision of following a recognized ethical rule or intuitive ethical belief. Both involve interpretations of the real and recognized—the physical and the social nature of human living and the cultural expectations under which one lives. And although empiricism is the hallmark of science and scientific utilitarianism, what is unspoken and only assumed is as important as what is said and placed in theoretical discourse. And just as we cannot build a bridge from hope to certainty, we cannot build from logic a bridge from fact to value, from isness to oughtness. In ethics as in the physical sciences, dialectical communication is required as a method communication, discovery, correlation, and accommodation. As Marc Hauser¹¹ (p. 2) comments, “On the contrary, I argue that moral judgments are mediated by an unconscious process, a hidden moral grammar that evaluates the causes and consequences of our own and others’ actions.” Hauser says this shifts the burden of evidence (that we in fact have some sort of moral compass) “from a philosophy of morality to a science of morality.” This is an assumption requiring our attention as it entails a search for the “hidden grammar” of moral discourse, the unspoken assumptions that drive our conclusions. This we should consider in both ethics and science.

Failed Arguments

Charles Taylor¹² concludes that morality is indeed concerned with what we ought to do. It is also concerned with what is “valuable in itself” and “what we should aspire to be” and “how we should aspire to live our lives,” with what he refers to as a “different vision of the qualitatively higher.” Ethical hope cannot be confined within a limited package of scientific assumptions.

Some utilitarians talk about “the greatest good for the greatest number,” but only in terms of its utility value. For the utilitarian, happiness (sometimes the word “pleasure” is used but was dropped because of its intrinsic and ethereal quality) as a good can't be explained without reference to possessions and certain observed lifestyles. Happiness for utilitarians is not an intrinsic feeling or

pleasure, for they deny that the intrinsic exists. We can ask, “What motivates this line of reasoning?” Existence cannot be confined to the sensory only and conveyed through the sterile language of the scientific method, a method replete with a-rational assumptions about which they don’t speak. For utilitarians like Rorty, happiness as “the good” is only an expedient way of thinking and behaving but, for one thing, omits the utilitarian assumption (pre-rational presumption) that “happiness ought to be pursued.” Looking more carefully at utilitarian theory, “happiness” and its “implied ought” are actually pre-rational assumptions, normative and not descriptive, and antecedent to their idea of social hope.

G. E. Moore¹³, contradicting his earlier assertion that “good,” as a value implied by a moral ought, cannot be defined by any other value, seems to concur with the utilitarians saying, “All moral laws, I wish to show, are merely statements that certain kinds of actions will have good effects. ... What I wish first to point out is that ‘right’ does and can mean nothing but ‘cause of a good result,’ and is thus identical with ‘useful’: whence it follows that the end always will justify the means, and that no action which is not justified by its results can be right.” What is left unexplained is “what is a good result?” How is “good” to be defined? “How would we know anyway?” And this is echoed by William James¹⁴ who said, “The true, to put it briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in the way of our behaving.”

Here we are left in a values-confusion wondering about the place of values in a world of facts. Moore’s “statements of a certain kind,” and James’ “expedient” are concepts weighted with pre-rational assumptions – unspoken presuppositions about the nature of good, right, and true. To be sure, “truth” finds its meaning in logic as a result of “pure reason,” but “good” and “right” find their meaning in the unspoken genealogy of our cultural histories. Upon examination, we are caught in a language quagmire of metaphor swapping leading to a slippery slope of meaningless dialogue.

The result of such reductive thinking is, as Frederick Olafson¹⁵ observes, “...to leave ethical thought in an isolated position and to raise in acute form questions about ‘the place of value in a world of fact.’” Michael Polanyi¹⁶ believed this to be a state of “moral inversion” in which “a strongly moral form of motivation is paired with a failure to acknowledge the existence of a distinctively moral component in human personality and judgment.” Polanyi believed to reduce humanity to a mechanical or purely physical interpretation was to lose what is humane and moral about people.

Naturally, most thinking people desire to be consistent in both thought and deed, to be logical. Logic is a practical discipline but look closer; often hidden in the grammar of logic are the patterns and values ensconced in our cultural genealogy, especially scientific verification. Here we should be reminded that ethics seeks justification not verification, justification in reasons immersed in the social environment and the hidden suppositions duly immersed within dialectical discussions where beliefs, values and conceptual disagreements occur.

Conclusion: Our Social Hope

Culture and the presuppositions and values it holds will always maintain a normative sway over our lives pushing us toward a unified, integrated, way of life, a life without deficiency, but this

can be deceptive for as we are surely aware culture can often be discombobulated and divisive. Yet, there remains a social hope for ethical unity and for a universal moral human community. Admittedly, this hope is a pre-rational assumption driving ethics, both secular and theistic.

In ethics the meanings found in our culture are normatively important. These meanings are moral, material, social, political, faith-based, and intellectual pursuits spanning both fact and value. Meaning converges in both our words and actions, our beliefs and insights, and in our assumptions and implied conclusions. Thus meaning is found in the throes of the life that we live—our motives, beliefs, and the consequences of our behavior. Meaning, by its very nature, implies a cultural heritage which, in itself is an assessment of instrumental reasoning. Reasons are required in the throes of dialogical conversation to support our choice of values from the cultural mixture that is us. This never occurs automatically and absolutism, as found in many religious values, is not sufficient to convince. Absolutism is self-absorbed and reduces ethics or any hypothesis (theory) to an unchallenged dogma dangling hopelessly in the vacuum of belief. With an absence of dialogue, absolutism morphs into a narcissistic ethical relativity. Ethics and civility are cultural norms requiring our constant diligence and dialectical interaction.

And care must be taken for as Oswald Spengler¹⁷ has noted, all cultures are organisms which eventually petrify and externalize themselves into civilizations which suggest a decline from the organic to the mechanical. This we find in utilitarian theory as its view of ethics and life reveal a sterile mechanical impulse, a utility value harnessed to natural impulses. The ideas and arguments of philosophers, theologians, educators, and scientists are embedded in a morass of unstated beliefs and assumptions. The clarity of their statements, the logic of their arguments, and the axiomatic assumptions guiding their theories provide only an illusion of objectivity as reason cannot create value, only recognize and evaluate the values we inherently and culturally hold.

Social hope is a metaphor implying the intrinsic nature of human commitment and motivation – the real hidden behind what appears to be, although impenetrable. And hope doesn't imply just wishing for something better to happen; it is not merely a future projection but implies an ethic that is to be internalized and activated in every moment of life as our present decisions are the antecedent properties of the hope we project. The values received from culture are to be taken as general principles and not laws of behavior and are not absolute and unchanging, but require interpretation and application in the concrete moment of everyday life. Daniel C. Dennett¹⁸ has reminded that, human consciousness is a product in large part of cultural evolution, which installs many thinking tools in our brains, creating thereby a cognitive architecture unlike the 'bottom-up' minds of animals. Thus, our brains are empowered to be intelligent designers of artifacts and of our own lives. This observation supports Sellars' thesis that we continually *represent* experience through our beliefs and values the cultural heritage of which often lies hidden within the background of our antecedent assumptions influencing the objectivity we so often prize.

Understanding this, we can conclude that limiting moral explanation and evaluation to logical empiricist thinking is too simplistic forgetting that culture is fluid, not static, manipulating,

persuading, and impacting our moral perspective. Culture is an internal-external social energy that moves and changes and in doing so, changes us as well. Life is flexible and unpredictable expressed as “the not-yet.” Life is cannot be expressed in only physical or biological or theological terms. Values admit principles and convictions are not self-contained but are socially malleable. In the context of life they are and must be interpreted and applied. Also, each situation will vary. Reason is required but cannot produce the values to which we adhere. Reason’s task is instrumental as utilitarians claim: to clarify, organize, give reasons for, explain, and maintain contextual consistency of the values to which we indeed adhere.

Joseph Fletcher¹⁹ has remarked:

We must realize, however, that pragmatism, as such, is no self-contained world view. It is method precisely. It is not a substantive faith, and properly represented it never pretends to be. Pragmatism of itself yields none of the norms we need to measure or verify the very success that pragmatism calls for! To be correct or right a thing – a thought or an action – must work. Yes. But work is to what end, for what purpose, to satisfy what standard or ideal or norm? Like any other method, pragmatism as such is utterly without any way of answering this question. Yet this is the decisive question.

Most of us claim to be rational, but care must be taken as Burtt reminds us, “Reason, in its power to apprehend deductive form and self-evident axioms, is a single faculty, and once it has found itself, it claims universal authority.” This is often a conversation closer, but we know from the history of ethics that Kant’s supposedly universal Categorical Imperative based on “pure reason” has opened more than 200 years of continuous discussion. Universalism is a claim difficult to maintain whether in politics or ethics as the discovery of new information testifies and our motivations to maintain a consistent ethical view intensifies. All moral rules, assumed to be absolute, bare this stain.

Often neglected in our theories and logical formulas is the passion and commitment we give to our views at the neglect of the views of others, especially in the light of new information or ideas, or the defects discovered in our own reasoning. Reasoning is seldom “pure,” even reasoning that is pursued with logical precision. Pre-rational assumptions and unspoken convictions are the drivers of reason’s course. Reason is more involved than just “means.” Surely, as Sellars reminds, “We deliberate about ends and look at them in terms of value judgments.” It is important to acknowledge the unswerving influence of our beliefs, commitments, and assumptions existing as hidden apparitions in the background of our rational discourse. Perhaps we only think about what is important to us and, as Hume suggests, maybe this is the way it ought to be. This is a fact, one that is difficult to dispute, one that continues to plague ethical decision making.

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