

The Quest for Bioethics

A New Morality for Science: Beyond-ism, by Raymond B. Cattell, *Elmsford, N. Y.: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1972. 482 pp. \$17.50 (cloth), \$8.00 (paper).*

AFTER A DISTINGUISHED CAREER in most of the significantly evolving branches of psychology, Dr. Cattell decided at the age of 70 to return to the major problem of synthesizing an ethical system from science.

The crisis of religious faith has left confusion in ethics. Utopians, from Morris to Marx, have tended to absorb heterogeneous mixes of "the unrecognized fragments from revealed religions" and to impose them as spuriously novel systems of universal morality. As a source of the new ethics, the social sciences suffer from methodological crudity and, more importantly, from the confounding of "scientific chains of argument with unconscious or naively introduced moral value judgments."

The important foundation of Cattell's system is that any objective, nonsupernatural, universal system of ethics must derive its goals from "an examination of the ongoing processes in the universe." Since the overriding theme of these processes is evolution, such an ethical system must be predicated on the goal of furthering the evolution of the human species. Since the rise of man toward mastery and manipulation of the biosphere has been made possible primarily by the evolutionary development of his intelligence and of institutions conducive to its effective use, it is plain that the development of mind lies at the core of such a new ethics.

This does not imply that mere problem-solving ability need displace morality, sensitivity, creativity, wisdom or other such psychic traits. There is considerable evidence, as Cattell takes pains to point out, of positive correlations between intelligence and those emotional, moral and aesthetic qualities which civilized societies esteem.

Accepting the evolutionary goal as the foundation of ethics means sweeping away the pre-scientific psychology and ethics of natural, inherent and inalienable rights. This may involve more drastic changes in the processes by which moral conclusions are reached than in the conclusions themselves. The pragmatic character of contemporary political and social thought imperceptibly but continuously shifts the weights assigned to supposedly absolute and inalienable rights.

The adaptation of man's conduct toward the central process of furthering species evolution has, in Cattell's view, both social and genetic aspects. An implication of the latter is that the preservation of all forms of life is contrary to the general evolutionary process, in which both individual and species deaths are necessary for genetic change and new adaptations to environmental challenge.

Unfortunately, wherever a question of relative reduction of population is concerned, [Cattell writes] the word "genocide" is today being bandied about as a propaganda term. Nature constantly commits both homicide and genocide, and there is no question but that both individuals and races are born to die. But at what point voluntary euthanasia by individuals and genthanasia by groups becomes appropriate is a difficult question. . . . The maintenance of the *status quo* cannot extend to making ninety-nine hundredths of the earth a living museum.

Cattell makes a basic differentiation between within-group and among-group ethics. The universalistic religions and political ideologies have argued for a mono-ethical world system on the grounds that absolute moral truths have been revealed and are valid for all men. Cattell retorts that the evolutionary goal is universal, but that the optimum means of approaching it may vary among populations and can only be ascertained by experiment. He writes:

Now the arresting conclusion from evolutionary law—and one difficult for many to digest—is that natural selection should be allowed and encouraged to act freely among groups. This is the *primary* law, and any later modification of it that we may discuss derives from secondary and lesser considerations. Defective internal morality, failure to control birth rate, unwillingness to sacrifice luxuries to education, adherence to superstitions, and many other deficiencies may cause a group to fail either in the struggle with another group or in the economic tussle with nature. At that point external “charitable” support from other groups, or even their failure to expand as the defective group retracts, are immoral acts militating against evolution.

It is perhaps true that to give food surpluses to starving people without changing those institutions and reproductive habits which make famine inevitable is self-defeating. But what about making radical institutional and reproductive reform the precondition of the food gifts?

Cattell’s approach to this general problem of cultural borrowing and new genetic infusion is ambivalent. Grudging approval is fraught with misgivings. He quotes the late H. J. Muller’s opinion that “it has been intrinsically dangerous” for man “to have so long existed as just one species” and approves of the isolation and inbreeding of populations to the point where new races or even new species may evolve. This sort of reasoning is more appropriate to experiments with laboratory animals than to human societies. Since the scientific and technological knowledge necessary to control physical habitat is becoming general to mankind, even prolonged genetic isolation would probably not lead to the evolution of new species. More importantly, if it did so, any conflict between the different species might easily escalate into wars for the avowed purpose of total extermination.

Cattell observes that “the greatest prob-

lem in regard to the evolutionary value of culture borrowing is that it reduces the desirable diversity among groups.” This is, of course, true, but the countervailing forces are stronger. Failure of backward societies to adopt Western contraceptive techniques and *mores* will certainly preserve their diversity, but at the probable cost of condemning their populations to a continuing brutish fellaheen existence.

The assumption that there is a basic cleavage between within-group and among-group morality both separates Cattell’s work from almost all traditional approaches to ethics and leads him into intriguing arguments and to penetrating insights. Yet the validity of the proposition is dubious. First, the forces working for civilizational uniformity are much more powerful than those tending toward diversity. Science and technology have become universal: those societies which lack them are engaged in a tumultuous race to acquire them. No outside force exists which can regulate or restrict this homogenizing process even if it were desirable to do so. Second, the possibility of creating stable subraces, races and species through genetic isolation is smaller today than ever before in history. Species differentiation proceeds by survival adaptation to particular environments. To the extent that technology either reduces environmental difference or compensates for it (for instance, to temperature differences through clothing, housing, diet, heating devices, air conditioning), the adaptive genetic changes are minimized. These factors combine to make the proposed dual system of ethics irrelevant.

Only a segment of the large area over which Cattell’s impressive work ranges has been discussed. This is an important book with profound and original insights and syntheses. As in other attempts to create new ethical systems, however, the more deeply one proceeds into the bramble of specificities, the more one moves from the necessary to the arbitrary.

Reviewed by NATHANIEL WEYL

A Commentary on
Prof. H. M. Curtler
*on Descartes**

FOR US, in the twentieth century, the most interesting and crucial problems in pre-Hegelian philosophical speculation are: how genuine was Descartes' affirmation of God's existence as the basis of our knowledge of the extra-mental world?—and—did Kant's epistemology affect his moral philosophy?

Professor Curtler addresses himself, in his review of Hiram Caton's book on Descartes, to the first question and goes to the heart of the problem. This problem, briefly restated, is whether Descartes included God's existence in his reasoning (mainly in the *Meditations*) in order to avoid the inquisitors' suspicion, or because God's existence is a necessary postulate in his system. Well known is Descartes' own statement—"larvatus prodeo"—according to which, at least in his published works, he exercised the utmost prudence in thought and expression. This is, however, insufficient evidence when we try to decide the above dilemma.

Sartre has recently argued that Descartes was a convinced atheist: if we substitute the word (demythologized) "man" for "god" in the *Meditations*, suggests Sartre, we find that Descartes had no religious belief but that he smuggled the scientifically enlightened man into his system as a potentially omniscient and omnipotent being. Gilson, certainly a more thorough student of Descartes, argues differently. Descartes was a believing Christian, he says, who used God as a supreme although abstract guarantee for the existence of the extra-mental world, but dropped him as soon as this statement was established. Pascal had already accused Descartes of the same thing: Descartes' God, he wrote, contented himself with giving an initial flick (*chique-naude*) to the universe, then withdrew into passivity.

It seems to me, upon reading and re-reading the *Meditations* (and listening to my students' immediate comments after their first contact with the work) that Sartre's interpretation rests on flimsy evidence, whereas Gilson's position is somewhat unjust. Rather, I propose the following interpretation:

Descartes, as an early seventeenth-century man, shared to a large extent the current ideas. And these ideas were still imperfectly disengaged from scholastic philosophy, as it can be seen from several of Descartes' arguments which are in the scholastic tradition. It took almost another century after Descartes until Aristotelianism was dislodged from the universities (as distinct from scientific circles) and replaced by the scientific system. Hence also Descartes' "dry" treatment of the problem of God's existence. On the other hand, the influence of the Italian universities, for example Padua, with their focus on Epicurus, the Stoics, and the Skeptics, cannot be overestimated. Descartes came after almost two centuries of speculative effort to reserve reason for profane science and to limit the discourse of God to the domain of faith and Church authority. This fideism (since Ockham and later, more subtly, Cusanus) threatened philosophy proper with extinction—as neo-fideism does in our own days. Descartes, both a believing Christian and an anti-skeptic, anti-materialist, tried the then impossible synthesis: to "save" God and science. In the process he assumed, like Gassendi, Charron, and others that God can take care of himself and that the more urgent task was to save science from its devastating skeptical critics. Let us bear in mind the enormous popularity of Montaigne at the time, a man who did more to revive Lucretius, Pyrrho and the Stoics than the Italian universities combined. In an intellectual milieu dominated by Montaigne and the Libertines, Descartes made commendable efforts at a synthesis, even if he did not succeed.

Of what did his failure consist? Descartes "used" God to prove that he (the mind)