

Mere Christianity Notes (Pygmalion)

"This law was called the Law of Nature because people thought that every one knew it by nature and did not need to be taught it."

This will be contradicted later

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"That is, he cannot disobey those laws which he shares with other things; but the law which is peculiar to his human nature, the law he does not share with animals or vegetables or inorganic things, is the one he can disobey if he chooses."

The problem with pure voluntarism is that such a law should ultimately still be capable of explaining human behaviour

Wilson's strange idea about a disposition that changes its expression according to context may be relevant here

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"but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference"

Ultimately this doesn't matter, as the legalistic metaphor of Human Nature providing self-evident truths doesn't seem to allow any difference. Convergence implies a common constraint, but exactly the nature of that constraint is up for debate

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"You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and two made five. Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to—whether it was only your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not to put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired. Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you liked."

The universal extracted here is an abstraction. The determination of what one ought to hold above the self is what would have supplied it with content, but in making such a law more concrete, it thereby becomes more particular to a social body

The moral categories here are vague enough to ignore how much this depends on material conditions. In a societal system where there is no concept of ownership, stealing is not much of a wrong. This is something Hegel points out

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"What was the sense in saying the enemy were in the wrong unless Right is a real thing which the Nazis at bottom knew as well as we did and ought to have practised? If they had had no notion of what we mean by right, then, though we might still have had to fight them, we could no more have blamed them for that than for the colour of their hair."

How should one interpret the phrase "at bottom" mean, and what is the form of whatever rests "at bottom"?

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"If we do not believe in decent behaviour, why should we be so anxious to make excuses for not having behaved decently?"

The need for social acceptance (which may manifest as the ideal-ego and ego-ideal) is a simple alternative

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"You might as well say that the sheet of music which tells you, at a given moment, to play one note on the piano and not another, is itself one of the notes on the keyboard"

The analogy is obscure and does not provide adequate enough intuition why we should not accept a meta-system transition of drives. Not all hierarchies of functional imply a fundamental difference in type. For instance, a meta-system is still a control system despite regulating those below

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"You probably want to be safe much more than you want to help the man who is drowning: but the Moral Law tells you to help him all the same. And surely it often tells us to try to make the right impulse stronger than it naturally is?"

This seems to be projection, and ultimately abstracted from the true characteristics of people who actually perform heroic acts (e.g. risk-taking). Sometimes people save others, and afterwards they claim that they weren't even thinking

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fper0000261>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/08/24/american-heroes-in-france-why-some-people-risk-their-lives-to-save-others/>

<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/the-secret-of-extreme-heroes-they-dont-overthink.html>

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"But clearly we are not acting from instinct when we set about making an instinct stronger than it is. The thing that says to you, "Your herd instinct is asleep. Wake it up," cannot itself be the herd instinct. The thing that tells you which note on the piano needs to be played louder cannot itself be that note"

1) Points to the idea of morality as somehow implicated into the structure of self-governance (and not just self-legislation)

2) Morality as related to a sort of alteration of dynamic weights is something that can be abstracted out of this idea.

Homeostatic property cluster conception is latent here as well

3) Still makes the same assumption that functional units of higher control order are necessarily differing in type. There could easily be a higher order instinct manifest here which may seem less instinctual due to its plastic enfolding of the social order

4) Ultimately due to possible plastic enfoldings, and other dynamics, the dichotomy between instinct and freedom is not so clear as it might initially seem

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"But there are situations in which it is the duty of a married man to encourage his sexual impulse and of a soldier to encourage the fighting instinct."

What we have here hinted at is actually physis. Lewis makes a major error in subjectivizing the term "Nature" into specifically Human Nature which leads him down the path he is in. Physis more properly understood is an ought that derives from the essence of the object/context itself. This more accurate concept captures Hegel's critiquing Kant as uncritically universalizing institutional constructs such as proprietary ownership

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"I fully agree that we learn the Rule of Decent Behaviour from parents and teachers, and friends and books, as we learn everything else"

This clearly contradicts the idea before that Human Nature is something that we do not need to be taught. Why teach something that does not need to be taught?

A major problem is that C.S. Lewis is stuck in picture thinking. There is a truth to the idea that moral law is analogous to mathematics. Furthermore Plato's idea of anamnesis might even explain the learning of both (though Lewis does not take this position)... However, these ideas need to be distilled into a more mature form which outlines the structure requisite faculties and the correct metaphysic to grasp such claims conceptually

It is notable that when we do actually try to articulate a more conceptually sophisticated account of these ideas, we actually find God, and in a way that does not rely on linguistic reifications

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"When you think about these differences between the morality of one people and another, do you think that the morality of one people is ever better or worse than that of another? Have any of the changes been improvements? If not, then of course there could never be any moral progress. Progress means not just changing, but changing for the better."

But by acknowledging progress, our knowledge of moral law is less likely to be a simple immediacy. Progress entails there is some mediation, development, or interference which is there. Only the 3rd idea might save such a simplistic notion of Human Nature, however it seems to excuse some people of moral failings and thus ultimately contradicts with his remark about nazis earlier

Meanwhile, under the physis view, we could have a gradual unfolding of the normative-essence of an object/context in perceptual and active life (here we should tie in the general concept of revisability). Error comes from a one-sidedness rather than an immediate question of "how wrong" any predicate considered in an atomized fashion is

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"You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think"

This is all well and all, but the Moral Realism does not necessarily entail that Real Morality has a determinate content. As mentioned before, an immediate abstraction from the various cultures around the world would only give us some abstract content

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"That law certainly does not mean "what human beings, in fact, do"; for as I said before, many of them do not obey this law at all, and none of them obey it completely"

There are complications here which are omitted here:

- 1) Norms particular to any given society can also be violated, however despite these outlying cases, there are still behavioural metastabilities within a social system (though could be on an individual level as well)
- 2) Of course, morality is not necessarily what people are doing immediately. However, for there to be moral progress that occurs in a principled way (for if it was by mere caprice, there would be little practical point in philosophical thinking about moral principles), what is here called Human Nature must somehow play an explanatory role. As such, there is a sense in which morality does supervene on certain movements in human behaviours. What we should be looking at is the transformation of behavioural metastabilities that occur due to the right practicing allowing a society to be more open to moral progress
- 3) By transforming morality into explanatory material, we probably need to give a deflationary semantics of morals

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"Now, of course, it is perfectly true that safety and happiness can only come from individuals, classes, and nations being honest and fair and kind to each other. It is one of the most important truths in the world. But as an explanation of why we feel as we do about Right and Wrong it just misses the point If we ask: "Why ought I to be unselfish?" and you reply "Because it is good for society," we may then ask, "Why should I care what's good for society except when it happens to pay me personally?" and then you will have to say, "Because you ought to be unselfish" — which simply brings us back to where we started. You are saying what is true, but you are not getting any further"

This further stresses an important problem with a lot of framings of moral justification. The difference between acting selfish vs unselfish is one of scale of self. Cancer is negative because it is only operating at the scale of self of a particular cell colony as opposed to the whole body. Similarly, in this instance, a person who would demand justification for this question is simply not "in" morality. Morality is really something you "step into" as opposed to something one merely merely knows. This further motivates a deflationary account

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"Anyone studying Man from the outside as we study electricity or cabbages, not knowing our language and consequently not able to get any inside knowledge from us, but merely observing what we did, would never get the slightest evidence that we had this moral law. How could he? for his observations would only show what we did, and the moral law is about what we ought to do"

- 1) Contradicts a suggested robowaifu methodology (not too much of a big deal)
- 2) If it is not empirically, then how can we account for moral knowledge which does not end up just appealing to caprice or providing no means of explaining moral progress? Note too that if it is only caprice, then it would not actually be knowledge
- 3) If we take a more radical empiricist metaphysic, it seems like we can observe such oughts

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"All I have got to is a Something which is directing the universe, and which appears in me as a law urging me to do right and making me feel responsible and uncomfortable when I do wrong"

- 1) What he is sneaking in here is the idea that morality is verb which has not only a patient but also a cause. However, morality could just as easily be an absolute process, or be a class of infinite processes
- 2) Subtle point: trying to inject a person in here just takes us to Euthyphro's dilemma. Being an enforcer of moral law does not necessarily entail being a truth-maker of it, even if there was such an enforcer

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"because after all the only other thing we know is matter and you can hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions"

- 1) This is another point. When there is talk of "giving instructions", we have tacitly assumed that Human Nature consists in semiotic content. However, Lewis hasn't ruled out the possibility that there are general constraints as opposed to laws with such ready made content
- 2) Another point, dependence on ontology seems to imply that Human Nature not being completely determinate is not a fault at all but rather an important feature

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"One is the universe He has made. If we used that as our only clue, then I think we should have to conclude that He was a great artist (for the universe is a very beautiful place), but also that He is quite merciless and no friend to man (for the universe is a very dangerous and terrifying place). The other bit of evidence is that Moral Law which He has put into our minds. And this is a better bit of evidence than the other, because it is inside information"

Also highlights why we should wary of applying the vague predicate of "mind" here. For in using such a term here, we have now smuggled in personality traits. Are such things requisite for "instruction"? Moreover, these predicates in so far as they often contain normative content, are often what-antecedent to the Good

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"That is the terrible fix we are in. If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are in the long run hopeless. But if it is, then we are making ourselves enemies to that goodness every day, and are not in the least likely to do any better tomorrow, and so our case is hopeless again."

- 1) Contradicts the claim that the moral law can not be observed
- 2) Hints at a major contradiction which Hegel wrestled with in the Phenomenology and Lewis's suggestion that this is were forgiveness comes in is very resonant

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"You must believe that God is separate from the world and that some of the things we see in it are contrary to His will. Confronted with a cancer or a slum the Pantheist can say, "If you could only see it from the divine point of view, you would realise that this also is God." The Christian replies, "Don't talk damned nonsense." (*)"

This is what happens when we are too quick to think of the Good as a thing. If it was instead a process of enfoldment/unfolding, then it could permeate every object while not necessarily affirming their present manifestation

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"But in real life people are cruel for one of two reasons— either because they are sadists, that is, because they have a sexual perversion which makes cruelty a cause of sensual pleasure to them, or else for the sake of something they are going to get out of it—money, or power, or safety"

Not sure if these are the only reasons can be sadistic. Sometimes it can be out of vindictiveness, thought might be able to trace such drive to some good

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"You can do a kind action when you are not feeling kind and when it gives you no pleasure, simply because kindness is right; but no one ever did a cruel action simply because cruelty is wrong—only because cruelty was pleasant or useful to him"

The individually pleasurable or useful is not necessarily good. Good as Lewis had already acknowledged is a meta-system transition so operates at a higher level than these things. We see here another contradiction

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"The reason why it can never succeed is this. God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing"

Interesting statement

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"Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else"

The logos is not so transcendent for it is the active ordering principle of the world.

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"In reality, moral rules are directions for running the human machine. [...] There are two ways in which the human machine goes wrong. One is when human individuals drift apart from one another, or else collide with one another and do one another damage, by cheating or bullying. The other is when things go wrong inside the individual—when the different parts of him (his different faculties and desires and so on) either drift apart or interfere with one another"

- 1) So the end of morality for Lewis relates to ratiovitalist synthesis of drives. Where we can perform a unisect operation, the general idea of morality follows
- 2) Note that the machine metaphor does not necessarily entail any unique Real Morality, even as there is still an intelligible moral progress. This is just as there can be multiple optimal configurations of an assemblage of machines. A deflationary semantics can accommodate such a possibility
- 3) Tying all of this with morality as an absolute process, we see that the moral process is a synthesizing one, much like the unity of apperception. This has as its process a product assemblages that reflect human machines which are working properly
- 4) The homeostatic property process view, while it makes a step forward in thinking about morality as a process, has not incorporated this synthesizing aspect and as such remains incomplete
- 5) Perhaps ambient aesthetics could have a more moral application?
- 6) If a synthetic process is coming into play, then we can use duration as an ultimate ground for it... This is where God comes into the picture in a natural way

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"Morality, then, seems to be concerned with three things. Firstly, with fair play and harmony between individuals. Secondly, with what might be called tidying up or harmonising the things inside each individual. Thirdly, with the general purpose of human life as a whole: what man was made for: what course the whole fleet ought to be on: what tune the conductor of the band wants it to play"

What he is positing here is a specific goal above and beyond a positive direction in overall societal integration with the introduction of new behavioural metastabilities and furthermore the general striving of a particular society. Would such a goal ultimately exist? This problem seems to go back to the question of teleology. Bergson would say that positing a final cause is a reification of product outside of process.

If Bergson is correct, then this should mean that progress needs to be intelligible from within the moral movement itself. This seems to resonate with Hegel's idea that the true is in the whole

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"If somebody else made me, for his own purposes, then I shall have a lot of duties which I should not have if I simply belonged to myself"

This is indeed pointing one way to ground morality on God. What's really going on is that in creating us, he is thereby establishing our physis. However, it is important to note that the end of man is not mere nomos (convention). Our oughts derive from our very physis, and thus physis has its own relative autonomy. It only loses this autonomy in the process of an on-going intention-driven activity (where man is thus only understood as an artifact as opposed to a natural phenomenon), for this activity becomes the proper frame of reference. However if this was the states of affairs, we would not be talking about Human Nature, but rather some actively-revised human blueprint

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"According to this longer scheme there are seven "virtues." Four of them are called "Cardinal" virtues, and the remaining three are called "Theological" virtues. The "Cardinal" ones are those which all civilised people recognise: the "Theological" are those which, as a rule, only Christians know about. I shall deal with the Theological ones later

on: at present I am talking about the four Cardinal virtues. (The word "cardinal" has nothing to do with "Cardinals" in the Roman Church. It comes from a Latin word meaning "the hinge of a door." These were called "cardinal" virtues because they are, as we should say, "pivotal.") They are PRUDENCE, TEMPERANCE, JUSTICE, and FORTITUDE"

Prudence - Common sense knowledge, knowledge of inferential relations

Temperance - Regulation of pleasure-seeking activities

Justice - Honesty, keeping promises, give-and-take, fairness

Fortitude - Suppression of drives to preservation

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"(2) We might think that God wanted simply obedience to a set of rules: whereas He really wants people of a particular sort"

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"We see only the results which a man's choices make out of his raw material. But God does not judge him on the raw material at all, but on what he has done with it. Most of the man's psychological makeup is probably due to his body: when his body dies all that will fall off him, and the real central man, the thing that chose, that made the best or the worst out of this material, will stand naked. All sorts of nice things which we thought our own, but which were really due to a good digestion, will fall off some of us: all sorts of nasty things which were due to complexes or bad health will fall off others. We shall then, for the first time, see every one as he really was. There will be surprises."

1) This however seems to come into conflict with the idea that we want people of a particular sort, for if we strip man of his raw material what else is left to individuate him as a particular sort? Mere choices would just mean obedience to a set of work. The issue is that virtue traditionally concerns an individual's constitution. It does not attempt to create a psychological dualism

2) Schellingian character/Heideggerian Dasein might help deal with the idea Lewis wants to grope at (I of course have criticisms of them)

3) Compare idea to the work 'Human Freedom and the Logic of Evil'

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"I said in an earlier chapter that there were four "Cardinal" virtues and three "Theological" virtues. The three Theological ones are Faith, Hope, and Charity. Faith is going to be dealt with in the last two chapters. Charity was partly dealt with in Chapter 7, but there I concentrated on that part of Charity which is called Forgiveness"