

ing-class above one's own as an individual. Not only is it a form of moral philistinism to construct a theory in which they must be excluded, but it can only devalue an important (though subsidiary) weapon in the working-class armoury for use in the class struggle.

The Value of Morality

Morals, or rather moral principles and actions, only become possible or intelligible under certain circumstances. In our present discussion for instance they arise in and through a conflict between the interests of the worker as an individual and as a member of the proletariat. We have characterised his action as 'moral' on occasions when he opts for the latter and against the former, and we have done so for the following reasons: (1) It is against his self-interest, (2) It is in the interests of his class, (3) The interests of his class are, ultimately, the interests of mankind. In situations where the proletariat has a very real chance of defeating capitalism, self-interest becomes (in general) the interest of the working class too. The arena of the specifically *moral* act diminishes accordingly on these occasions.

Working class moral activity is of course less important than the non-moral or self-interested actions of the class, but its significance is for all that a real one, and it certainly shows Andrew Collier to be wrong or confusing when he claims that 'There is no moral basis for socialism, no such thing as "living as a socialist" in capitalist society... How a socialist gets his money or his kicks is politically irrelevant'. For it is precisely proletarian moral considerations, embodied in the concepts of class solidarity, cooperation with one's work mates and struggle against the bosses, that makes the best militants reject the seductive offers of cushy managerial posts or other attempts to buy them off. 'How a socialist gets his money' can thus be of the utmost importance.

So it is a myth to believe that all correct actions can be validly derived from one's needs and interests, for sometimes these must be overridden by actions derived from considerations which concern one's very *authenticity* as a socialist. Interests don't always have to be confronted by other interests therefore. Correct actions follow from what one *is* as much as from what one *wants*.

So, in conclusion, we don't need morality to demonstrate the necessity for revolutionary socialism. To understand the real and contradictory nature of capitalism is to appreciate its incompatibility with both bourgeois and socialist moral theories. At this level it is therefore superfluous and idealistic to opt for Freudian naturalism. However the working class, as the only agents capable of smashing capitalism, will need moral principles to guide an individual's action when such action comes into conflict with his self interest. But in that case too, what is needed can hardly be summarised by Collier's programme of combatting the superego in the name of the ego. For in reality it is the ego itself which stands in need of suppression to the collective subject 'we', to solidarity, and to fighting against the capitalist class. In all these areas Andrew Collier is going in the wrong direction. ~

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Notes

Reductionism and the 'Uniqueness of man'

I want to examine here some of the arguments used by John Lewis in *The Uniqueness of Man* [Lawrence & Wishart, 1974], an eminently readable polemic against the crude reductionism employed by such notorious characters as Desmond Morris, Jacques Monod, H. J. Eysenck and B. F. Skinner. In Lewis's main thesis (that man is more than a collection of molecules, mechanical interactions, or a 'naked ape' that has acquired a few tricks) I find much to agree with. Moreover Lewis's exposition of the reactionary and anti-social nature of these views is beyond dispute. However, in putting forward arguments to demonstrate the 'uniqueness of man' Lewis commits himself to certain dubious assumptions concerning the relationship between a philosophical standpoint and a moral or political attitude. These invite the following questions: does a particular political attitude *inevitably* follow from a philosophical standpoint? What is the relationship between the metaphysical assumptions which underlie the theories of Morris, Eysenck et al, and the reactionary and manipulative political attitudes associated with them? Does a manipulative attitude *inevitably* follow from reductionism, as Lewis suggests?

According to Lewis reductionism, or to use his expression, 'the philosophy of nothing but', has expressed itself in three main forms: (i) in the modern materialism of Francis Crick and Jacques Monod, who reduce man to physical and chemical constituents; (ii) in the theories of scientists, such as Minsky and Turing, who regard the computer as a model of the human brain, and (iii) in the 'ethological and genetic' myths of Konrad Lorenz, Robert Ardrey, and Desmond Morris, who reduce man to the level of the predatory carnivore or the laboratory rat, 'ineradicably aggressive' and 'motivated by a territorial imperative'. [p15]

Though held by the BBC and the press as great works of science very few of these theories have any genuine scientific merit, and what is more, argues Lewis, they rest on very shaky metaphysical assumptions. By concentrating on their philosophical weaknesses it is therefore possible, Lewis maintains, to refute them without postulating the existence of further metaphysical entities, or 'vital principles', which have been held to determine the difference between organic and inorganic matter. Vitalism, however, has been dead for over half a century. Little would be gained by its resurrection. Yet, if there is no 'vital principle' which distinguishes man from computers, apes, or a chance collection of molecules, what is unique about the human species? In the absence of any 'vital force' the following view, put forward by Monod, must seem very plausible:

... everything can be reduced to simple, obvious, mechanical interactions. The animal is a machine and there is no difference at all between men and animals.¹

It must be recognized that science can, in principle at least, explain everything about physical phenomena, but explaining everything from the standpoint of a particular science does not include an explanation of how things are seen from another standpoint. The company's accounts explain everything to the accountant about the running of the company, but they tell us nothing about the 'goings on' in the canteen. Physics and chemistry

tell us everything, from a physico-chemical standpoint, about life, but not everything there is to know about life. We can explain the sound of the violin in terms of sound vibrations, horse-hair and cat-gut, but this says nothing about the quality of the music. Most scientists, it is true, do not attempt to reduce everything to the categories of their specific discipline, and therefore have no desire to dismiss the whole of human culture as mere epiphenomena. Those who do are usually philosophers who don scientific caps or scientists trying on the philosopher's attire. And for this reason their 'philosophical problems arise', as Wittgenstein says in a similar context, 'when language goes on holiday'.²

Lewis argues that the popular reductionist materialism of Crick and Monod does not rest on any substantial philosophic support. Reductionism, he says, rests on what Ryle has termed a 'category mistake', a mistake which it shares equally with vitalism. When it is said that 'life' and 'mind' are realities both reductionists and vitalists take it to mean that they possess the same reality as bodies. But in fact we are talking about totally different categories when we speak of 'life' and 'mind', just as we are employing different categories when we speak of the blade of a knife and its cutting function. No one denies that a knife has a cutting function, and no one, when shown a knife, asks where its cutting function is situated. In the same way to ask where the 'life force' can be observed in a living organism, and if it cannot be observed, to deny any essential difference between organic and inorganic matter, is to confuse the categories of 'life', 'mind', etc, with physical entities. Life is not a substance, nor mind a mental force - observable or hidden - but is more akin to a quality, function, or even an activity. Lewis points out, correctly, how

*This could be made clear by substituting for the nouns 'life', which suggests a 'something' hovering over the non-living and then attaching itself to the organism, and 'mind', with a very similar connotation, the present participles 'living' - a complex series of activities, and 'minding' - something the brain and hand and eye-possessing man is doing all the time he lives and acts.*³

It is not necessary to reduce man to atoms and molecules described in terms of mere behavioural impulses and reactions to stimuli, in order to eliminate the assumption of a 'Ghost in the machine'. Putting forward a similar rejection of the 'mental force' doctrine Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, depicts his imaginary interlocutor asking him whether behaviourism was a necessary outcome of this position.

Are you not really a behaviourist in disguise? Aren't you at bottom really saying that everything except human behaviour is a fiction? - If I do speak of a fiction, then it is a grammatical fiction. How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviourism arise? - the first step is the one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we shall know more about them - we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent.) - And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended

*process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them.*⁴

But the assumption which both Ryle and Wittgenstein have seen as a 'category mistake' or 'conjuring trick', which has misled reductionists, is much deeper than a misunderstanding in the use of language - a view which is held by many followers of Ryle and Wittgenstein. To be sure this 'category mistake' is the shaky foundation stone of the dubious metaphysical utterances of Crick and Monod and, moreover, it is the result of a linguistic confusion. But like many followers of Ryle and Wittgenstein Lewis does not seem to be concerned with the need to offer an explanation as to why language misleads and why such category mistakes are made. This is probably because he is more concerned with the political and social consequences of the doctrines he is attacking than with their origins. Yet to come to grips with this question is to attempt to understand the nature of philosophy, and its relationship towards the social base which has nurtured it.

Now whilst Wittgenstein held that confusions in language lie at the root of philosophical confusion he did recognise that they were a product of a much deeper disquiet. Hence the solution was not to be found simply in correcting the linguistic errors of deviant philosophers. If all that lay at the root of the doctrines of Crick and Monod were linguistic errors one would only have to point this out to them so that they could recognise their errors, recant them, and let us all get some peace. Obviously the nature of their 'error' lies more deeply than this, since they are unlikely to be convinced by Lewis's handling of Ryle's arguments, however well presented.

Though Wittgenstein's 'therapeutic method' sounds, in many ways, as if one only has to assemble the occasional reminders to refute a particular doctrine⁵ he did recognize that

*The sickness of a time is cured by the alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and the sickness of philosophical problems can be cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by an individual.*⁶

Wittgenstein, of course, envisaged no political programme for carrying out any of the necessary alterations to a mode of life which reflected various forms of philosophical sickness. Marx, however, did have a definite programme in mind when he perceived that

*... all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism ... but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which give rise to this idealistic humbug; that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory.*⁷

The point is this: philosophic confusion has its origins in the social base, and therefore its solution requires a change in the social base. The crudities of the reductionists, Monod and Crick, like the élitist theories of man held by Lorenz, Ardrey, and Morris, are not merely products of 'category mistakes', as Lewis thinks, but these 'category mistakes' themselves are the products of the élitist and highly competitive social base in which they flourish. It is precisely this social base that finds itself reflected in the various theories which treat man as either a bundle of reflexes to be controlled by external forces or a naturally aggressive and competitive ape. Such thinkers have wholly adopted the ideology of a manipulative and élitist society and have projected this into their theories about the

nature of man. Lewis, however, over-emphasises the primacy of a reductionist philosophy rather than its social origins, when he says that

*If men are only bundles of conditioned reflexes and animal drives, and only their behaviour reactions matter, and not their minds and thoughts and motives, then men are reduced to the status of laboratory animals to be treated by the same conditioning mechanisms... This is the inevitable procedure for the reductionist who has already refused to see life as anything more than chemistry.*⁸

But is this procedure really an inevitable consequence of reductionist philosophy? Lewis himself must accept that this is not entirely so, since he notes, in an *ad hominem* argument against the reductionists, that they themselves do not act in accordance with their own theories. But this inconsistency on the part of the reductionists themselves is sufficient to cast doubt upon the allegedly inevitable consequences of holding a reductionist or materialist theory. Such a theory does not necessarily lead to a manipulative attitude towards men, or to a weakening of respect for human life, any more than the adoption of aspiritual (or religious) world view must lead to a heightening of respect for human life. For example, Christians can, and do, treat life with contempt, and conversely a reductionist with respect for human life need not be a contradiction at all. The manipulative attitude towards life is bound to the social base, and this precedes any philosophical theory regarding the nature of man. Philosophy does not determine any attitudes towards life, it only reflects them - though not always accurately. As Hegel put it:

*One more word about giving instruction as to what the world ought to be: Philosophy in any case always comes on to the scene too late to give it. As the thought of the world, it appears only when actuality is already there cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed. The teaching of the concept, which is also history's inescapable lesson, is that it is only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the ideal apprehends this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints it grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.*⁹

Let us now consider whether, in a society which was not characterized by a 'low' opinion of human life, it would be possible to eliminate the distinctions between men, artifacts, and other animals without the inevitable decline in human values - as envisaged by Lewis. This would be out of the question on Lewis's terms since he holds that to treat man as comprehended by any lower level, whether on the stimulus-response level, the biological, or the mechanical, is to undermine respect for the individual and lay men open to conditioning and manipulation; it is to treat them as things like colliding billiard balls, or interacting molecules, entirely determined by forces outside themselves - which is how men are treated when they are swept hither and thither by economic forces. This is a view that lends itself to those who want to exercise control over others but who never apply it to themselves, or submit to be controlled themselves, never seeking to awaken men to problematic situations, inviting

them to meet them in their own way. It is in fact an elitist theory for use by the elite in relation to the inferiors they rule.¹⁰

At the root of Lewis's account of the 'uniqueness of man' is the assumption that to reduce the differences between man, artifacts, and other animals, is to devalue human life. But is this necessarily so? Let's begin by concentrating on the question of artefacts. For a start, it seems that Lewis is operating with an all too crude account of an artefact. No machine at present is capable of doing everything that men do, and Lewis is therefore correct in showing that reductionists who speak this way are underestimating the human potential. But then, there are many humans who cannot do what other humans can do. Very few English philosophers could assemble transistors with the speed and accuracy of the Mitsubishi female operatives, but none of these operatives would disqualify English philosophers from membership of the human race.

More fundamentally, though, I suggest that the criterion of performance isn't really the main issue at all; if one is of the attitude that there is a fundamental difference between artefacts, animals, and men, no listing of achievements will influence opinion one way or the other. This, I believe, is Wittgenstein's point of view when he says

*My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul.*¹¹

Whether or not man is an automaton is a question that is beyond the range of rational argument, according to Wittgenstein, since his attitude shows itself in his actions; the way he reacts to the other, and so on. But it also follows that if somehow his attitude changed, then it is equally plausible that the question whether artifacts could be distinguished from humans could be also outside the range of rational discussion. Such a change of attitudes would obviously be preceded by a social transformation, possibly a complete social upheaval if what the writers of science fiction tell us is to have any credibility. The question is, is such a change of attitudes to be ruled out as an *a priori* impossibility?

Consider the following analogy: In many respects the language of those whose attitudes are set against the possibility of eliminating distinctions between men, artifacts, and other animals, is akin to the language of those who hold, or have held, to doctrines concerning the superiority of one race over another. To convince a defender of apartheid that there is no fundamental difference between Indians and white men would take more than a listing of facts and arguments, since they would be operating with an entirely different concept of human life. The US Indian was not legally recognised as a person until 1879¹² and his South African counterpart is likewise denied access to the same status. In both cases there are no recognizable criteria which they could appeal to in order to demonstrate their credibility as humans. Further, it isn't a question of what sort of arguments members of a 'sub-human' race, or an artifact, could put forward to establish their equality, but what sort of actions would convince others that they were human enough to argue with. Before their arguments can be listened to they have to be recognized as the arguments of a human. The analogy between artifacts and 'other races' is very strong here. 'One simply does not argue with machines' is the sort of response one would expect if it was said that a machine was demanding the status of a human. And this is very similar to 'One doesn't argue with Indians, Africans ... etc

(throughout the whole history of colonialism) ... the only language they understand is this ...' - pointing to a gun, whip, and so on. In these cases there are no common grounds for rational discussion.

In any case there are, even now, many people who, in at least some circumstances, treat machines and animals with the sort of respect that is normally reserved for humans. Indeed there is an abundance of examples where animals and artefacts are given preferential treatment over humans. One often reads in the press of parents who starve their children whilst the dog is well nourished, and the divorce courts are full of husbands who have greater affection for their cars than their wives. Machines are given recognition in other ways; the business of cheating the ticket machine - not necessarily the man who owns it - is now an established practice, and such expressions are part of our normal discourse. Day-to-day conflict in industry takes on the form of a resistance to the machine, and not only as an indirect expression of the workers' hostility to the owner of the machine. There are significant signs that resistance to production on the part of many factory workers is a direct resistance to the power of the machine itself. The machine may be the means by which the workers are exploited by capitalists, but it is not always a certainty that the worker who sabotages a machine is hitting at his employer. The modern factory worker has learned to resent the machine as the agent of domination just as his predecessor resented the factory owner. (This of course does not let the management off the hook; they are simply one stage removed, like the shareholders etc, in the hierarchy of exploitation).

To be sure it may be a long way to the 'war of the robots', or the 'Day of the Triffids', but the fact that such fictions have a degree of plausibility is an indication that attitudes towards artefacts and other species are not determined and fixed for all time. The above remarks may serve as a hint that attitudes can change. Who is to say that, given the right circumstances, they might change completely? There are many in South Africa who are convinced that the 'other races' will always remain inferior - wiser men predict an holocaust if attitudes do not change.

So if it is conceivable for attitudes towards machines and animals to change, would this necessarily entail the 'unfortunate consequences', as Lewis maintains, of a diminished concept of human life? Could we not argue that if the US settlers had recognized the Indians as human instead of 'painted savages', and if the South Africans ever recognize their countrymen as human, they would have, in fact, enriched their concept of human life? And if this were possible could we not imagine those who granted equal status to artefacts and other animals, subject to the appropriate circumstances, having enriched their concept of human life? To view the granting of equal status to alleged inferiors as a lowering of one's own standards is really another form of that very elitism that Lewis is attacking. It is conceivable, at least, that in a society that had a high regard for every aspect of the environment the words 'don't harm it - after all it does consist of atoms and molecules', might have the same meaning as 'don't harm him - after all he is human'.

David Lamb

NOTES

- 1 Quoted by J. Lewis, *Uniqueness of Man* p9, from a BBC interview with Jacques Monod, July 1971
- 2 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1968, 38 p19e
- 3 *Uniqueness of Man*, p18
- 4 *Philosophical Investigations*, 307-8 p102-3e
- 5 *Philosophical Investigations*, 127 p50e
- 6 L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1967, p57e
- 7 K. Marx, *The German Ideology* publishers, Moscow, 1964, p50
- 8 *Uniqueness of Man*, p40
- 9 G W F Hegel, Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T M Knox, Oxford, 1958, p13
- 10 *Uniqueness of Man*, p59
- 11 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p179e
- 12 As the result of a civil action, *Standing Bear v Crook*, April 1879.



the end of philosophy

'For it strikes me that the "end of philosophy" proclaimed by Marx has often been misunderstood, either as the notion that philosophy is in its very nature idealistic and must be replaced by materialism or as the idea that philosophy, as one specialized discipline and mode of research, was to be replaced by another such specialized discipline, in the form of economics or social science in a more general sense. On the contrary, it seems to me that in aiming to dissolve philosophy, Marx intended to strike at the very category of the specialized discipline as such and to restore the unity of knowledge. In renouncing philosophy, he aimed at replacing the abstract in its various forms by the concrete, by history itself - and at this stage in nineteenth-century thought the discovery of economics was the same as the discovery of concrete history.' In our time, 'where economics has become itself an abstraction and a mode of specialization, a return to the concrete in history is bound to involve a partial dissolution of the economic as well as the other abstract disciplines'.

[Frederick Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton, 1971; also paperback, p294]