



Some ethical considerations

Timothee Bordenave

In a world necessarily conceived as vast or even immense, it is important to consider for ourselves—the necessary center of our attention and perception, and the sole source of our intelligent reflection—that we can only observe a very small part of it. Then focus our attention on even less, and logically, if we can even think intelligently about an even smaller portion...

In this vast world, of which we can only reflect on a necessarily much smaller part, and in which we almost necessarily perceive, as far as I know, as men or women, the presence around us of other men or women who, as far as we can tell, constitute representatives of our species—and even if we are not entirely certain of this, since, in Descartes' words, they could be automata or even images, after all—and although it may be considered that we could never know any of them completely for certain, because we are ourselves and they are not, we can nevertheless, through interaction with them—personal or cultural, and through the use of language or what our behavior involves : be corresponding with these people, often when we observe them, and if not, researching or learning about them, at the very least through language and then through logical, and often intelligent, reflection on their own language and behavior.

This allows us, through what we call social norms, to understand each person or group of people who can be perceived, observed, and then reflected upon in order to interact with them and shape our lives around them. By observing this social norm, convention, or consensus of behavior accepted by everyone within a society, and often simply by applying what is legitimate—respectful of the law and perhaps of the tolerance observed around us—we can live a life that is as safe and less dangerous as possible. Even though a part of this danger or risk to our own life, existence, cannot yet be entirely evaded as coming to us from the social body. Certainly, this is commonly accepted, the life which is by reason closest to the conventions observed between various people and for their social organization is undoubtedly the least risky and by our activity, can be the best condition for us to be able to establish ourselves and prosper through study and work, as long as we find satisfaction or pleasure in it - I so believe.

So, this notion of morality that directs our intelligent will toward our behavior in society, is often—and it seems to me as well—designated as the best way to live intelligently in society for as much as possible. This is because if each person determines the modality of their actions according to overall criteria that resonate with them, either through an affinity with ideas, or with people who share them, or through a taste for a particular activity, or perhaps a particular sensation or feeling, then those who necessarily have a life that unfolds in time and is oriented in space will be better able to find coherence between their efforts and their undertakings or interests—and between these and the relevance of their ideas in what they conceive or hope for, or in what they believe. The result, I believe, will be—or so it is said—a better sense of both themselves and their accurate understanding of the world, as they see fit.

This morality—or, as I would personally prefer to call it, for my own reflection here, the somewhat more limited term "ethics"—is traditionally defined by philosophers, particularly the Greeks, as an attraction to and a will to work for the good, whether considered for oneself or for others.

The good is often defined by these same philosophers as encompassing four notions: beauty, goodness, utility, and pleasure. Here, I, who subscribe to this definition of both morality or ethics and that of the good, must acknowledge that I am not so important as to claim to know nothing

more about it or to be unable to define it better. And while moral or ethical good is certainly a commonly established concept, I cannot claim to already possess it, but only that I can express a desire to approach it.

When we act legitimately and observe the tolerance of customs and traditions in our pursuit of good, then I believe that our intellectual capacity and perhaps a little intelligence will suffice for the life we lead in society to be, indeed, through reciprocity I believe, good, beautiful, pleasant, and useful. And this is something I believe I have often observed around me. But as for the opposite of good, which we call evil, composed of physical or intellectual suffering and a supposed form of satisfaction derived from this suffering, whether inflicted to oneself or another, it is important to reject it; this is, moreover, the unequivocal social norm. And if you feel drawn to moving away from it, I believe, and if, unfortunately, you should because it has happened find it better to recover from it and then move away from it, this seems rational and appropriate to me. Moreover, if evil, the opposite of good, were composed of ugliness, wickedness, uselessness, and unpleasantness, I personally cannot envision any appeal in it, nor do I understand how anyone could find any in it. As the proverb says, if we reject evil and distance ourselves from it, it will not harm us.

However, if we strive for good, I believe that logically, through the exercise of our will, we increasingly align ourselves with it. Similarly, through study and action, we can improve our abilities. More generally, I believe that wanting to do good, then observing how to undertake it, and considering its principles in order to reflect on how to implement them, ultimately determining one's behavior, and then persevering in this, is already, up to that point, doing good! Thus, we will begin to live better.

I have only intended to express very common considerations here in order to visualize them in writing, and I am certainly no one else capable of explaining or teaching a complex concept or line of reasoning to another, as I possess neither a vast vocabulary nor the texts of the masters of the past. However, even for myself, I realize as I write these few lines that, much as I expressed earlier, attempting to define this seemingly simple question of ethics in writing has required an effort that, as long as I applied myself to it, has greatly helped me to better understand it and opens up new perspectives now, allowing me, I hope, to then conceive of new ideas.

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Paris, France
26.5.16.



Bionote:



Born in 1984 in Paris, France, Timothee Bordenave is a French author of fiction and essays, and a poet. He has published many books, about 25 to date, and his literary works have been translated in large parts to about 20 languages... He is also a visual artist, whose photographs and paintings have been shown in France and in various international locations.

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