

SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF THE BODY AND THE INTERACTION OF MINDS

The conception of sharing life rests on the assumption that one shares the same physiological and psychological structures with the others. One thinks that beings with similar structures have similar pains, similar pleasures, similar desires, fears, and in general the same formal structure of understanding and will. Organic similarity is easily confirmed: human bodies are sufficiently similar in all macroscopic and microscopic details in every particular part or system. This is how we are able to survive: the same type or quantity of food is nourishing; the same measure of bleeding or of impact is grave, etc. It is only by reckoning the due measures of these goods and evils that one is able to live; one becomes so assured of the utility of these measures as to have no doubts in advising the same to the others. I advise because I am satisfied with my experience when I respect these due measures; and I assume that “the others” advise me to do the same because they are satisfied with their experiences. Hence, there arise universal measures for good and evil. This is a common sense analysis of the origin of values or norms: I and the others presume to know what *good life* for the human or even for the animal *is* in general through considerations of similarity.

Advices on issues like the nutritiveness of the food or advantageousness of a specific bodily motion refer, of course, only to a primitive form of a common understanding of, or care for the species, and such examples constitute the archetypes of any conceivable counsel. All practical, ethical and aesthetical judgements, imperatives or recommendations aim the improvement of life: one professes to know what is better by one’s own experience and hence one thinks one can, and even ought to advise the means to attain it. No doubt, error and hypocrisy are possible, but error and lie become conceptual possibilities only when their contraries already have assumed meanings. Besides, this cannot be an argument against the idea that all counsel aims at good. The philosophically significant type of advice is veridical, and all ethical counselling is generally taken to be aiming the common good. It seems possible to offer the same argument from a solipsistic perspective too: even

when ethics is seen as aiming nothing but the personal good, it may be that the personal and the common good are one and the same thing, for egoism does not necessarily aim the good of the ego at the expense of the others. Although the existence of the others is epistemologically problematic, my good and evil cannot be conceived in isolation from the good and evil of the others.

SIMILARITY AND INTERACTION

I have argued elsewhere that resemblance is the only basis for caring for others, other minds, or souls, or beings like me.¹ Indeed, the existence of the others can only be justified by the perception of the resemblance of shapes, sounds, movements, etc. What exactly is similar? The notion of similarity has a wide extension; it ranges from relations between vague concepts defined by means of direct sense perception to various numerical relations formulated by parameters of time and space, and those of any other conceivable property. Bodily family resemblance, for example, or resemblances of voice the child can recognize are formal similarities that require no mathematical apparatus. These are indispensable relations of sense, relations one cannot survive without learning how to draw. Communication, cooperation, breeding, moral behaviour are unthinkable without an ability of drawing such simple relations when necessary. It can safely be assumed that these are what all humans and some animals can do; for otherwise these forms of life would apparently be impossible. No sufficiently complex organism feeds merely itself, but it cares for the others – primarily for its offspring – as well. Care concerns primarily the nourishment of the young and it extends to specific methods of maximizing the quality of life, of teaching the same perceptual or sensory pleasure of a good of any kind, of making the young recognize others' right to a good life, of reminding them of what is required for the common good, of schooling them so that they may experience the same aesthetic pleasures before the same work of art or in a ceremony, of forbidding them what one takes to be ugly, evil, painful, etc.

Judgements founded on this propensity to care follow from primitive forms of calculating without precise numerical relations. Mathematical, or in general a primordial methodical treatment of similarities render scientific "healing" possible; for, without calculation all curing can only be instinctive. Certain forms of scientific calculation are in that sense only means to attain happiness. A calculation of this kind, either a primitive or a scientific one, must rest on the "knowledge" that certain states of the body are better than others. It seems that ethics too is a form of such healing practices.