

Valid action (29.09.78)

This question has been answered, or has tried to be answered, in different ways, always taking into account the kindness or unkindness of an action. The validity of an action has been measured by the goodness or badness of the action, that is to say, answers have been given from the point of view of what, since ancient times, has been considered ethical or moral.

For many years we have been engaged in finding out what is moral and what is immoral, what is good and what is bad. But basically we were interested in knowing what was valid in any action. We were given answers in different ways. There were answers of a religious nature, legal answers, and ideological answers. All those answers told us that people ought to do things in a certain way and ought to avoid doing things in another way. This was very important because human activities, according to whether they follow one direction or another, also develop a different way of life. In human life everything is arranged according to the orientation. My present situation is arranged according to the direction I have towards the future. Therefore, these questions about what is valid and what is not, what is good and what is bad, affect not only the future of the human being but also the present. They affect not only individuals, but also communities and whole nations.

Different religious views gave their solutions. And in this way, the believers of different religions had to obey certain rules, certain precepts inspired by the god. That was valid for the believers of those religions. What is more, different religions gave different precepts, some of which indicated that certain actions ought to be avoided so as to prevent certain repercussions. Other religions indicated that this was to avoid going to hell. Sometimes these religions, which on principle were universal, did not agree on their precepts and commandments. But the most worrying thing of all was: what happened in those areas with a religion that gave moral direction to the people? What happened in those areas of the world where many inhabitants could not comply - even though they may have wanted to - where they were not able to fulfill those precepts and those commandments because they could not "feel" what they were supposed to feel. These non-believers, who in the eyes of the believers were also the sons of god, these non-believers could not fulfill the commandments and so it seemed as though they were far from the hand of god.

A religion should be universal, not because it geographically covers the world, but basically because it dwells in the heart of the human being, no matter what his condition and no matter where that human being lives. So religions, with their ethical replies, presented us with certain difficulties. We consulted other structures of behavior. Legal systems make their own structures and establish codes of behavior in certain ways which must be carried out or avoided in relationships and social behavior. There are all kinds of codes which rule relationships, even penal codes which foresee punishment for certain crimes, that is to say, punishment for behaviors that are considered anti-social. Legal systems have also tried to give answers to human behavior. They have tried to define a good and a bad behavior.

And just as the religions that gave their answers - which is fine, fine for the believers - the legal systems have also given their answers - which is fine, fine for a given historical moment, fine for a given type of social organization.

But this does not say much for the individual who must comply with a determined behavior. Because, as reasonable people no doubt realize, it is interesting for there to be a regulation of social behavior in order to avoid a complete chaos. But, of course, this is a technique of social organization, not a justification of morality. In fact, according to the development and concept, different communities have rules of behavior which are legally backed and yet sometimes oppose each other. Legal systems are not valid universally, but serve the purpose only at a given moment, for a particular structure. They are not valid for all human beings. They are not valid at all times and at all places. And what is most important, they say nothing to an individual about what is good and what is bad.

We also consulted the ideologies. Ideologies are good friends with developments. Their explanations were far more showy than the boring legal systems and even, perhaps, than this other question of the precepts or laws brought down from heaven. Some doctrines explained that the human being is a sort of rapacious animal, a being who develops at any cost and who must open his way in spite of everything, in spite, even, of other human beings. There is a sort of will for power behind that morality. That morality can in some way appear romantic yet sensationalist and it says nothing to the individual for whom things do not go quite so well in that mad scramble for power.

There is another kind of ideology that tells us: everything in nature is in evolution and the human being is a product of that evolution, the human being is the reflection of the conditions in a given moment. His behavior shows the sort of society in which he lives. Therefore, one class is going to have on sort of morality and another class is going to have another. In this way, morality is determined by the objective conditions, by the relations and by the way of production. One does not have to worry too much as one acts mechanically according to impulses. Matter in evolution moves towards entropy. Physicists speak of the final death of the world. Therefore, every mechanical moral act forecasts the death of the world. So, by limiting ourselves to mechanical development, I do what I do because my impulse is to do so! Where is the good and the bad? There is a mechanical clash of particles in motion.

Other remarkable ideologies have told us things such as this: morality is a sort of pressure, a sort of pressure useful to contain the force of the impulses. This contention effected by that sort of "super-I", this compression

which it makes in the cauldron of the consciousness allows, in any case, the sublimation of the basic impulses, allows them to acquire a direction. So our poor friend who sees others coming and going with their ideologies, suddenly sits down on the pavement and says, "What must I do? Here I am, under the whole pressure of society and over there I have impulses and it seems as if sublimation can take place - so long as I am an artist - and then everything will be all right, as long as I can sublimate. Otherwise, it seems as if I will end up neurotic." So this question of morality is really a way of tackling these pressures in order to avoid a neurotic explosion.

Other psychological ideologies explained good and evil according to adaptation. A moral of behavior of adaptation. Something which permits us to fit into a system and in the measure that the individual does not fit in, he is segregated, has problems. So he had better walk straight and fit well into the system! Morality tells us then what is good and what is bad according to the adaptation of the individual, according to whether he fits in or not. That is another ideology.

In times of great cultural fatigue, such as have already repeatedly occurred in other civilizations, the short-lived and immediate answers about what must and must not be done, then appear. I am referring to the so-called schools of morality of decadence. In different cultures already in their downfall, we see the appearance of would-be moralists who very quickly try to accommodate their views - according to need rather than ideology - as best they can in order to give a certain direction to their lives. Some sound more or less like this: there is no meaning in life and as there isn't any meaning then I can do whatever I wish, if I can. Others: as there is not much meaning in life, I must do those things which bring me satisfaction. Whatever makes me feel good in spite of everything else.

There are other doctrines from the schools of morality of decadence which say: since I am in such a bad situation and since life itself is a suffering, I must do things in certain ways, I must lead the life of a stoic. And this is how the schools of decadence are called schools of stoicism. Even though these may be answers given in times of emergencies, behind these schools there are also ideologies. There appears to be a basic ideology of having lost everything and that loss of meaning is urgently responded to.

There are other concepts, perhaps of a psychological nature - that is not so easy to define - which say: the correct action is that which is fulfilled with non-attachment. Action itself, in any case, serves to liberate. This is a slightly difficult position, very difficult for our friend who remains sitting in the middle of the pavement asking himself, "What should I do?"

So the systems of ideologies, the legal systems, the schools of morality of decadence, the religions, have all worked trying to give answers to the serious problem of the valid action in order to establish their morality, to establish their ethics. Because of course, they were all aware of the importance of a justified or unjustified action.

This problem of actions and their justification is very important to us. You all know very well that an action cannot be justified by an absurd theory where compromise just appears out of nowhere. It so happens that if I make a compromise with something, I must do it. A sort of financial coercion. I cannot establish any sort of compromise if the world in which I live is absurd and ends up in nothing.

What is the basis of a valid action?

The basis of a valid action is not given by the ideologies, nor by the religious commandments, nor by beliefs, nor by the social regulations, even when all these things in themselves are important. The basis of a valid action is not given by any of them, but is given by the internal register of an action.

There is a fundamental difference between the other evaluations - which appear to come from the exterior - and this one according to the registers which the human being obtains from his action.

And what is the register of a valid action?

The register of a valid action is that which one experiences as unitive. It is the one which at the same time gives a sensation of internal growth and also the one which one wishes to repeat because it has a taste of continuity, that is to say, that it is extended in time.

Let us examine each of these aspects separately.

First, the register of internal unity, then its continuity in time.

When faced by a difficult situation, I can respond in one way or another. If, for example, I am being bothered, I may respond violently. Faced by that irritation which the external stimuli produces in me and that tension which I feel, I can distend, I can react violently and by doing so I experience a great sensation of relief. So, apparently, the first condition of the valid action has been fulfilled. When faced with an irritating stimuli, I do away with the stimuli, and by doing so I distend, and by distending I acquire a unitive register. A valid action cannot be justified only by the distension, because it so happens that, although I may distend at that moment, the register does not continue in time. At a moment "A", I produce the distension by reacting in a certain way; at a moment "B", I don't agree at all with what I have just done. This produces contradiction in me. That distension is not unitive because the second moment contradicts the first. It is necessary for it also to fulfill the requisite of continuity in time without any breaks, without any contradictions. In this way, we can present numerous examples where the action is valid for one moment, but not for the next. And the individual cannot really wish to

examples where the action is valid for one moment, but not for the next. And the individual cannot really wish to prolong this sort of attitude because he registers contradiction instead of unity.

There is another point. The individual does not register a sensation of internal growth. Every day we carry out

numerous actions and relieve many tensions. These actions have nothing to do with morality. We do them and we distend. They produce in us a certain amount of pleasure, but they remain there, and if a tension were to appear once more, we would again discharge it with that sort of condenser effect where a charge raises and, on reaching a certain limit, it is discharged. With this condenser effect of charging and discharging, we get the impression of being within an eternal wheel of repetitions of acts, where in the moment the tension is discharged, the situation is pleasant, but it leaves us with a strange sensation as though life were only that, a wheel of repetitions, of pleasures and pains. Life, of course, would be quite absurd.

So today, when faced by a tension, I produce a discharge and tomorrow, I do the same. And so the wheel of actions goes turning like day and night, continually, independent of human will, independent of any human choice.

Nevertheless, there are actions which we have perhaps realized only a few times in our lives. These are actions that grant great internal unity at the time. These are actions that also give us a register of something having improved within us. These are actions with proposals for the future, in the sense that, were we to repeat them, something would grow inside us, something would change for the better. These are actions that give us unity, a sensation of internal growth and continuity in time. These are the registers of a valid action.

We have never said that it is better or worse, or that it is compulsory. But rather, we have given proposals and systems of registers corresponding to those proposals. We have spoken of the action that creates unity or contradiction. And finally, we have spoken of the perfecting of a valid action by the repetition of those acts. In order to close a system of registers of a valid action, we have said: if you repeat your acts of internal unity, then nothing can detain you. The latter speaks not only of the register of unity, of the sensation of growth, of the continuity in time, it speaks also of the perfecting of a valid action. Because, of course, not everything turns out right the first time. We very often try to do interesting things which do not turn out right and, of course, we realize that things can be bettered and perfected. A valid action can also be perfected and the repetition of those acts which give internal unity, a sensation of growth and continuity in time, is the perfecting of the action itself. This is possible. In very general terms, we have given the registers of a valid action.

There is an overriding principle, the greatest principle of all which says: treat others as you would have them treat you. This principle is not new. It is thousands of years old. It has endured the passage of time, in different regions, in different cultures. It is a principle universally valid. This principle has been presented in different ways. It has been considered in its negative aspect, for example, by saying something like this: don't do to others what you wouldn't want them to do to you. It is another way of focusing the same thing. It has also been said: love your brother as yourself. Naturally, it is not quite the same thing as saying: treat others as you would have them treat you.

This principle has been talked about since long, long ago. It is the greatest of moral principles, it is the greatest of the principles of valid action.

How do I want others to treat me? It is taken for granted that it would be good to treat others the same as one wants to be treated. But how do I want to be treated? I shall have to answer this by saying that, if I am treated in one way, I am being harmed, if in another, I am not. I shall have to speak of good and bad. I shall have to turn to the eternal wheel of defining a valid action according to one theory or another, according to one religion or another. For me, one thing would be good, for someone else, the same thing would be bad. No doubt, someone would appear to be treating others very badly indeed, applying the same principle, because it so happens that that person likes to be treated badly. The human mind is extremely complex! This is all very well, this principle that speaks of treating others according to what is good for oneself, but it would be better to know what is good for oneself.

So, in this way, we are interested in going to the basis of a valid action. The basis of a valid action is given by the register. I say: treat others as I would have them treat me. Why? Surely there is some mechanism, some mental function that creates problems when we treat others badly. What could this function be? If I see somebody in a very bad condition, or if I suddenly see someone suffer a cut or wound, this rings a bell in me. How can a bell ring inside me if all this is happening to that other person? It is almost magical. It so happens that when someone suffers an accident, I almost experience physically the register of the other person's accident. You have all studied these phenomena and you know very well that to every image corresponds a perception. You know very well that images carry charges and that some images can tense certain points, other images can distend. If to each perception there corresponds a representation and of that representation one has a register, that is, a sensation, then it is not so difficult to understand the mechanism of perceiving a phenomenon and having an internal image which, when mobilized, gives me a sensation in different parts of my body or intrabody. (These sensations have been mobilized by action of the previous image.) And so then, of

course, I feel identified when someone suffers a cut. I feel identified because the visual perception of such a phenomenon corresponds to a visual image and correlating many other images of a cenesthetic or tactile nature, which by means of a sort of "internal cable" give me a sensation and so I end up feeling in myself the register of the other person's cut.

It will not be good for me to treat others badly, not only because I have the same type of register of the other person's suffering, and that is quite interesting, but also because when doing one kind of activity or another, I have a register of what I am doing. I am speaking of a second circuit. One thing is the first circuit corresponding to the perception, representation, the new input of the representation and the internal sensation. Another thing

is the second circuit, which has to do with the action. And to me this means something like this: that no matter what action I effect towards the world, I also have an internal register of that action. We know this feedback/input system very well. It is the one that allows us to learn. If I did not have inside me an input of feedback of the movements which I am doing, then I would never be able to perfect them. I learn to type by repetition, that is, I record my acts by means of trial and error, but I am able to record acts only if I do them.

There is a great prejudice amongst many intellectuals, that is, that learning takes place by thinking, that something is learned when one simply takes in data. Nevertheless, the mechanism of the centers tells us that they are mobilized when they are touched by images and that this produces an overcharge that activates them towards the world. But there is a feedback/input system taking the information of this activity to the memory and to the consciousness. It is this feedback/input system which allows us to say: I pressed the wrong key, or this is all right and so there I register the sensation of hit and miss, there I perfect the register of a hit and so I learn. It becomes more fluid and so the correct action of typing becomes automatic. We are speaking of a second circuit. The first was referred to the pain in another, which I register in myself and the second circuit speaks of the register which I have of the action I produce.

You have studied the differences between the so-called cathartic acts and transference acts. Cathartic acts refer basically to this question of the discharge of tension. Transference acts are the ones which allow the transfer of internal charges, the integration of the contents and also they help the development of psychic energy. We know that wherever there are islands of mental contents, contents which are not communicated among themselves, the consciousness encounters difficulties. We know that if a person thinks in one direction but feels in another and finally acts in a completely different direction, that something is not right and that the register is not unitive. It seems then that the psychic functioning is only integrated when we build bridges among the internal contents. This allows us to take a few more steps in the right direction. You know the transference techniques in operative and you know very well how, by mobilizing determined images and moving the images around until finding points of resistance you can, if you are crafty, overcome those resistances and in doing so provoke distensions and transfer the charges to new contents.

And these phenomena of transfer of charges to new contents are what later enable an individual to integrate his whole internal scenery in post-transference elaboration. You know those techniques and you also know the autotransference techniques where the action of an external guide is not required (as happens in the transferences), but that internally one is able to guide oneself with determined images which have been previously coded. You also know that action - and not only the work of the images which we have mentioned - but that action can operate transference phenomena as well as autotransference phenomena. One kind of action will not be the same as another. Some actions will allow the integration of internal contents whereas other actions will be incredibly disintegrating. Some actions produce in a human being a tremendous weight, such as sorrow and internal division, such a profound uneasiness that the person will never wish to repeat them. Nevertheless, such actions have remained strongly adhered to the past and even though such an action were never repeated in the future, those actions continue their pressure from the past without being resolved, without being integrated, not allowing the consciousness to transfer, integrate its contents in order that the individual can experience that sensation of internal growth of which we have already spoken.

It makes a difference whether one acts in one way or another. There are actions which in themselves give a register of unity. There are actions which give a register of disintegration. If this is studied carefully in the light of what is known as operative and transference procedure, this question of the actions towards the world in respect to the integration of contents and the development of the contents, if all this is studied carefully, then it would be far clearer to everyone. But of course, this question of the circuits is a field for specialists whereas our friend still remains sitting in the middle of the pavement saying to himself, "And what shall I do?"

We register as unitive, as valuable, something which makes us grow and which makes us feel better, something that helps us to improve ourselves. We can also register a valid action when we take to this man sitting on the pavement, who has no internal register, no guide, these very things, in simple words, in simple facts.

That is all for today.

