

## What Does It Mean to be Human

### To be human is to be free

I desire to be free from imposed values and beliefs and free for developing my own values and beliefs. I want to be myself; it is a frustration of my need to be free, my need to be myself, to live only in terms of the expectations of others. I have found that I need to have expectations of my own. I have had to find my own way of teaching rather than imitate someone else's way of teaching. I find even today that I feel the continuing need to examine my teaching and to change in order to be the me that I really want to be, that I really need to be.

### In order to be free, I have to be rational

I can be free only by understanding what I am doing. If I want to reach my goals, I have to find out what are the best means for reaching those goals. But even more so, if I want to have the best goals in life which really let me be the me I want to be, I have to examine many different goals in life. I need to examine both the means I will use and the goals I will seek. If I don't understand my means and my goals, I may make what seem to be choices to reach what I seek; but these choices may be self-defeating. The means used may defeat the goals sought. For example, if a country were to seek to establish a realm of justice and peace by repressing human freedom and participation in government, the result is more likely to be a totalitarian state rather than a constitutional democracy. Another example, if I were to seek to teach my children to love and I never understood their feelings and viewpoints, the result may be that they have difficulty in loving others. I need a good understanding of both the goals and means in order to be free to be myself.

### In order to be rational, I have to be free

Being rational involves a twofold freedom of the mind; first, the mind or self is able to say "No," and secondly, the mind or self is able to say "Yes."

The mind is free to say "No" when I step back from the views that others try to give to me, when I question those views and ask whether the explanations might not be other than they are proposed to me. Skinner has argued that in reality I am still determined by my heredity and past experience even though I feel free when not physically coerced or threatened by punishment. The way in which Skinner states his argument as probable and the way in which he sees the success of behavior modification as confirming his basic assumption of determinism is a reasonable argument from Skinner's viewpoint. However, the ability of the mind to question, to say "No," at least for a while, and to look at various viewpoints suggests that not all behavior should be seen as determined. I don't want to think that Skinner is just trying to condition me into accepting his viewpoint; I want to think that he is appealing to my freedom of mind, asking me to accept only what is the truth. However, when I realize that there do not seem to be pure facts out there in the world but that what the facts or evidences seem to be depends upon the basic assumptions or methods I use with which to examine experience, then the question of freedom and determinism seems insoluble on the basis of "facts." I

understand then that some philosophical questions will not be decidable or knowable by pure reflection. I am going to have to involve myself at some risk in trying out some assumptions and methods in living in my world and in interpreting my experience.

The mind cannot escape from its need to say "Yes" to some assumptions and methods. I would be deceiving myself, Sartre argues, if I were to think that I could live without choosing. In Sartre's terms, existence precedes essence. My choices create both myself and the meaning and value I discover in life. The truths I discover about values will be affected by my choices. For example, my idea about a child as lovable or unlovable is not independent of my choices and emotional attitude. If I choose to think that the child is unlovable, my negative attitude toward the child will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.. The child will react with hostility to my hostility, only confirming what I have chosen to create unwittingly. As is well known, infants who suffer deprivation of positive parental attitudes have died in orphanages because of the lack of loving touch. Even the intelligence and achievements of the child can be affected in a significant way by the teacher's assumptions about the child. Some experiments in psychology have told teachers that certain children who were not gifted were gifted. By the end of the year the children were achieving like gifted children.

The important truths about human relationships and about life in general must be created; I cannot remain a pure knower, making no choices, and hope to discover the role of love in human life. I can only know the true potentialities of my life and of other humans by a positive, open, (Rogerian) acceptant attitude. Only by love, by saying yes can important truths be created and thereby discovered.

Therefore, being rational and free is fulfilled in loving self and others I see the very process of doing philosophy as an act of love. I seek to understand myself, and I find that my self-understanding is enriched by attempting to understand the experiences and viewpoints of others. In order to understand others, I have to set aside my own prejudices and assumptions and see life from the assumptions of others. Entering into reasonable discourse with others is a way of loving both myself and others, for such discourse lets us both develop our abilities. In saying "No" at least for a while to my own prejudices, I find that I become more the self I want to be; for I become more understanding. I realize the complexity of experience and perhaps even the need for more than one view to interpret human life.

In saying "Yes" to my own potentialities and to that of others, I discover that some values are created by human love and are knowable only in the light of love. As Carl Rogers suggests, human life is discovered to be a creative process, a self-transcending process, through love. For the development of mutual relationships of understanding and acceptance encourages people to be more self-confident, self-directing, more imaginative and open to novelty, more trusting and experimental, thereby letting the self become in undreamt of ways.

Since being rational and free is fulfilled through love, to be human is to make a moral commitment to an all-embracing human community, a community of creative intelligence and creative

freedom.

As Marx has argued that self-awareness develops through speech and social relationships in which the self looks upon itself from the social group of which it is a part, so also I have argued that self-awareness is enriched through social relationships that are based on Roger's concept of love. As Marx has argued that human freedom and individuality is achieved in a dialectical relation with society, so also I have argued that the choice of the self and of others to establish a relationship of love is a choice that comes back to the self and enriches the self and others, making continual development of self and others possible. (Of course, Marx has attempted to analyze the disastrous consequences in social and self relationships when economic and political relationships are humanly degrading and alienating.) The paradox of life to me is that I can only be the self I am meant to be by the very nature of rationality and freedom by living in commitment to an all-embracing community of love and justice. I can only be myself by losing myself, the dialectical mystery of self-development.

In the course, I have suggested several ways of expressing and developing the moral commitment required in the process of becoming human. Both Sartre and Kant have argued that human freedom and consciousness can only reasonably and consistently choose to value the freedom and consciousness of every rational being. Kant's formulation of the basic moral imperative is clear: So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or that of any other, in every case as an end, never as means only. In treating others as valuable in themselves, I am willing to universalize my guidelines. I am willing that others may do to me as valuable for my own sake as I would do unto them as valuable for their own sake. I act morally in so far as the maxim of my act were by my will to become a universal law of human nature. Of course, I don't want to ignore the complexity and individuality of our personal experience with some naive morality which never went beyond abstract guidelines.

To solve this need to be fully cognizant of my situation, I can use either Aristotle's and Mill's prudential morality or Fletcher's situation ethics(i.e., act-utilitarianism)

Virtue for Aristotle is the habit of acting according to the mean, not too much and not too little, relative to the individual as the wise person would decide. Virtuous action involves a mean, because too much or too little tends to put an imbalance in the growth of intelligence, freedom, love, and emotions. The harmonious fulfillment of basic human abilities requires a balance. There can be too much philosophy, too much religion, too much exercise, too much emotionality, too much courage, too much law, too much morality, too much playfulness, too much sunshine, too much of any human good. The virtuous is what the virtuous person would decide. Very much like a contemporary existential philosopher, Aristotle insists that morally good actions need to be created to fit the individual and his situation.

There is little difference between Aristotle's prudential morality and Fletcher's situation ethics, except for certain possible crisis situations in life. Aristotle and Kant argue that there are certain kinds of acts such as the torture of a child

that a wise, loving person would never do since it would be a direct attack upon human dignity. They argue that morality cannot be placed on a quantitative basis whereby we torture one to save many. Fletcher's affirmation that love is required and that no act is right or wrong apart from a person's loving intention simply cannot do justice to the matter of torture. For the consequences of the act must be reckoned with; not just any act can be loving. Human beings have dignity, whether one human is involved or many. Like Socrates, Aristotle and Kant affirm there are certain values for which we must die rather than compromise.

Fletcher would also die for the value of love, his only absolute, just as Kant and Aristotle would. I believe that Fletcher would refuse to torture even if torturing were to save many. However, I have argued that Fletcher's theory would not adequately explain why torture must be refused. Nevertheless, Fletcher argues against a naive legalism. He argues that we cannot have two absolute values such as truth and love. Although 99% of the time, we can do one thing which is both loving and truthful, there may come a time when to be truthful is to be unloving. For example, if I tell the truth on the witness stand, my testimony may be the connecting link in a chain of circumstantial evidence which sentences my friend to jail. But if I say the loving thing, then I would have to lie under oath.

In response to such a problem, Kant and Aristotle could argue that one truthful testimony is not a direct act of hatred against one's friend. If one were to tell the truth with a motive of hatred, one would be doing the right thing but with a bad motive. The commitment of every person in society simply requires that due process of law be honored without exception and that truthful testimony be given under oath. There are avenues of appeal in the courts, pardon from the governor, and even value in suffering although innocent. Vanzetti, condemned to death four decades ago, with his friend Cacco, for a crime they did not commit, is quoted as saying:

If it had not been for these things, I might have lived out my life talking at street corners to scorning men. I might have died, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life could we hope to such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man as now we do by accident. Our words--our lives--our pains--nothing! The taking of our lives--the lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler --all! That last moment belongs to us--that agony is our triumph.

Burt's comment is that "by accepting an unjust death for himself, in compassionate concern for justice to others, he realized a positive and hopeful meaning in the ordeal that had fallen to his lot; and through that realization what otherwise would have been a futile agony became a redeeming triumph." (In Search of Philosophic Understanding, p. 102) Should some friend of Vanzetti have perjured himself in order to release Vanzetti, would Vanzetti have grown in love and understanding of himself. The following of firm values, with little or no exceptions, but with wise application of those values to each concrete situation, is a way of life which calls the self to maturity. The paradox of life is that the self loves itself only in unselfish love of others, of the community as a whole and of each person as valuable for that person's own sake.

## "Love, Creation, and Reality"

From

Edwin A. Burt, *In Search of Philosophic Understanding*

Let us return now to our main theme and draw these varied threads together. One who seeks to know another person is thereby interacting with him, and every interaction has its characteristic effects on the one who is known. Being the process that it is, causal action and the quest for understanding are intrinsically bound together in it. If the seeker for knowledge exemplifies a positive response to the other's presence, the causal action and the quest for understanding are in harmony with each other; action is eliciting the emergence of the self to be known. If he exemplifies a negative response, they are in conflict; action is obstructing the emergence of the full self to be known.

Do we need to avoid any longer the appropriate word for what has been called the positive response" to another person? Thus far it has seemed wise to avoid it because of its deep-rooted and pervasive popular connotations. When the question is asked, what love is, people naturally think of the watchful concern of a parent for children, or of the romantic attachment between man and woman, or of the mutual affection of two friends; these are prominent ways in which the affinity of a person with other persons reveals itself. Because of the strong influence of such associations, one is tempted to speak instead of sensitivity," or "openness to others, or "responsiveness," as we have been doing. Each these has its advantages, but each has its limitations too. I believe that the wise strategy is to clarify the word "love" and then use it freely, rather than surrender it to vague and confused thinking.

The crucial reason for believing so stands out clearly when we examine these popular connotations and realize that to identify love with sentimental or romantic attachment is run the risk of violating the true meaning of the word instead of being faithful to it. Such an identification encourages the assumption that something is essential to love that is not essential--something that may even be incompatible with its true nature. Those emotions can be present when respect for the beloved is lacking. And they almost always harbor exclusiveness and dependence: exclusiveness by being an attachment to person as against others; dependence by expecting a requite for one's devotion as the price for continuing to feel it. But is love truly such if it can only be felt toward one person by hating others, or by threatening to hate him too if he does not respond as the lover demands? Is it not evident that need a sounder conception, which will include these familiar forms of love but will give them their proper place in a wiser and more reliable perspective?

We look then for the primary meaning. May it not be this. Love is freedom from self-centeredness, and hence from demands and limitations that self-centeredness involves. Insofar as a person is not thus free, what he calls love is likely be partly or wholly something else--an eagerness for approval, a desire for comforting gratification, or an urge to control another person to make him serve one's needs. So long as he is thus free, his liberated feeling for others will flow in every direction and ask no recompense for its outreach. How else could that freedom reveal itself? To be sure, it must begin with much less than a universal outreach; a child needs an intimate few to enfold in feeling and by whom to be enfolded. But if it is love that is taking root in him, it has the seed of unlimited expansion. If this is so, then exclusiveness and dependence have disappeared; it becomes clear that love by its very nature embraces all men. Such an insight does not conflict with the patent truth that love does show a deeper tenderness and a more constant thoughtfulness toward those who are bound to us by special ties or friendship than toward others.

In its true meaning, love is then just what we have described as free and open responsiveness. And this identity becomes more obvious when we examine a perplexity that might be suggested by the all embracing character of love. A keen thinker can get entangled in it if he takes for granted the tempting presupposition that loving a person means helping him achieve his present ends. Reasoning thus, he is likely to ask: Since one who loves universally is responsible to the values that any other person seeks to realize, will he not be hamstrung when he finds it necessary to support one in preference to another? Will he not love the man who is acting unjustly as well as the man who is treated unjustly? How can he take sides, resisting the former and aiding the latter? But this weird paralysis could appear only if love were stupid--and of much sentimental and romantic attachment this is doubtless the case. However, if we think of love as involving by its very nature an outreaching sensitivity, this quandary disappears completely. Love has its inherent implications for the guidance of action, and the completed support of the person loved is not necessarily implied. In the presence of exploitation he will act in such a way as to induce the perpetrator of injustice to become aware of what he is doing. To love is thus to seek wisely "the common good" indeed it may be that this concept, so indispensable in legal and political thought, gains its meaning through the existence and intrinsic universality of love. A common good can hardly arise except where concern for the well-being of every person in the community is effectively present.

In short, these varied considerations point toward the conclusion that love for a person and openness to all his actualities are one and the same thing. And in virtue of this openness love is intrinsically universal; it will express itself in respect for and responsiveness to every person in whatever situation he may be. True knowledge of men and love of men cannot then be separated; neither is possible without the other.

Looking back in the light of this identity, it now appears that love was really contained in the meaning of several concepts that have proved indispensable.

For example, the objectivity sought by the scientist reveals his insistence that any acceptable result of his work must be capable of verification by other competent inquirers; and without sensitivity to the experience of others and to standards generally approved in his field, how could such a result be intelligently sought? Another example is agreement between investigators, which became more and more influential in the course of history as a criterion of truth. The very word "love" implies that a quest for mutual understanding through openness to each other's experience has been going on and that often achieves its goal. A free responsiveness is even more obviously involved in the basic condition of successful communication, which is necessary to the gaining and speaking of truth. Only when such responsiveness to the state of mind of the person communicated to is present, can one speak the truth--that is, make an assertion to him that will reliably guide his wise adjustment to the realities which are being discussed. Telling the truth, in short, is one of the ways in which love is expressed; and we well know that when love is absent, words can and will be used to deceive. But the most vivid illustration of this intrinsic bond appears if we turn to the distinctive kind of communication called demonstration, and especially to the form of demonstration that fills a primary role in relation to all other forms. When in the presence disagreement on fundamental values, one person takes the initiative in building a bridge of communication to another person, he is revealing the freest and most positive that can be revealed in any human situation.

In the light of these instructive links between love and various concepts through which the meaning of truth and knowledge is clarified, we can fully appreciate what Bertrand Russell meant when he wrote: "The impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same quality of mind which in action is justice and in emotion is that universal love that can be given to all."

If this outcome still seems strange, perhaps the further step needed is to note that the principles which have emerged essential to true knowledge of persons are essential to the knowledge of everything. Just as the negative emotions of fear, hate, suspicion, and indifference block the way to understanding a human being, so they block the way to any form of understanding.

Observe first how one's attitude toward another person inevitably affects one's power to comprehend anything when in that person's company. Watch two congenial people conversing about matters of mutual concern. Each is open to learn from the other's experience and judgment. Watch two who disdain one another. Each is alert for some warrant and reject; instead of reaching out toward the larger truth that might be gained, his mind is imprisoning itself more tightly in its narrow opinion.

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