Reason over Passion: The Social Basis of Evaluation and Appraisal.

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about the importance of mediation, but we never see it in practice. A discussion that derives its norms almost exclusively from Catholic views of human nature and human reason is no more satisfying than Protestant theological positivism that appeals immediately to the will of God. The essays in *Doing Evil to Achieve Good* cover far less ground than Curran attempts to traverse in *Tradition and Transition in Moral Theology*, but they permit us to see normative ethics in the making. Curran's essays simply assure us that somewhere such things are happening.

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Simpson, Evan. *Reason over Passion: The Social Basis of Evaluation and Appraisal.* Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979. Pp. xi + 162. $7.50.

"Reason is not passion's slave." The opening words of Simpson's book challenge Hume's account of reason as a tool that enables us to satisfy our wants and desires but is powerless to redirect them except on the basis of another desire. Scores of philosophers have tried to frame a convincing refutation of Hume's position. The appearance of Simpson's book is evidence that none of these attempts has been widely accepted as successfully rebutting Hume. Unfortunately Simpson has not succeeded where others have failed.

Though *Reason over Passion* is not a long book, the first hundred pages are heavy going. They consist of detailed analyses of "Attitudes," "Evaluation," and "Characterization." This may be necessary preparation for what is to come, but the drift of the argument is hard to catch—without Simpson's helpful introductory outline I might have missed it altogether—and the book's uninspired prose does nothing to assist the reader's concentration.

Simpson's position may best be situated by placing it between the cultural relativism of Richard Norman's *Reasons for Action* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971) and the ethical naturalism once espoused by Philippa Foot. Like Norman, Simpson claims that the rationality of action should be seen as a social, rather than an individual, matter. Norman's own position was reminiscent of the relativism urged by Peter Winch in "Understanding a Primitive Society" (in *Rationality*, ed. Bryan Wilson [New York: Harper & Row, 1971]), and this association applies to Simpson's book too, as can be seen from his discussion of the rationality of witchcraft, which concludes: "A conception of the reality of witches is as immune to scientific attack as science is to witchcraft" (p. 117). Where Simpson parts company with Winch and Norman is in asserting that "cultural facts" are not conventional.

A "cultural fact" is, in Simpson's terminology, a characterization which is socially constituted, but not constituted by conventionally accepted rules. Thus, "John promised to pay Mary $5" is, in Simpson's terminology, an "institutional fact" but not a "cultural fact." Institutional facts can be rejected by individuals, and so Simpson does not accept John Searle's well-known argument against the "is-ought" gap. That John was cruel to Mary, on the other hand, Simpson thinks can be a cultural fact. These cultural facts are subject to rational appraisal on the basis of facts about human nature and social relationships. This is what makes Simpson's position look more like a form of naturalism; but Simpson steers away from this too, saying that while describable facts may give reasons for condemning actions, they do not give decisive reasons. Simpson refers to his own position

as a form of "non-naturalism," although this label will surely confuse those who associate it with the intuitionism of G. E. Moore and W. D. Ross.

If all this seems confusing, it is. For me, at least, the fog lifted only when, with the number of pages remaining fast dwindling, Simpson stated: "According to the account of appraisal developed here, there is reason for [respect for persons] if human beings are in fact respectable, and it behooves a defender of appraisal to determine whether or not any such fact exists" (p. 133). By "respectable" Simpson means, of course, worthy of respect. He regards respect-worthiness as a fact about people which is or is not the case. It is not, therefore, simply a nonrational attitude we have which leads us to respect or not to respect certain kinds of beings. Simpson contends that human beings are worthy of respect by asserting that there are no relevant grounds for saying that the interests of certain persons are inherently inferior to those of others. He thus claims that something very like the moral principle of equal consideration of interests is based on facts about human beings (and, he adds, other beings with interests).

There is much here that jars with deep-seated ideas about what is and is not a "fact." It may be that in calling this kind of thing a "fact," Simpson is stretching the word beyond its standard usage. Nevertheless, there is a good deal that can be said in defense of the claim that the principle of equal consideration of interests rests on an objectively rational footing. (Simpson himself does little to make out this case; Thomas Nagel did much more in *The Possibility of Altruism* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970].) But Simpson never squarely addresses the crucial issue from which Hume's thesis derives its formidable strength: if a person is not concerned about whether someone is or is not objectively worthy of respect, what can reason do about it? If people are more interested in securing their own happiness than they are in doing what they might do if they were to decide from some objective, purely impartial stance, they do not seem to be making any error or mistake. How then can they be convicted of irrationality?

Readers of Henry Sidgwick will recognize this question as the one which that extraordinarily careful and acute thinker confessed himself, at the conclusion of *The Methods of Ethics*, still unable to resolve. If the egoist is prepared to concern himself with what is objectively good, Sidgwick thought, a method of argument exists which would lead the egoist to a conclusion (very like Simpson's) that we should give equal weight to the like interests of all sentient beings. But the egoist can avoid this conclusion, Sidgwick says, by restricting his concern to what is good *for him*; and since, Sidgwick admits, it is contrary to common sense to deny that it is rational to have greater concern for one's own interests than for the interests of others, there seems to be nothing reason can do to budge the egoist from this stance.

On this Simpson has nothing to say. He claims that because morality is based on beliefs and we are not free to choose our own beliefs, so morality is not a matter of choice (p. 126). Perhaps then he would say that the egoist is not acting morally. If so, the obvious retort for the egoist to make is: "If that is how you define morality, you have still to show me why it is rational for me to care about morality." And that Simpson does not do, except perhaps insofar as he claims that what is "rational" is not for the individual to decide, but a social fact. That answer, however, will not convince an independently minded egoist.

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