ON THE IMPOTENCE OF UNNATURAL VALUES

by May Leavenworth

I must commend Professor Wall's paper (pp. 268–73 above) for his valiant attempt to keep alive "the specter of Hume." He writes: "Hume's point about the distinction between the 'is' and the 'ought' is essentially a point about deductive logic—the conclusion of a valid argument may not contain terms which are not at least implicit in the premises. I do not see how Hume's conception of valid deductive reasoning can be faulted" (p. 268). Frankly, I do not see how this "conception of valid deductive reasoning" can be faulted either. But since I am not trying to get terms in the conclusion of a deductive argument that were not at least implicit in the premises, my arguments cannot be faulted either by raising this specter.

Fact and Value: An Artificial Bifurcation

What I am trying to do is to eliminate the artificial, sharp bifurcation made by antinaturalist philosophers between factual or descriptive discourse (statements about what *is* the case) and evaluative or prescriptive discourse (statements about what *ought* to be). It is the presupposition that all "is's" are value free or norm free that has made the "no ought from is" program such a hard nut to crack. As I pointed out in my article, "On Integrating Fact and Value,"[1] if one accepts the premises of the antinaturalists, one must accept their conclusions. However, if there are "is's" that are *not* value free or norm free—that is, if there are statements in our language that are both factual and evaluative—they may serve as factual premises (in which the evaluative element is implicit) in a deductive argument leading to evaluative conclusions, without committing any logical fallacy. And since these premises will be factual, they may be established by empirical science.

I think that statements about human desires and aversions would be simple examples of the kind of statement that integrates facts and values. If I say that I dislike *x*, this psychological fact about me is not value free. This is a point which I think Wall would readily accept, since he has said that he accepts the viewpoint "that value-disvalue is to be understood in terms of desire-aversion" (p. 269).

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By accepting such a conception of value, Professor Hall is rejecting the sharp fact-value bifurcation. But if he does this, why does he still feel obliged to introduce, by definition, underived normative principles (or moral judgments) *that are fact free* in order to bring in the necessary normative premises from which to derive normative conclusions? In his definition he says that these normative premises "would not be derived from another moral judgment (or judgments), or another moral judgment (or judgments) *in conjunction with a factual judgment*" (p. 272; my italics). My question is, Why shouldn't certain factual judgments, which are also evaluative, such as those about human desires (values) and human survival, be used in arriving at these normative principles?

Wall would probably answer this question by pointing out that not all values are equally acceptable. Some means of selecting between them is necessary. "The question is whether a strictly factual survey of man's evaluations provides for the selection of this means" (p. 28). Just because something is desired (valued) does not mean that it ought to be valued. A decision theory is necessary for deciding not just which values are held but which ought to be held.

Wall introduces UNJ (a definition of underived normative moral judgments) as the basis for making such decisions. Supposedly, once we have these underived principles, their application to particular situations should be no problem. But how do we ascertain these first principles? Wall tells us in his definition of them that they should be of such a nature that they could be agreed upon "after careful reflection by any person in a normal state of mind, who was sufficiently informed and capable of logical reasoning" (p. 273). But I am puzzled as to why Wall stipulates that these qualified evaluators must be "sufficiently informed." According to him, normative judgments are not to be derived from factual judgments—not even facts that incorporate values, such as facts about human needs and desires. Why, then, does Wall think an evaluator must be well informed? What does he think is the role of factual information in determining underived moral judgments? And if such information plays no role, then why must qualified evaluators be sufficiently informed?

Wall's ambiguity here seems to be the result of his assumption that, in order not to fault Hume's point about deductive logic, he must have normative principles that are fact free from which to derive normative conclusions. He assumes the sharp bifurcation between "is" and "ought," an assumption which I find artificial and unnecessary. My conception of norms must, therefore, be that norms are both factual

and normative and so provide factual, normative premises for arguments leading to normative conclusions without breaking the rules of logic.

These norms, of course, must provide the means for selecting between particular values. I might note in passing that Wall has not really provided any such means, for merely to say that the norms must be chosen by qualified people does not suggest any means to be employed by these people in deciding. If I do not happen to be one of the evaluating aristocracy, then my deciding what moral principles I ought to obey is a simple factual matter, as Wall says—I just ask whether the aristocracy approves. But if I do happen to be one of the qualified evaluators, what assistance has Wall given me in deciding? None.

Naturalistic Ethic: A Means for the Selection of Values

In contrast with Wall's proposal for selecting norms, I think a naturalistic ethic such as I have been advocating does provide means for selection, as I shall attempt to show. But first I want to make clear that, in presenting my naturalistic account of evaluating in my article, I was not trying to provide a supreme normative principle. Contrary to Wall's interpretation, I was not saying that, in evaluating, a person ought to "meet as many requirements as possible in a situation." The purpose of my paper was not to give any particular harm at all but only to remove certain metaphysical barriers to the use of science in ethics. I stated this quite explicitly in my essay.[2] I was giving a naturalistic account of evaluating, the purpose of which was to show how the empirical sciences may be useful in choosing values. I will develop the theme of norms more in this answer to Wall, but in the essay Wall is criticizing this was not my main interest.

I might mention at this time that I think John Rawl's rule utilitarianism has been helpful in resolving some of the differences mentioned by Wall between utilitarian and nonutilitarian theories.[3] This is an approach compatible with a naturalistic ethic.

To return now to the question of how my naturalist description of evaluating could provide a means for selecting norms, I shall draw upon certain enlightening distinctions made by Stephen C. Pepper in his article, "Survival Value." As I pointed out earlier, my norms must reject the sharp bifurcation of "is" and "ought." For example, I would not make the assumption that all facts must be value free, which seems to have been the presupposition of the erroneous interpretation of Darwin, discussed by Pepper, which drained "the term 'fittest' completely of value significance."[4] In contrast with such an artificial bifur-

cation of fact and value, I would agree with Pepper that certain facts, such as the fact that certain behavior patterns adapt man to survival, are not value free. This fact provides the basis for what Pepper calls the "adaptive selection system," which has as its values the social security and survival of the species and is to be distinguished from the purposive selective systems which have individual satisfactions as values.

In my search for a factual means for selecting norms for choosing between values I would look to something like Pepper's adaptive selection systems. Those moral principles that provide for the selection of individual values which contribute to the security and survival of the cultural species (nations or other social groups sharing certain cultural values) and ultimately the biological species (*Homo sapiens*) are to be chosen over principles that would detract from these goals. And the question of which principles are best becomes an empirical matter.

Wall claims that a number of different principles would equally achieve survival. I question whether this would be true of all those mentioned by him, particularly ethical egoism; but at any rate the answer would be an empirical matter, to be decided by biological, psychological, and sociological studies, which is the point I want to establish.

Of course survival is not the only consideration. Individual satisfactions are not to be devalued. As Pepper points out, "questions arise only when different purposes with different ends converge, and particularly when these purposes and their diverse ends are held by different persons."[5] As long as no clashes occur, there is no need to rate values. Why should we have to rate the mystic's value of mystic experience as better or worse than anyone else's highest value? Where no clashes occur, each individual may have his own hierarchy of values. Of course, as Pepper has pointed out, individual needs and desires have themselves been selected through evolution for their survival value. Therefore it would seem that a good deal of satisfaction of needs and desires would be perfectly compatible with survival.[6] I might add that even the capacity for mystic experience discussed by Wall may have been selected through both biological and cultural evolution, so even that may have survival value. The mystic certainly wants to survive long enough to achieve his mystic experience. He does not want to be killed prematurely by war or disease or any other such catastrophe.

In conclusion, I wish to stress that my goal has been to show that the sharp bifurcations of fact and value, is and ought, are untenable and have set up artificial barriers to the use of science in ethics. And if Wall still wants to ask, "But ought we to attempt to achieve survival

(as well as satisfaction of desires)?" he is simply assuming what I have called the "theory of the alienated self," that is, a self outside the natural chain of causes and effects, and which may be compared with Russell's "free man" shaking his fist at matter as it rolls on its relentless way. Such an alienated self with the alienated values it may propose as alternatives to those of natural human needs and desires, including survival, would simply have no power to achieve its artificial values.

NOTES

1. *Zygon* 4 (1969):38–39.
2. Ibid., p. 40.
3. See his "Two Concepts of Rules," *Philosophical Review* 64 (1955):3–32.
4. Stephen C. Pepper, "Survival Value," *Zygon* 4 (1969):4.
5. Ibid., p. 7.
6. For an interesting discussion of the differences and relations between needs and desires or values, see Abraham Edel, *Ethical Judgment* (New York: Free Press, 1955), pp. 167–75.