Now it does seem to me that Norman does trade on this "rationalist" view, in his discussion of Tolstoy. For he does say 'Andrew's 'discovery' is in each case the acquisition of an enlarged and clearer view of human nature and of the relation of the world' (p.8)

But, can Norman say this? Can he go beyond the relation of Andrew himself? Would not the young Andrew think these latter sorts of ideas ridiculous? How can he be said to have (really) progressed?

MORAL OUTLOOKS AND SPECIFIC BELIEFS

So, it seems to me, the seeing-as analogies do not lend independent support to the central thesis. All the weight, then, falls on the specific discussion of moral views and 'basic orientations'. Here several problems arise many of which will only be noted.

(a) Split-consciousness

As philosopher, the Norwegianian pluralist, looking down from the meta-world, sees that there is no validity in the claim of any moral outlook to be "correct" - there are many "equally valid" outlooks. As a being-in-the-world, however, as say, Marxist humanist, he attacks and criticises religious views as repressive, even as superstitious. (This is recognised but not resolved on p.7)

(b) Truth

If truth is not a property of any "basic orientation" it is difficult to see how it can be a property of any belief, given that this belief only makes sense in terms of the "basic orientation". Is not Norman committed to a "true for us - false for them" idea all down the line?

(c) Hypostatization

It seems to me that Norman tends to hypostatise world-views. This is strange since the chief point and virtue of the article is to show how we cannot abstract particular moral propositions for "assessment" without examining their ideological location. But, rather than speaking in terms of a more or less systematic structure of beliefs he speaks of a "world-view" behind all beliefs "giving rise to them", "making them intelligible" etc.

This seems to me to connect with the idea that world-views are beyond rational criticism. The suggestion is that if we could "understand" another world-view, (whatever that might amount to) while we might not "adopt" it, we would see its validity to be equal to our own.

But if we think in terms of more or less fundamental "theoretical" beliefs so that, for example, the more fundamental beliefs "define the terms" of the less fundamental, then although we needn't have the simplistic idea of general beliefs transparently entailing concrete judgements we are able to see how it can be a property of any belief, given that this belief only makes sense in terms of the "basic orientation". Is not Norman committed to a "true for us - false for them" idea all down the line?

Phenomenology and Phenomenalism

Despite the welcome and in the context of academic moral philosophy unusual concern to treat concrete phenomena seriously there is I think a certain lack of seriousness about Norman's approach, a lack common to all "phenomenological" writing.

Norman tends to leave things at the phenomenal or ideological level - take each consciousness (save the critical consciousness) at its face value, noting that other consciousnesses exist too. The enquiry is not pushed to the level where we can speak of ideology, of false consciousness.

Radical writers of a phenomenological persuasion e.g. R.D. Laing have pointed out the stupid incomprehension of straight society in regard to madness. Their writings have tended to be concerned (different terms - real "realities" or world views). It seems to me that these terms obscure the main lesson of Laing's work: that whole dimensions of experience are repressed in "ordinary" bourgeois life - and are real lacks; that mental illness has to be taken seriously to be understood.

Similarly it seems to me that, a real attempt to understand divergent outlooks often imposes real shortcomings in our own lives but this sort of "self-criticism" would not be possible if it were not also possible to criticize other outlooks. Ice picks could not cut thin ice if ice picks could not cut thick ice.

Exams and Academic Illiteracy

Sean Sayers

I have just finished marking exams. I was struck by the illiteracy of the answers, and so was my co-examiner. This illiteracy is not confined to bad spelling or grammar, or even to the lack of structure in sentences or whole essays. It is a deeper sort of illiteracy: an illiteracy of thought. It seems that this is a new feature of exam answers; it seems that year after year examiners are faced with scripts in which it looks as if students are struggling to express ideas which they do not understand in a language they cannot use. Why is this?

There has been surprisingly little thought about this important question. The most common response among teachers is to blame the student: 'They are illiterate, they should...'

This sort of answer may successfully insulate the teacher from any self-doubt and confirm all his prejudices. It explains nothing. I am amazed at the complacency with which teachers regard the exams simply as confirming their intellectual superiority over the students. It is high time we had to re-examine standards and discipline.

Why is it that exam answers are so illiterate? Is it because students read nothing but the Daily Mirror? Of course it isn't. The illiteracy of the answers is not that of the Daily Mirror, but that of academic journals (in comparison with which the Daily Mirror is lively and well written). Is it because standards are not strict enough? No it is not; for it is these standards themselves which produce the illiteracy.
From reading the scripts it is clear that this illiteracy is due to the absence of any interest or involvement by the students in what they are writing. Sometimes this may be attributable to the personalities and habits of individual students, but it is so pervasive a phenomenon that one must seek its cause in the educational system itself. Here two factors are at work: education is authoritarian and exam-oriented; and the content of higher education at present is academic and irrelevant to life.

In an authoritarian, exam-dominated educational system, students write, not because they need to express themselves and their ideas, but because writing is demanded of them. Furthermore, and particularly in the actual exam, they are not encouraged to express what they think, but rather what they think their teachers think they ought to think. Of course this is going to be true to some extent in any educational system; but at present, in Britain at least, there is a wide and increasing demand for students to write what their teachers think they ought to think. This sort of anti-intellectualism is a very worrying phenomenon in a University, and it cannot be understood in terms of the laziness and ferocity of students. On the other hand, it becomes intelligible when seen as a response to the bankruptcy of contemporary academic intellectual life. For academic intellectual life is usually uninteresting and futile, and students are right to distrust 'sciences' which work blindly, but not intellectually.

Professors and teachers are often interested in the students; but this is not true of their students. They are taught. As a result many students in the universities come to feel that the world is a completely separate and detached world of a field pointing at the moon would be at logical risk in the exam. It is at the root of the illiteracy of the exams. No one, not even the best writer, can write well when what he is writing has no meaning for him: his style disintegrates, his lucidity of expression dries up, he becomes 'illiterate'.

In my experience, many students today come to feel that academic thought forms a completely separate and detached world of its own which has nothing to do with real life as they experience it. They trust feeling more than thought or 'logic'; they distrust 'science', which has been elevated by the academic to become the new objective source of knowledge. This sort of anti-intellectualism is a very worrying phenomenon in a University, and it cannot be understood in terms of the laziness and ferocity of students. On the other hand, it becomes intelligible when seen as a response to the bankruptcy of contemporary academic intellectual life. For academic intellectual life is usually uninteresting and futile, and students are right to distrust 'sciences' which work blindly, but not intellectually.

Students today are not often turned on by the ideas which they have no real faith in thought; and the student be anything but anti-intellectual if this is the only sort of intellectuality he has known?

The illiteracy revealed in the exams is, then, partly the product of the exam system itself. Reform of the exam system is essential in itself, but it is important to realize that exam serve education rather than education serving exams. In thinking about the exam system one must therefore look beyond the actual exam itself, and see its wider effects on the whole educational process. For in an exam-dominated educational system learning is inevitably fragmented into question-sized chunks and disintegrated in favour of snappy and memorable formulae.

Lewis is articulate about this: 'The academic authorities believing in such a system will tend to take as their first-class man a type that may be described as the complete walking cliché - the man who churns out with such confident and accomplished ease in the examination-room because he has never really grappled with anything, and is unwilling to think or to learn. This sort of anti-intellectualism is a very worrying phenomenon in a University, and it cannot be understood in terms of the laziness and ferocity of students. On the other hand, it becomes intelligible when seen as a response to the bankruptcy of contemporary academic intellectual life. For academic intellectual life is usually uninteresting and futile, and students are right to distrust 'sciences' which work blindly, but not intellectually.

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This is clearly too large a topic to pursue at any length here. The therapy that philosophising needs is a long, a long time and another, in one place or another, have to say about the world. But he does have a lot to say about what other chaps, at one time and another, have to say about the world. In a way, then, the Philosopher has a lot, though indirectly, circumlocutiously, as it were, to say, though, in another sense, he has nothing to say. This is a paradox.

It is striking, although usually unnoticed, that the best sort of statements made about the world are factual statements - true empirical statements (statements are sometimes incorrectly, and foolishly, called 'judgements'). This causes only confusion, since in the statement 'in the flash he'd reached his judgment' we could not substitute the word 'statement' without some sort of ludicrous absurdity, since it does not reach a conclusion in quite the same way one does a plate in a cupboard or the end of one's tether. But this is a digression from my central trajectory, and a story for another article.

As stated above, then, the best things said about the world are of a factual kind. This is as a logical ice this will cut with the reader will make no difference; the world is too much with us late and soon'. Now apart from the self-contradiction in this latter statement the question we must first ask is: what are we to make of it? There are in this country clearly worked out procedures available for determining the presence or absence of a chair in my room, at least in the normal case, but in statements like 'in the flash he'd reached his judgment' we could not substitute the word 'statement' without some sort of ludicrous absurdity, since it does not reach a conclusion in quite the same way one does a plate in a cupboard or the end of one's tether. But this is a digression from my central trajectory, and a story for another article.

But is this not a strange paradox? A statement about a chair gets high marks from the Philosopher as a statement about the world while the poet's statement (perhaps this is misnomer), getting very low marks indeed from the Philosopher, In the one whose grammatical subject is 'the world'. Moreover this is utterly typical. Statements grammatically about chairs are good, solid, so to speak four legged statements about the world. But he does have a lot to say about what other chaps, at one time and another, have to say about the world. In a way, then, the Philosopher has a lot, though indirectly, circumlocutiously, as it were, to say, though, in another sense, he has nothing to say. This is a paradox.

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Strikingly, although my chair is in Canterbury, and in Britain, one would normally dream of saying that the statement 'this chair is in this room' is a statement about the world, while statements grammatically about chairs are good, solid, so to speak four legged statements about the world. But he does have a lot to say about what other chaps, at one time and another, have to say about the world. In a way, then, the Philosopher has a lot, though indirectly, circumlocutiously, as it were, to say, though, in another sense, he has nothing to say. This is a paradox.

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Philosophers hitherto have interpreted "the world" in various ways. The point however, is to forget it.