

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 man's relation to the world" (p.9)

But, can Norman say this? Can he go beyond the impression of Andrew himself? Would not the young Andrew think these later sort 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 Normanian 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 criticizes 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 of any "specific" moral 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 rational assessment say of Schopenhauer's death - philosophy is possible - however tortuous and many layered it might be. This after all is the idea of a critique.

Thus, I want to argue, the "religious attitude" can be examined - the assumptions and experiences behind the "monkish virtues" rationally assessed. Whether the monk will agree or not is another matter. Nor is there any reason why the "realist" has to look for some mythical "neutral" "sense-datum" as is tendentially suggested in Camus' Outsider. Why should "the facts" be neutral?

There is no reason why there should not be contradictions or at least serious tensions within an outlook, whether it is an "ideal type" or not. Thus for example there is often said to be a tension in Christianity between its "other-worldliness" and its humanism of "the Incarnation". World-views are not abstract "Simples".

Thus it would be a substantial task to evaluate Norman's claims about the "world-views" that he talks about. The issue needs to be settled in practice, through developing and examining serious critiques of religious and other reactionary ideologies.

Objectivism and Experience

It is another question whether if Norman is right about "world-views" he ought to think of his position as "objectivist". In my view the links between "beliefs" and "experiences" are too tenuous in his presentation to allow this. Thus in the Tolstoy example Andrew thinks in terms of "discoveries" but Tolstoy tends to write in terms of non-rational changes. Norman is sensitive to this but gives no indication of how he would distinguish illusions of discovery from real discovery. And Norman stresses that experiences could lead "either way". What, in his view, would be "subjective"?

The role of the Weltanschauung

If experiences are tenuously linked to beliefs, so are "world-views" even though the latter "make sense of" the former.

"The 'way of seeing the world' (the "religious world-view") does not necessitate or entail such moral values as chastity or self-denial (it might equally well lead to an attitude of sheer pessimism and despair".

Are things as tenuous as this? Surely if a "religious" person is convinced that humans cannot be saved, or that God is indifferent to his misery, then he must be in despair. But this pessimism is intelligible surely, in the light of some such articulatable difference between him and an orthodox Christian. And in any case there would be some explanation of this pessimism. Like Christianity, pessimism doesn't hang in mid-air.

Moreover, chastity, discipline (Hobbes, Lenin) pessimism about the flesh (Freud) are not necessarily religious notions; they are intelligible in quite specific terms - the world is full of strange bedfellows. And this brings out the unclarity of the notion of "a world-view". Does the bourgeoisie have a characteristic world-view?

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 couched in relativistic terms (different "realities" or "worlds"). 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 no 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 never have been allowed into University, our standards are not strict enough, anything goes in Universities these days." Further questioning reveals the following 'analysis': 'Students are blowing their minds with drugs and rock music, what else can you expect?'

This sort of answer may successfully insulate the teacher from any self-doubt and confirm all his prejudices, but it explains nothing. I am amazed at the complacency with which teachers regard the exams simply as confirming their intellectual superiority over the students, and how they pontificate about the need to re-assert 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 apparent: the form of 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 divergence between what students think and what their teachers think they ought to think (and thus what students write for their teachers). And it is this divergence which 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 fluency 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 sole source of 'objective' 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 inferior ability 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 in this country is usually irrelevant and futile; students are right to distrust 'sciences' which work blindly, they are right to see as irrelevant 'logic' which is abstracted from real and important thought about the world, and they are right to regard as pointless the games with words which now pass for thought in the Universities. How can the intelligent 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 and it must be undertaken with a view to ensuring that exams 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 education learning is inevitably fragmented into question-sized chunks and distorted in favour of snappy and memorable formulae. Leavis 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 (its often a woman) who unloads with such confident and accomplished ease in the examination-room because he has never really grappled with anything, and is uninhibited by any inkling of the difference between the retelling of his amassed externalities and the effort to think something out into a grasped and unified order that he has made his own. Those who like this type will recruit themselves from it, and will inevitably tend to dislike, and to undervalue as a student, the man who makes them uncomfortable by implicitly challenging their standards, their competence and their self-esteem; the system is disastrous and self-perpetuating. So the 'academic mind' comes to deserve its depressing reputation.'

But the illiteracy I have been talking about is also the product of the academic and irrelevant nature of much that now passes for 'knowledge', and this is perhaps the most important factor. If people are interested and involved in what they are learning, they will continue to learn in spite of the obstacles they encounter. On the other hand, if people are neither interested nor involved learning becomes a hopeless struggle. Students today are not often turned on by the ideas which they are taught. As a result many students in the University today have no real faith in thought; and the University itself, instead of always blaming the students, must take some responsibility for this state of affairs. The first task of education should be to discover how thought can be meaningful and valuable, and to show how thought is necessary to the deepening of experience of the world. But too often, what students are taught and consequently what they write for their teachers and in exams is not what really matters to them or, ultimately, to their teachers. In these circumstances, their real feelings and thoughts have to lead an underground existence where they are weak and easily repressed. 'Learning' is made into work, undertaken without interest or enthusiasm - a meaningless compliance to external discipline. The result is an endemic illiteracy within the Citadel of Learning; and this illiteracy is yearly delivered up in the exams as the consummation of the process of Higher Education.

Philosophy and the World

We are fortunate to be able to present a contribution from a leading analyst who was able to take a few moments off from his task of editing a collection of articles on "Pricks and Ticks".

What has the Philosopher to say about the World? Not much. But he does have a lot to say about what other chaps, at one time and another, in one place or 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 judgement' we could not substitute the word 'statement' without some sort of ludicrous absurdity. Not that one reaches judgements in quite the 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 sort. This is easily perceived if we contrast the statement: 'There is a chair in this room' (this is only one from a large number of equally serviceable examples) with a statement like '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 'the world is too much with us late and soon' this is clearly not so. Grammatically, we have a sentence, whose subject expression is the noun 'the world' and whose predicate expression is 'is too much with us late and soon'. But grammar, as Wittgenstein said, is terribly misleading. We have a grammatically healthy sentence but a logically off-colour statement.

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, is 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, while statements grammatically about the world are very much on the tipsy side. Is this just a contingent state of affairs? Or would an elucidation of the concepts 'chair' and 'world' provide our answer?

This is clearly too large a topic to pursue at any length here. The therapy that philosophising is needs a long time, as Wittgenstein said. There is space for but a few insights.

Strikingly, although my chair is in Canterbury, and in Britain, no one would normally dream of saying that the statement 'this chair is in this room' is a statement about Canterbury or about Britain. Yet one would not ordinarily hesitate to say that it was a statement about the world. Of course what logical ice this will cut with the reader will depend on his view as to whether the chair described as 'a part of Canterbury' is aptly characterizable as such; Only, perhaps in a Tom All-Along sense.

Curiously, whatever line one takes on this (and it must be admitted that all that has been done here has been the opening up and so to speak first tour of a possible avenue of research), one must see that 'this chair is no longer in Canterbury' makes perfect sense (though a chap in the middle of a field pointing at the moon would be at logical risk in uttering it). On the other hand 'this chair is no longer in the world' is no good at all, save as a logically risqué euphemism. What this shows is that it is misleading to use the expression 'the world' as a thing-noun. The world is not, to slip into the vernacular, one great big object contrastable with even conceivable logical, if not magnitudinal peers. Possibly Kant, handicapped by his lack of the tools later developed by linguistic philosophy, was groping for this point.

So the paradox stands: the best way to talk about the world as with so many things is to do so without mentioning it.

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