HUMAN RIGHTS, RATIONALITY, AND SENTIMENTALITY

In a report from Bosnia, David Rieff said, "To the Serbs, the Muslims are no longer human... Muslim prisoners, lying on the ground in rows, awaiting interrogation, were driven over by a Serb guard in a small delivery van." This theme of dehumanization recurred when Rieff said:

A Muslim man in Jasenovac... [was] forced to bite off the penis of a fellow-Muslim... If you say that a man is not human, but the man looks like you and the only way to identify this devil is to make him drop his trousers — Muslim men are circumcised and Serbs are not — it is probably only a short step, psychologically, to cutting off his prick... There has never been a campaign of ethnic cleansing from which sexual sadism has gone missing.

The moral to be drawn from Rieff’s stories is that Serbian murderers and rapists do not think of themselves as violating human rights. For they are not doing these things to fellow human beings, but to Muslims. They are not being inhuman, but rather are discriminating between true humans and pseudo-humans. They are making the same sort of distinction the Crusaders made between humans and infidel dogs, and Black Muslims make between humans and blue-eyed devils. The founder of my university was able both to own slaves and to think it self-evident that all men were endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. This was because he had convinced himself that the consciousness of blacks, like that of animals, "participates more of sensation than of reflection." Like the Serbs, Mr. Jefferson did not think of himself as violating human rights.

2 "Their griefs are transient. Those numbing affections, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are lost, and sooner forgotten..."
Serbs take themselves to be acting in the interest of true humanity by per-
tifying the world of pseudo-humanity. In this respect, their self-image re-
sembles that of moral philosophers who hope to cleanse the world of prejudice and superstition. This cleansing will permit us to rise above our animality by becoming, for the first time, wholly rational and thus wholly hu-
mank. Serbs, moralists, Jefferson, and black Muslims all use the term “men” to mean “people like us.” They all think that the line between humans and animals is not simply the line between featherless bipeds and the rest. Rather, this line divides some featherless bipeds from others: there are am-
imals walking about in humanoid form. And we like those are paradigm cases of humanity, but those too different from us in behavior or custom are, at best, borderline cases. As Clifford Geertz puts it, “Men’s most impor-
tant claims to humanity are the scars of group pride.”

We are here in the same rich democracies feel about Serbian torturers and rapists as they feel about their Muslim victims; they are more like animals than like us. But we are not doing anything to help the Muslim women, who are being gang-raped by the Muslim men who are being castrated, any more than we did anything in the 1960s when the Nazis were amusing themselves by torturing Jews. Here in the safe countries we find ourselves saying things like “That’s how things have always been in the Balkans,” suggesting that, unlike us, those people are used to being raped and castrated. The con-
tempt we always feel for losers—Jews in the 1960s, Muslims now—combined with our disgust at the assassin’s behavior to produce the unconsciously at-
titude: “a fox on both your houses.” We think of Serbs or Nazis as animals, because ravenous beasts of prey are animals. We think of Muslims or Jews being herded into concentration camps as animals, because cattle are ani-
mals. Neither sort of animal is very much like us, and there seems no point in human beings getting involved in quarrels between animals.

The human-animal distinction, however, is only one of three main ways in which we parochialize humanity; distinguishing ourselves from border-
cases. A second is by invoking the distinction between adults and children-
ignorant and superstitious people, we say, are like children; they will retain
humanity only if raised by proper education. If they seem incapable
of such education, that shows that they are not really the same kind of be-
ings as we educable people are. Blacks, the whites in the United States and in South Africa used to say, are like children; that is why it is appropriate to adduce black males, of whatever age, as “boys.” Women, men used to say, are permanently childish; that is why it is appropriate to spend so much money on
their education and to refrain them access to power.

When it comes to women, however, there are simpler ways of excluding them from true humanity: for example, using “man” as a synonym of “hu-
man being.” As feminists have pointed out, such usage exaggerates the aver-
age male’s thankfulness that he was not born a woman, as well as his fear of the ultimate degradation: feminization. The extent and depth of the latter fear are evidenced by the particular sort of sexual sadism Rief describes. His point is that such sadness is never about the fact that women are women but
because the society confirms Catharine MacKinnon’s claim that, for most
men, being a woman does not count as one way of being human. Being a
woman is the third way of being nonhuman.

Philosophers have tried to help straighten out this confusion by specify-
ng what is special about featherless bipeds, explaining what is essential to
being human. Plato suggested that there is a big difference between us and
animals, a difference worthy of respect and cultivation. He thought that hu-
man beings have a special added ingredient that puts them in a different ontological category than beasts. Respect for this ingredient provides a rea-
son for people to be nice to each other. Anti-Platonists like Nietzsche reply
that attempts to get people to stop murdering, raping, and castrating one
other are, in the long run, doomed to failure— for the real truth about human nature is that we are a bundle of different kinds. When contemporary admirers of Plato claim that all featherless bipeds— even the stupid and childlike, even the women, even the sodomized— have the same inalienable rights, admirers of Nietzsche reply that the very idea of “inalienable human rights” is, like the idea of a special added ingredient, a laughingly feeble attempt by the weaker members of the species to fend off the
stronger members. As I see it, one important intellectual advance that has been made in our century is the steady decline in interest in this quarrel between Plato and Nietzsche about what we are really like. There is a growing willingness to neg-
sti the question “What is our nature?” and to substitute the question “What can we make of ourselves?” We are much less inclined than our an-
cestors were to take “theories of human nature” seriously, much less inclined to take ontology or history or sociology as a guide to life. We are much less inclined to pose the ontological question “What are we?” because we have

From "MORAL PROGRESS" by S. James Coleman

"Woman Rights" by S. James Coleman
come to see that the main lesson of both history and anthropology is our extraordinary fallibility. We are coming to think of ourselves as the flexible, reclassifying animal rather than as the rational animal or the cruel animal.

One of the shapes we have recently assumed is that of a human rights culture. I borrow the term "human rights culture" from the Argentinean jurist and philosopher Eduardo Rabois. In an article called "Human Rights Naturalized" Rabois argues that philosophers should think of this culture as a new, welcome face of the post-Holocaust world. Rabois warns them to stop trying to get behind or beneath this fact, stop trying to detect and defend its so-called philosophical prepositions. On Rabois's view, philosophers like Alan Gewirth are wrong to argue that human rights cannot depend upon historical facts. "My basic point," Rabois says, is that "the world has changed, that the human rights phenomenon renders human rights foundationalism unmoved and irrelevant."

Human rights foundationalism is the continuing attempt by quasiphilosophers like positivists to see, at last, a final victory over their opponents. Rabois's claim that this attempt is outmoded seems to me both true and important; it is my principal topic in this essay. I shall enlarge upon, and defend, Rabois's claim that the question of whether human beings are really the rights emphasized in the Helsinki Declaration is not worth raising. In particular, I shall defend the claim that nothing relevant to moral choice separates human beings from animals except historically contingent facts of the world, cultural facts.

This claim is sometimes called "cultural relativism" by those who indignantly reject it. One reason they reject it is that such relativism seems to them incompatible with the fact that our human rights culture is morally superior to other cultures. I quite agree that ours is morally superior, but I do not think that this superiority consists in favor of the existence of a universal human nature. It would only do so if we assumed that a claim of moral superiority entails a claim to superior knowledge - assumed that such a claim

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4 See Eduardo Rabois, "La teoria de los derechos humanos naturalizada," Revista del Centro de Estudios Constitucionales (Mexico), no. 4 (January-March 1979), 159-69. Rabois also says that he does not wish to question "the idea of a rational foundation of morality." I am not sure why he says this, but the essay he has in the past not, at the time of writing, this has still made a kind of sense, but there were no more. That, if any, if you can, is a man's view. But wrong in a period when the only alternative is religious seems to be something like science. In such a period, inventing a pseud-science called "the science of transcendent philosophy" - writing the urge for the show-scamping climate in which one puts moral obligation on a transcendental basis - might plausibly seem the only way of saving morality from the debase in one side and the purity on the other.

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tire. So are such counterexamples as that human beings are merely vehicles for selfish genes or merely creations of the will to power. To claim such knowledge is to claim to know something that, though not itself a moral illusion, can foster moral intuitions. It is essential to this idea of moral knowledge that a whole community might come to see that most of its most salient intuitions about the right thing to do were wrong.

But now suppose we ask: is there this sort of knowledge? What kind of question is that? On the traditional view, it is a philosophical question, belonging to a branch of epistemology known as "metaethics." But on the pragmatic view I favor, it is a question of efficiency: a question about how best to grab hold of history—how best to bring about the utopia sketched by the Enlightenment. If the activities of those who attempt to achieve this sort of knowledge seem of little use in actualizing this utopia, that is a reason to think there is no such knowledge. It seems that most of the work of changing moral intuitions is being done by manipulating our feelings rather than by increasing our knowledge, that is a reason to think there is no knowledge of the sort that philosophers like Plato, Aquinas, and Kant hoped to get.

This pragmatist argument against the Platonist has the same form as an argument for ceding off payment to the priests who perform purportedly war-winning sacrifices—an argument which says that all the real work of winning the war seem to be done by generals and admirals, not to mention foot soldiers. This argument does not say: since there seem to be no gods, there is probably no need to support the priests. It says instead: since there is apparently no need to support the priests, probably there are no gods. We pragmatists argue from the fact that the emergence of the human rights culture seems to owe nothing to increased moral knowledge, and everything to hearing good and sentimental stories, in the conclusion that there is probably no knowledge of the sort Plato envisaged. We go on to argue that since no useful work seems to be done by insisting on a purportedly abstract human nature, there probably is no such nature, or at least nothing in that nature that is relevant to our moral choices.

In short, my doubts about the effectiveness of appeals to moral knowledge are doubts about causal efficacy, not about epistemic status. My doubts have nothing to do with any of the theoretical questions discussed under the heading of "metaethics"—questions about the relation between facts and values, or between reason and passion, or between the cognitive and the noncognitive, or between descriptive statements and action-guiding statements. Nor do they have anything to do with questions about realism and antirealism. The difference between the moral realist and the moral antirealist seems to pragmatists a difference that makes no practical difference.
change things over stable criteria for determining the desirability of change. They are the ones who think much of both Plato and Kant in mind.

The best explanation both of Darwin's relatively easy success and of our own vigorous and widely shared hope for the knowledge is also the nineteen and twentieth centuries and among Europeans and Americans, an extraordinary increase in wealth, literacy, and leisure. This increase made possible an unprecedented acceleration in the rate of moral progress. Such trends as the French Revolution and the ending of the transcendent slave trade helped nineteenth-century intellectuals in the rich democracies to say: It is enough for us to know that we live in an age in which humans beings can make things better for ourselves. We do not need to dig behind this historical fact to neurological facts about what we really are.

In the two centuries since the French Revolution, we have learned that human beings are far more malleable than Plato or Kant dreamed. The more we are impressed by this malleability, the less interested we become in questions about our ahistorical nature. The more we see a chance to reframe ourselves, the more we shall treat Darwin as offering one more theory about what we really are but as providing reasons why we do not need to ask what we really are. Nowadays, to say that we are clever animals is to say something philosophical and pessimistic but something political and hopeful - namely, if we can work together, we can make ourselves into whatever we are clever and courageous enough to imagine ourselves becoming. This is to set aside Kant's question "What is man?" to substitute the question "What sort of world can we prepare for our great grandchildren?"

The question "What is man?" in the sense of "What is the deep ontological nature of human beings?" owed its popularity to the standard answer to that question: we are the rational animal, the one that can know as well as merely feel. The residual popularity of this answer accounts for the residual popularity of Kant's animistic claim that sentience itself has nothing to do with morality, that there is something distinctly and transcendentally hu-

6 Piaget's 'Vision of Man' is a careful reminder of the social way life was like, and, for a cognitive discipline called philosophy and would require us to step back from the Enlightenment's religious faith. The unside, anthropological opposition, in Western and Eastern Europe, between spirit and faith suggests that many intellectuals could no longer believe that philosophy would produce some sort of superknowledge, knowledge that might trump the results of physical and biological inquiry.
man called "the sense of moral obligation" which has nothing to do with love, friendship, trust, or social solidarity. As long as we believe that people like Rabobini are going to have a tough time convincing us that human rights foundationism is an outmoded project.

To overcome this idea of a suit generis sense of moral obligation, we would help to stop answering the question "What makes us different from other animals?" by saying, "We can know and we can require life." We should substitute "We can feel for each other a much greater extent than they can."

This substitution would let us disentangle Christ's suggestion that love matters more than knowledge from the neo-Platonic suggestion that knowledge of the truth will make us free. For as long as we think there is an historical power that makes for righteousness -- a power called truth or rationality -- we will not be able to get foundationism behind us. The point, and probably the only argument for putting foundationism behind us in the one I have already suggested: it would be more efficient to do so, because it would let us concentrate our energies on manipulating sentiments, on sentimental education. That sort of education gets people at different kinds sufficiently well acquainted with one another that they are less tempted to think of different things from themselves as only human beings.

The goal of this sort of manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms "our kind of people" and "people like us." All I can do to supplement this argument from increased efficiency is to offer a suggestion about how Plato managed to convince us that knowledge of universal truths matters as much as he thought it did. Plato thought that the philosopher's task was to answer questions like "Why should I be moral? Why is it rational to be moral? Why is it in the interest of human beings as such to be moral?" He thought this because he thought that the best way to deal with people like Thrasymachus and Gorgias was to demonstrate to them that they had an interest of which they were unaware, an interest in being rational, in acquiring self-knowledge. Plato thereby settled us with a distinction between the true and the false self.

That distinction was, by the time of Kant, translated into a distinction between categorical, rigid moral obligation and flexible, empirically determinable self-interest. Contemporary moral philosophy is still burdened with this opposition between self-interest and morality, an opposition which makes it hard to realize that my pride is being a part of the human rights culture is no more external to myself than my desire for financial or sexual success.

It would have been better if Plato had decided, as Aristotle was to decide, that there was nothing much to be done with people like Thrasymachus and Gorgias and that the problem was how to avoid having children who would

be like Thrasymachus and Callides. By insisting that he could reconcile people who had matured without acquiring appropriate moral sentiments by invoking a higher power than sentiments, the power of reason, Plato got moral philosophy off on the wrong foot. He led moral philosophers to concentrate on the rather rare figure of the philosopher, the person who has no concern for any human being other than himself. Moral philosophy has systematically neglected the much more common case: the person whose treatment of a rather narrow range of featherless bipeds is morally impeccable, but who remains indifferent to the suffering of those outside this range, the ones he thinks of as pseudo-humans.8

Plato sets things up so that moral philosophers think they have failed unless they convince the rational egoist that he should not be an egoist -- convince him by telling him about his vice, unfortunately neglected self. But the rational egoist is not the problem. The problem is the gullible and honorable Socrates who sees Muslims at circumsized dogs. It is the brave soldier and good conrade who loves and is loved by his mate, but who thinks of women as dangerous, malevolent whores and bitches.

Plato thought that the best way to get people to be nicer to each other was to point out what they all had in common -- rationality. But it does little good to point out to the people you have just described, that many Muslims and women are good at mathematics or engineering or jurisprudence. Resemblance young Nazi thugs were quite aware that many Jews were clever and learned, but this only added to the pleasure they took in beating such Jews. Nor does it do much good to get such people to read Kant and agree that one should not treat rational agents simply as means. For everything turns on who counts as a fellow human being, as a rational agent in the only relevant sense -- the sense in which rational agency is synonymous with membership in our moral community. For most white people, until very recently, most black people did not count. For most Christians, until the seventeenth century or so, most Hebrews did not count. For the Nazis, Jews did not count. For most males in countries in which the average annual income is less than two thousand pounds, most females still do not count. Whenever tribal and national rivalries become important, members of rival tribes and nations will not count. Kant's

8 Nota bene: see right to remind us that "these same men who, amongst themselves, are so violently committed by reason, worship, ritual,พาvait and by moral surveillance and penalty, who are so respectful in considerations, goodness, loyalty, pride and friendship, who once they step outside that circle become little better than mercenary beasts of prey" (The Genealogy of Morals, III, 2).
account of the respect due to rational agents tells you that you should extend the respect you feel for the people like yourself to all featherless bipeds. This is an excellent suggestion, a good formula for secularizing the Christian doctrine of the brotherhood of all families of man. But it has never been backed up by an argument based on natural premises, and it never will be. Outside the circle of post-Enlightenment European culture, the circle of relatively safe and secure people who have been manipulating one another's sentiments for two hundred years, most people are simply unable to understand why membership in a biological species is supposed to suffice for membership in a moral community. This is not because they are insufficently rational. It is, typically because they live in a world in which it would be just too risky — indeed, would often be insanely dangerous — to let one's sense of moral community stretch beyond one's family, clan, or tribe.

To get whites to be nicer to blacks, males to females, Serbs to Muslims, or Muslims to Jews, to help our species link up into what Kubo calls a "planetary community" dominated by a culture of human rights, it is of no use whatever to say, with Kant: notice that what you have in common, your humanity, is more important than these trivial differences. For the people we are trying to convince will reject that notice nothing of the sort. Such people are usually offended by the suggestion that they should treat someone who is not kin as if he were a brother, or a rigger as if he were white, or a queer as if he were normal, or an infidel as if she were a believer. They are offended by the suggestion that they treat people whom they do not think of as human as if they were human. When utilitarians tell them that all pleasures and pains felt by members of our biological species are equally relevant to moral deliberation, or when Kantians tell them that the ability to engage in such dutifulness is sufficient for membership in the moral community, they are incredulous. They reject that these philosophers seem oblivious to the bluntly obvious moral distinctions, distinctions any decent person would draw.

This rejoinder is not just a rhetorical device, nor is it in any way irrational. It is heartfelt. The identity of these people, the people whom we should like to convince to join our Eurocentric human right culture, is bound up with their sense of who they are. Most people — especially people relatively untouched by the European Enlightenment — simply do not think of themselves as, first and foremost, a human being. Instead, they think of themselves as being a certain good sort of human being — a sort defined by explicit opposition to a particularly bad sort. What is crucial for their sense of who they are is that they are not an infidel, not a queer, not a woman, not an untouchable. Just insofar as they are impoverished, and as their lives are per-

fault that they do not know it. All they had to do, after all, was to think a little harder, be a little more self-conscious, a little more rational.

But the bad people’s beliefs are not more or less “irrational” than the belief that race, religion, gender, and sexual preference are all morally irrelevant—that these are all trumped by membership in the biological species. As used by moral philosophers like McGinn, the term “irrational behavior” means no more than “behavior of which we disapprove so strongly that our space is turned when asked why we disapprove of it.” So it would be better to correct these bad people are no less rational, no less clear-headed, no more prejudiced than that we good people who respect Others. The bad people’s problem is, rather, that they were not as lucky in the circumstances of their upbringing as we were. Instead of treating all those people out there who have been left behind and find Salmaan Raddul as irrationally, we should treat them as deprived.

Foundationists think of these people as deprived of truth, of moral knowledge. But it would be better—more concrete, more specific, more suggestive of possible remedies—to think of them as deprived of too many concrete things: security and sympatry. Its security I mean conditions of life sufficiently risk-free as to make one’s difference from others irrelevant to one’s self-respect, one’s sense of worth. These conditions have been enjoyed by North Americans and Europeans—the people who dreamed up the human rights culture—much more than they have been enjoyed by anyone else. By “sympatry” I mean the sort of reactions Athenians had more of after seeing Aeschylus’s The Persians than before, the sort that whites in the United States had more of after reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin than before, the sort we have more of after watching television programs about the genocide in Bosnia. Security and sympathy go together, for the same reasons that peace and economic productivity go together. The tougher things are, the more you have to be afraid of, the more dangerous your situation, the less you can afford the time to think about what things might be like for people with whom you do not immediately identify. Sentimental education works only on people who can relax long enough to listen.

If Raskol and I are right in thinking human rights foundationalsists outworn, then Hume is a better answer than Kant about how we intellectualism can handle the coming of the Enlightenment utopias for which both men yearned. Among contemporary philosophers, the best advice seems to me to be Anneke Baier. Baier describes Hume as the “woman’s moral philosopher” because Hume held that “corrected (or, more accurately, rule-corrected) sympathy, not law-abidingness reason, is the fundamental moral capacity.”

Baier would like us to get rid of both the Ptolemaic idea that we have a true self and the Kantian idea that our reason is rational to be moral. In aid of this project, she suggests that we think of “true” rather than “obligation,” as fundamental moral notion. This substitution would mean thinking of the spread of the human rights culture as a matter of our becoming more aware of the requirements of moral law, rather than as what Baier calls “a program of sentimements.” This program comes in an increasing ability to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences. It is the result of what I have been calling “sentimental education.” The relevant similarities are not a matter of sharing a deep truth that transcends true humanity, but are such little, superficial similarities as cherishing our parents and our children—similarities that do not distinguish us in any interesting way from many nonhuman animals.

To accept Baier’s suggestions, however, we have to overcome our sense that respectfulness is too weak a force and that something stronger is required. This is the reason that respect is stronger than sentiment, that only an insistence on the unconditional-giving has the power to change human beings for the better, is very pertinent. I think this resistance is due mainly to a sentimentalization rationalization, but if we had the hope for moral progress over to sentiment, we are in effect holding them over to sentimentalism. For we shall be relying on those who have the power to change things—people like the rich New England abolitionists or rich breeding hearts like Robert Owen and Friedrich Engels—rather than relying on something that has power over them. We shall have to accept the fact that the face of the woman of Bosnia depends on whatever television journalists manage to do for them, that Warren Beecher Stone did for black slaves—whether these journalists can make us, the audience back in the safe countries, feel that women are more like us, more like real human beings, than we had realized.

To rely on the suggestion of sentiment, rather than on the command of reason is to think of powerful people gradually ceasing to oppress others, or to come to mean the oppression of others, out of mere niceness rather than
out of obedience to the moral law. But it is revoltiong to think that our only hope for a decent society consists in softening the self-satisfied hearts of a leisure class. We want moral progress to burst up from below, rather than waiting patiently upon the descent from the top. The residual populatioh of Kantian ideas of “unconditional moral obligation”—obligation im-
posed by deep ahtistorical noncontingent forces—seems to me almost en-
tirely due to our atordure of the idea that the people on top hold the fuure in their hands, that everything depends on them, that there is noth-
ing more powerful to which we can appeal against them.

Like everyone else, I too would prefer a bottom-up way of achieving utopia, a quick reversal of fortune that will make the last first. But I do not think this is how utopia will in fact come into being. Nor do I think our preference for this way lends any support to the idea that the Enlightenment project lies in the depths of every human soul.

So why does this preference make us resist the thought that sentimenta-


HUMAN RIGHTS


rioal progress as an expression of resentment, he was quite wrong to treat
Christianity and the age of the democratic revolutions as signs of human de-
genearation. He and Kant, alas, shared something with each other that nei-
ther shared with Harriet Beecher Stowe—something that Iris Murdoch has
called “dryness” and Jacques Derrida has called “phallogocentrism.” The
common element in the thought of both men was a desire for purity. This
sort of purity consists in being not only autonomous, in command of one-
self, but also in having the kind of self-conscious self-sufficiency that Sartre
describes as the perfect synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself. This syn-
thesis could be attained, Sartre pointed out, only if one could rid oneself of
everything nasty, slimy, wet, sentimental, and wondrous.

Although this desire to strive for purity links Plato to Kant, the desire to
bring as many different kinds of people as possible into a cosmos links
Kant to Stowe. Kant represents, in the history of moral thinking, a tran-


12 Nietzsche’s diagnosis is reinforced by Elizabeth Anscombe’s famous argument that innate

not enlisted to the term “moral obligation.”
tions of an intellectual epoch in which the quest for quasi-scientific knowledge seemed the best response to religious excarnation.

Unfortunatly, many philosophers, especially in the English-speaking world, are still trying to hold on to the Platonic insistence that the principal duty of humankind is to know. That insistance was the lifeline on which Hume, many English-speaking philosophers now see themselves as saving reason from Descartes. But with the wisdom of hindsight, and with Baier's help, we have learned to read Hume not as a dangerously frivolous iconoclast but as the wittest, most flexible, least phallogocentric thinker of the Enlightenment. Somewhere, I suspect, our descendants may wish that Descartes' contemporaries had been able to read him not as a frivolous iconoclast, but rather as a seminal educator, as another of "the moral philosophers.'

If one follows Baier's advice, one will see as it the moral educator's task not to answer the rational egoist's question "Why should I be moral?" but rather to answer the much more frequently posed question, "Why should I care about another, a person who is no kin to me, a person whose habits I find disgusting?" The traditional answer to the latter question is "Because kinship is custom is morally irrelevaet, irrelevant to the obligations imposed on us by the recognition of membership in the same species. This has never been very convincing, since it begs the question as whether membership is, in fact, a sufficient surrogate for closer kinship. Furthermore, that answer leaves one wide open to Nietzsche's discouraging rejoinder: for universalistic motion, Nietzsche will meet, would have crossed the limit of only a slavet--or, perhaps, an intellectual--peasant whose self-esteem and livelihood both depend on keeping the rest of us to accept a sacred, unarguable, unchallengeable paradox.

A better sort of answer is the sort of long, sad, sentimental story that begins, "Because this is what it is like to be in her situation--to be far from home, among strangers," or "Because she might become your daughter-in-law," or "Because her mother would grieve for her." Such stories, repeated and varied over the centuries, have induced us, the rich, self-powerful people, to tolerate and even to cherish powerless people--people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variability.

To people who, like Plato and Kant, believe in a philosophically ascertainable truth about what it is to be a human being, the good work remains incomplete so long as we have not answered the question "Yes, but am I under a moral obligation to her?" To people like Hume and Baier, it is a mark of intellectual immaturity to raise that question. But we shall go on asking that question as long as we agree with Plato that it is our ability to know that makes us human.

Plato wrote quite a long time ago, in a time when intellectuals had to pretend to be successors to the priests, had to pretend to know something rather esoteric. Hume did his best to jolt us out of that pretense. Baier, who seems to me both the most original and the most useful of contemporary moral philosophers, is still trying to jolt us out of it. I think Baier may eventually succeed, for she has the history of the past two hundred years of moral progress on her side. These two centuries are most easily understood not as a period of deepening understanding of the nature of rationality or of morality, but rather as one in which there occurred an astonishingly rapid progress of sentiments, of which it has become much easier for us to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories.