

Thelemic values



A new view of morality

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- Ye olde morality -

Nearly every human alive has heard of the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai - the ten "thou shalt not"s. This system of ethics as set forth literally in stone by God and delivered through Moses is practically the perfect symbol of what I propose to call "old morality." Old morality consists essentially in the belief that there is an absolute law of conduct, often rewarded with promises of heaven or some kind of pleasure and punished with verdicts of

various types of suffering, even eternal suffering in a firey "Hell." This notion of absolute morality is most apparent in the Jewish religion, with its ten commandments (Judaism actually has 613 commandments in total), but it also appears in both Christianity and Islam (the "five pillars of Islam"). Both of these religions are characterized by their insistence on sin and the punishment of hell following sinful actions. These types of absolute morality are also apparent in many forms of Buddhism where they have "sila," which consists usually of five "thou shalt not"s. In some forms of yoga, there are what is called "yama" and "niyama" which are essentially five "thou shalt"s and five "thou shalt not"s.

Now, this old morality being by definition founded on a notion of "absolute moral conduct," is also necessarily quite inflexible. Not only did Moses invoke God as the source and authority of his commandments, but they were set in two gigantic tablets of stone.

In the course of history, one might say that these commandments, Jewish and otherwise, were necessary for that particular time. It can be agreed that many of these guidelines were (and still can be) effective if employed in the

right circumstances, in the right cultures. For example, "keeping kosher," a practice in Judaism, might be a highly effective way of being healthy in a certain part of a world, in a certain time-period. The fact is that these old moralities, as discussed above, emphasize the absoluteness of their rules and are therefore inflexible in their adaptation to individual circumstances. Nietzsche described this old morality, cognate with the Freudian "superego," as "the great dragon" that plagues each person in their development,

"What is the great dragon which the spirit is no longer inclined to call Lord and God? "Thou-shalt," is the great dragon called. But the spirit of the lion saith, "I will."

"Thou-shalt," lieth in its path, sparkling with gold--a scale-covered beast; and on every scale glittereth golden, "Thou shalt!"

The values of a thousand years glitter on those scales, and thus speaketh the mightiest of all dragons: "All the values of things--glitter on me.

All values have already been created, and all created values--do I represent. Verily, there shall be no 'I will' any more. Thus speaketh the dragon." [1]

This dragon is contrasted with the lion, a symbol of a certain stage of the "metamorphosis of one's spirit, which corresponds with the discarding of this old morality.

- Discarding of old morality -

"Anthropologists, archæologists, physicists and other men of science, risking thumbscrews, stake, infamy and ostracism, have torn the spider-snare of superstition to shreds and broken in pieces the monstrous idol of Morality, the murderous Moloch which has made mankind its meat throughout history... Moral philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, mental pathology, physiology, and many another of the children of Wisdom, of whom she is justified, well know that the laws of Ethics are a chaos of confused conventions, based at best on customs convenient in certain conditions, more often on the craft or caprice of the biggest, the most savage, heartless, cunning and blood-thirsty brutes of the pack, to secure their power or pander to their pleasure in cruelty."
-Aleister Crowley, Liber V vel Reguli

The 18th and 19th centuries signaled the slow demise of the conventional views of an Absolute Law of morals. This is epitomized in Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead." The essential realization that had crept in

was that moral judgment of things is entirely relative. Amazingly, Einstein announced the relativity of space-time itself less than half a century later. Nietzsche also summarized this relativization of morals in one aphorism: "There is no such thing as moral phenomena, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena." [2] In this, we come to see that morality as we know it lies entirely in our particular interpretation of phenomena, it does not reside in the phenomena themselves.

Thelema was surely the first religious philosophy to adopt - or rather incorporate - this new notion of amorality. This idea is more fully expanded in the chapter "The notion of sin abolished" in the "Psychological Commentary to Liber AL vel Legis" as well as in the essay "The Ethics of Thelema" by Erwin Hesse that appeared in the first issue of the Journal of Thelemic Studies.

It is proclaimed famously in Liber AL vel Legis, the central text of Thelema,

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."
"There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt." [3]

The will being unique to "every man and every woman," their different Laws are essentially not going to be identical. This most definitely states that each person is to do their own Will and not follow out the various laws and mandates of others. Naturally, moral sanctions imposed from without are discarded. The discarding of old morality during the last two centuries is also reflected into the microcosm of each human individual. Each man and woman must go through the various stages of human development, and a large part of this development is one's continually changing approach to values. In the process of all of our lives, we have each adopted values and many of us, especially during adolescence, begin to question our adopted values that we took initially to be true.

This questioning of values is what Nietzsche discussed in his classic Thus Spoke Zarathustra. He declared there were three metamorphoses of the spirit, the first of which is the camel that essentially takes on the values of the society it was born into. Next, through necessity, the lion emerges, symbolic of the discarding of introjected values. On this symbolic lion of the spirit Nietzsche writes,

"My brethren, wherefore is there need of the lion in the spirit? Why sufficeth not the beast of burden [the camel], which renounceth and is reverent?"

To create new values--that, even the lion cannot yet accomplish: but to create itself freedom for new creating--that can the might of the lion do.

To create itself freedom, and give a holy Nay even unto duty: for that, my

brethren, there is need of the lion.

To assume the right to new values--that is the most formidable assumption for a load-bearing and reverent spirit. Verily, unto such a spirit it is preying, and the work of a beast of prey.

As its holiest, it once loved "Thou-shalt": now is it forced to find illusion and arbitrariness even in the holiest things, that it may capture freedom from its love: the lion is needed for this capture."[4]

The prime characteristic of this lion-like attitude is "to create itself freedom" by rejecting the "Thou-shalts" of values imposed from without. Modernly, the old morality is represented to the modern individual in the form of "society" or "the State," which are imposed from without. This lion symbol Nietzsche speaks of is essentially the breaking free of old perspectives of value. These include any imposed values acquired throughout one's development in modern society, especially those of old morality.

In the field of psychology, Carl Ransom Rogers - an influential psychologist who founded the client-centered form of therapy and was president of the American Psychological Association - delineated the progress of our approach to values throughout our individual development. To understand the transition to what Rogers terms a "psychologically mature" outlook on values we must first understand completely his model of the development of values. In an essay he published called "Toward a Modern Approach to Values," he first of all distinguishes between "operative values" which refers to "the tendency of any living beings to show preference, in their actions, for one kind of object or objective rather than another," which, "need not involve any cognitive or conceptual thinking,"[5] and what he calls "conceived values," which are "the preference of the individual for a symbolized object," where, "usually in such a preference there is anticipation or foresight of the outcome of behavior directed toward such a symbolized object." [6] For operative values, Rogers gives the example of a worm navigating a maze by choosing the directions through it; for conceived values, he gives the example of the value-statement "honesty is the best policy." With this subtle distinction in values we may return to the subject of becoming a psychologically mature adult.

Carl Rogers suggested that there are three distinct perspectives or stages of value: the infant, the psychologically immature, and the psychologically mature adult. The infant's view of values is inborn - it has "at the outset, a clear approach to values. He prefers some things and experiences, and rejects others. We can infer from studying his behavior that he prefers those experiences which maintain, enhance, or actualize his organism, and rejects those which do not serve this end." [7] This infant stage of values is entirely composed of operative values, for conceived values require symbolic thought of which infants are not even capable. The fact that is asserted is that infants

are inborn with a sense of valuing things, which corresponds to what Rogers calls elsewhere the "actualizing tendency," which is that tendency of all humans (not just infants) to inherently move towards "those experiences which maintain, enhance, or actualize his organism," as previously mentioned. Rogers continues, explaining that the infant's approach to values "is first of all a flexible, changing, valuing process, not a fixed system... What is going on seems best described as an organismic valuing process, in which each element, each moment of what he is experiencing is somehow weighed, and selected or rejected, depending on whether, at this moment, it tends to actualize the organism or not. This complicated weighing of experience is clearly an organismic, not a conscious or symbolic function. These are operative, not conceived values." [8] The last aspect of the infant's approach to values is that "the source or locus of the evaluating process is clearly within himself. Unlike many of us, he knows what he likes and dislikes, and the origin of these value choices lies strictly within himself. He is the center of the valuing process, the evidence for his choices being supplied by his own senses." [9] Essentially, the infant's approach to values is what Rogers terms the "organismic valuing process," wherein each phenomenon is weighed and rejected depending on its potential for actualizing the individual in question, and the source of the evaluating process is clearly within the individual.

One would think that this soundly based and highly efficient valuing process would not be worth giving up. The fact is that all of us exchange this apparent effective valuing process for a more "rigid, uncertain, inefficient approach to values which characterizes most of us adults." [10] The reason for this, Rogers posits, is essentially the need for love from others, especially the parents. "The infant needs love, wants it, tends to behave in ways which will bring a repetition of this wanted experience. But this brings complications." [11] Each child is scolded for doing things the parent sees as unacceptable and rewarded for things viewed as acceptable. These various value judgments become adopted by the infant as if they were his own, which is called the "introjection of values." Rogers explains, "He has deserted the wisdom of his organism, giving up the locus of evaluation, and is trying to behave in terms of values set by another, in order to hold love." [12] It is this new stage, when the infant begins to start introjecting values from outside as if they were his own, which corresponds with Nietzsche's notion of the camel. The camel is that which delights in bearing heavy loads, in this case the burden of introjected values. On this Nietzsche writes,

"What is heavy? so asketh the load-bearing spirit; then kneeleth it down like the camel, and wanteth to be well laden.

What is the heaviest thing, ye heroes? asketh the load-bearing spirit, that I may take it upon me and rejoice in my strength... All these heaviest things the load-bearing spirit taketh upon itself." [13]

These introjected values in the individual corresponds as a microcosm to the

old morality, discussed earlier, that has appeared in the course of human history. Rogers writes that "because these [introjected] concepts are not based on his own valuing, they tend to be fixed and rigid, rather than fluid and changing." Like introjected value concepts, the old morality is inherently fixed and rigid. Our lives as children, through when we are adolescents, up until we become adults, we are constantly introjecting values from around us. Rogers notes that, "in this fantastically complex culture of today, the patterns we introject as desirable or undesirable come from a variety of sources and are often highly contradictory in their meanings." [14] This assimilation into society with its values creates this "highly contradictory" feeling within each person. Most adults are at this stage of tension between their various conceived values that they have introjected, and more importantly Rogers describes the "wide and unrecognized discrepancy between the evidence supplied by his own experience and these conceived values." [15] This is because his experience no longer dictates his values as they did as an infant when his locus of evaluation was still within himself. Now, this source of evaluation lies outside of himself in most matters because of these fixed introjected values that he has adopted. One consequence of these introjected values being fixed is that "he must hold [these conceptions] in a rigid and unchanging fashion. The alternative would be a collapse of his values." [16] Carl Rogers believed that this picture of the individual, that of one with a large discrepancy between their experience and their introjected, conceived values, "is the picture of most of us. On this fundamental discrepancy Rogers wrote,

"By taking over the conceptions of others as our own we lose contact with the potential wisdom of our own functioning, and lose confidence in ourselves. Since these value constructs are often sharply at variance with what is going on in our own experiencing, we have in a very basic way divorced ourselves from ourselves, and this accounts for much of modern strain and insecurity. This fundamental discrepancy between the individual's concepts and what he is actually experiencing, between the intellectual structure of his values and the valuing process going on unrecognized within him - this is a part of the fundamental estrangement of modern man from himself." [17]

It is at this point in development, where there is a fundamental discrepancy and dissonance in ourselves, that Nietzsche's lion is needed "create itself freedom" by discarding the old values of "the great dragon" of "Thou shalt not"s. Before, as a camel, the individual takes on and introjects the values of his society at large, moving the his source of evaluation from a fluid center within himself to a fixed set of values outside of himself. This process is most likely necessary for all humans to go through, even though it has "divorced ourselves from ourselves." It is at this point that the lion is needed, which is essentially symbolic of the discarding of old values. This lion in its rejecting of introjected values is a symbol of the transition from this psychologically immature outlook of values to becoming what Rogers called a psychologically

mature adult. Rogers said that "some individuals are fortunate in... developing further in the direction of psychological maturity." [18] Being a therapist he naturally recommends the therapeutic climate for this further development but also admitted that this development can also happen in life where various conditions are similar to therapy.

- The birth of a new system of values -

If we discard our own introjected values, what do we have left? This is what the two previously mentioned essays (the chapter in Psychological Commentary to Liber AL and Hesse's "Ethics of Thelema") on Thelemic morals have neglected. Once the lion has found the old set of values ineffective and useless, what takes the place of this new void? Is "Do what thou wilt" simply just a call to complete anarchy?

As we begin to discard these introjected values, we come again to an approach to values that is similar to the infant's perspective treated earlier. In this sense, "it is fluid, flexible, based on this particular moment, and the degree to which this moment is experienced as enchancing and actualizing. Values are not held rigidly, but are continually changing." [19] This return to a fluid and flexible approach to values can only happen when we relinquish our attachment to various conceived values that have been introjected. The experience of our organism, which is constantly changing, becomes more important to the evaluation process than the thought structure of our values. Also in similarity with the infant's perspective, this new mature approach establishes, "the locus of evaluation... firmly within the person. It is his own experience which provides the value information or feedback. This does not mean that he is not open to all the evidence he can obtain from other sources. But it means that this is taken for what it is - outside evidence - and is not as significant as his own reactions." [20] Further, "there is also involved in this valuing process a letting oneself down into the immediacy of what one is experiencing, endeavoring to sense and to clarify all its complex meanings" just like in infancy. Essentially, one returns largely to the infant's point-of-view insofar as one's values are more fluid & flexible, the locus of evaluation is re-established within oneself, experiential evidence trumps outside evidence, and a sort of letting go to be "in the moment."

Amazingly, as Carl Rogers says this new psychologically mature look has much in common with the infant's perspective, Nietzsche designates the stage after the discarding of values by the lion as that of the child. He writes,

"But tell me, my brethren, what the child can do, which even the lion could not do? Why hath the preying lion still to become a child?

Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea.

Aye, for the game of creating, my brethren, there is needed a holy Yea unto life: ITS OWN will, willeth now the spirit; HIS OWN world winneth the world's outcast." [21]

The child is 'innocence' because he does not reference his own actions against the values of others (whereby one feels guilt, shame, etc. for not complying) but of his own, he is 'forgetfulness' because his values is not a fixed system but a fluid, ever-changing process, and he is 'a new beginning' and 'a first movement' because his values are always renewed in each moment, each calling a new judgment from his being. The child is 'a game' because he does not take the following of introjected values so seriously anymore - in fact, finds those following them quite ignorant (Rogers writes that, "[the infant] would laugh at our concern over values, if he could understand it"[22]), he is 'a self-rolling wheel' because his locus of evaluation has been relocated to within himself, and he is 'a holy Yea' because in this bringing of valuing into the locus of oneself naturally brings one into being more accepting of experience in general. This image of the mature child appears in an injunction by Christ to "become as little children" (Matthew 18: 3), and also Blavatsky's injunction, "The Pupil must regain the child-state he has lost,"[23] and finally Nietzsche's own injunction "Maturity in a man: that means having found once again that seriousness which man had as a child, in play." [24]

Rogers emphasizes that similar to the infant, "the psychologically mature adult trusts and uses the wisdom of his organism, with the difference that he is able to do so knowingly. He realizes that if he can trust all of himself, his feelings and his intuitions may be wiser than his mind, that as a total person he can be more sensitive and accurate than his thoughts alone." [25] As emphasized in a chapter from the Psychological Commentary on Liber AL, reason cannot adequately be the guide of the Will. Rogers offers this "organismic valuing process" as a solution to not only what may guide our actions when we discard reason as the sole arbiter, but also it fills the vacuum created by our questioning and discarding of values. The "child" of Nietzsche who creates his own values is one who has adopted this psychologically mature "organismic valuing process." Like Rogers, we assert that "there is an organismic base for an organized valuing process within the human individual... It is part of the functioning life process of any healthy organism. It is the capacity for receiving feedback information which enables the organism continually to adjust its behavior and reactions so as to achieve the maximum possible self-enhancement." [26] This natural inclination is with us since birth and consequently covered over with our adopted of various conceived values in our need for love and esteem. Now as we begin to question and discard our various conceived values that have been imposed from without, we are re-adopting many facets of this natural organismic valuing process yet with the psychological maturity and insight of the adult.

Finally, some often question whether relocating our valuing process within ourselves will result in widespread anarchy. Carl Rogers assures that although this process of organismic valuing is entirely individual, the values that are created share a large degree of commonality across humanity. He asserted that "where individuals are valued, where there is greater freedom to feel and to be, certain value directions seem to emerge. These are not chaotic directions but instead have a surprising commonality... this commonality does not seem to be due to the influences of any one culture... I like to think that this commonality of value directions is due to the fact that we all belong to the same species... As a species there may be certain elements of experience which tend to make for inner development and which would be chosen by all individuals if they were genuinely free to choose." [27] In fact, Carl Rogers was able to identify various common themes, or "value directions," that arise when individuals are accepted and left free to choose their own values: "They tend to move away from facades... pretense, defensiveness, putting up a front," "they tend to move away from 'oughts,'" "they tend to move away from meeting the expectations of others," "being real is positively valued," "self-direction is positively valued," "one's self, one's own feelings, come to be positively valued," "being a process [as opposed to being fixed] is positively valued," "perhaps more than all else, the client comes to value an openness to all of his inner and outer experience," "sensitivity to others and acceptance of others is positively valued," and "finally, deep relationships are positively valued." [28]

Although these may be general trends of "value directions," in Thelema it is recognized quite firmly that "There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt." Instead of dogmatically imitating these apparently common stances on values, we may recognize that the very fact of a commonality of value directions among all humans who are relatively free and esteemed shows us that this process of understanding values that we all go through does not end in complete anarchy as some criticize. Essentially, "a new kind of emergent universality of value directions becomes possible when individuals move in the direction of psychological maturity, or more accurately, move in the direction of becoming open to their experiencing." [29]

- Summary -

The essential endeavor of this essay is to understand values in a Thelemic context. First, the historical appearance and dissolution of old morality, symbolized both as Moses' stone tablets of the Laws and the "great dragon" of Nietzsche, was defined as a system with a fixed and absolute rule of conduct. It was discussed how our approach to values changes continually throughout our individual development, and Carl Rogers' model for understanding values was adopted as a framework to understand this more deeply.

According to Carl Rogers, there are three distinct stages of development where we have different approaches to what we value. Initially, we all begin in the infant stage with an inborn organismic valuing process. This process is based on what will actualize the infant the most in the moment (called by Rogers "the actualizing tendency"), and consequently it is a constantly changing process in contrast to fixed, unchangeable principles. Slowly, largely through the desire for love and esteem from others, we relinquish this locus of values from within ourselves to various introjected values that are imposed from without. This stage of "introjecting values" from our parents and society as a whole was shown to correspond with Nietzsche's notion of the camel which "bears the burden" of its society's values.

This introjection of values creates a dissonance in ourselves because of the gap between our experience and the thought-structure of conceived values that we have introjected. This is what Rogers distinguishes as the "psychologically immature" approach to values. It is at this point that we begin to question our values, and many of them are seen to be irrelevant, arbitrary, and useless. These imposed values were seen to correspond both to Freud's superego and Nietzsche's "great dragon," which assails each individual. When we begin to question our values and discard them, we become Nietzsche's "lion" who creates freedom by giving "a holy Nay even unto duty"[31] and the many conceived values that we have introjected.

It is by the questioning and discarding of values that it is possible to move beyond psychological immaturity into the final stage which Carl Rogers calls the "psychologically mature adult." In this final approach to values, we once again bring our locus of evaluation within ourselves, relying on experiential evidence. We "become as little children" also insofar as we start to become more open to all kinds of experience when we relinquish attachment to our old, static, conceived values; also, we regain a more intimate immersion in the moment, although now as adults we have accumulated the wisdom of many years of experience. It is an interesting paradox that both in Carl Rogers' model of the developmental approach to values and Nietzsche's understanding of the "metamorphoses of the spirit," that the most mature manifestation retains markedly the relation to the "Child" or "infant." It is a delicate balance to strike between the knowledge of adult experience and the innocent candor of the child-like attitude, but it certainly can and has been done.

Since we relocate our valuing process to within ourselves, it becomes entirely individual and relative. Some may argue that this approach to values, as many have often argued against the Thelemic maxim "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law," leads to complete anarchy. This situation of relying on the individual "organismic valuing process" may appear to be anarchy to one still situated in their fixed approach to values, consisting almost entirely of introjected values from the duration of one's life, but it is much different in practice. Carl Rogers assures that, amazingly, universal "value directions" emerge when people across all cultures are allowed

freedom to develop fully psychologically. The very fact that universal value directions emerge may show that although there is much more diversity, there is certainly still a certain commonality of values that arises.

With this knowledge, we may all arise as lions to question, re-examine, and discard our old notions of values. In this discarding we make way for the child within us, who brings forth his or her individual approach to values - that particular person's Will. This "child"-approach is really only the "organismic valuing process" that we have had inherently within us since our birth; it has only become clouded over by the complex of introjected conceived values. Just as the blazing sunlight is diffused and darkened by the clouds, every individual's Will is obscured by this process of introjecting values. Any star who wishes to burn as brilliantly as possible would surely wish to disperse these clouds. That is, any man or woman who truly wishes to actualize their full potential can and must engage in this process of the re-examination of values.

"Instead of universal values 'out there,' or a universal value system imposed by some group - philosophers, rulers, or priests - we have the possibility of universal human value directions emerging from the experiencing of the human organism. Evidence from therapy indicates that both personal and social values emerge as natural, and experienced, when the individual is close to his own organismic valuing process. The suggestion is that though modern man no longer trusts religion or science or philosophy or any system of beliefs to give him his values, he may find an organismic valuing base within himself which, if he can learn again to be in touch with it, will prove to be an organized, adaptive, and social approach to the perplexing value issues which face all of us." [32]

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