



The New Morality

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Editorial Remark:

YEHUDI MENUHIN was a Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science, who apart from his work as an artist, was deeply and actively concerned with problems of education and human welfare. For his philosophical works on music and his influence on music teaching, he held honorary degrees in Music and Law from various Universities and was awarded honorary distinctions in many countries. In the following article, he presents his view on the subject as an artist and educationist. His article is an abridged version of his Chuter Ede lecture, delivered on March 30, 1965, at Hamilton House, London.

As by definition, the Chuter Ede lecturers are drawn from outside the ranks of educationalists per se, so do I propose to consider the art of education in its widest implications, implications of knowledge and superstition, of fact, fancy and reason, as of God and morality.

It took a long time for man to relate facts to each other; facts were isolated phenomena explained only by the most daring feats of fantasy; each man was isolated to his God and it was only common fantasy which joined people and not common knowledge. Today, along with common knowledge and I should add common doubt, which have both cast a pall on fantasy, we need to build a common morality as well as to release myriad new worlds of fantasy. For liberating fancy, imagination, dreams, abandon — these are man's lifeline to the infinite and man's greatest privilege. Born to seek light, unlike the tireless black ant, he is also as the peacock to the sun; fancy was man's reason before his reason built himself a prison. It is a very old habit born of our senses and our intellect, the legitimate offspring of both. Thus in the past facts did not explain themselves — fancy came to the rescue, and reason served fancy. Even today when a fact is supposed to be a fact, it is still meaningless except for what we can bring to it.

At one time every fact had to be interpreted as an isolated phenomenon and any hypothesis, however childish or wild, was apparently better than none. But at least, we as human beings were involved with body and soul, committed in life and death; we interpreted and we assumed, quite understandably, that the piece was composed for us, and in a sense perhaps it was... Now one fact is explained by another, and this other by a third, and so on, but we are left out of it. The facts, as it were, speak for themselves and except for revealing the fact in the words and the numeral, we are ourselves no more or less than any lump of clay; or then, as any comparison goes, why not than any lyrebird, dolphin, or for that matter any illiterate but heartrending tenor, proverbially mindless?

The great question is: Are we no more than clay plus intellect? What lies in between? What about that fancy which clothed the most trivial fact in the most richly ornamented and

embroidered cloak? What went into that cloak? Fear and sorrow, yes, but also joy, hope and pride and all the ecstasies of the infinite; of infinite love, infinite space and time, infinite beauty, and in absolute contrast, infinite pain, torture and anguish. For life is born of the infinite and yearns for it at every turn.

Morality and faith too are born of the infinite. Man does himself a great injustice when he lives only in terms of measurable — for the measurable will never yield the infinite and it is, therefore, partly untrue. Here is where imagination and fancy, art and morality come in. These come into play automatically with and in proportion to the time-space factor and infinity. Morality exists as soon as we feel for others, every kind of others, and so soon as we think of our future and the future of mankind. Morality can be built back into reality, not as a superstition, but as the inevitable attitude to life when seen in a certain perspective. What is this perspective? Science has explained so many of our phenomena — that, for instance, the fear of castigation by some Deity in the form of disease, earthquake etc. no longer holds water. We can indeed live a “godless life” within a very narrow compound: within these limits we can do that with impunity and a clear conscience, but it still remains a prison compound. Infinity is present at all times and it can be proved only in the more subtle ways; just as science today has discovered that infinity must enter into reckoning, so do these subtleties enter into the infinity within ourselves, into that depth of perception, into the intensity and quality of sensation, into the breadth of our horizon, of our vision. Whoever doubts that we are driven by the infinite should contemplate the sheer dimensions of power dreams, of pyramids and palaces which at their mightiest were never big enough for their makers. We must rather build in depth and in time what we seek to achieve in the immediate present in matter: actually, this means working even harder than we are.

Today, unfortunately, eternity is no longer represented: the mysteries of death as the subtleties of life are to a large measure ignored.

I would like to envisage morality as simply the unseen senior partner presiding at every transaction between a human being and his environment, as within a human being, between himself and his person. Morality could be described as that attitude or approach essential to achieve maximum joy, satisfaction, ecstasy, security and health—mental and physical, over the longest possible period for oneself and other creatures.

Man has always known that the reality in terms of the evidence of his senses was only half the story and that however enjoyable or painful this half was, the evidence was untrustworthy. He has always allowed for this second half, the so-called superfluous, and clothed it in ritual, symbol and all the colourful trappings of his imagination. This second half of our life — invisible, inaudible, intangible — is still with us. That fact has remained. Ever since thousands of years ago, perhaps even before man rode a horse, when he lived under the stars in a clear warm climate, by sheer dint of reasoning he was able to discover that the earth was round, and since then we have learned — and, alas, also forgotten—more and more facts not immediately apparent. This learning process grows in direct proportion to our humility, to our capacity for objectively subtracting ourselves as individual little vicars of God on earth, in direct proportion to the breadth of the concept wherein we figure as only one part, however essential and eternal, of the evolving whole. The success, the diversity, the survival strength of a civilisation has always been in proportion to its fund of knowledge, its wide distribution

among its people, as well as to the physical and mental health of its people and their willingness to sacrifice themselves individually and collectively for a great object.

In those terms our learning, therefore, leaves much to be desired. We have, as it were, lost one compass; it was found wanting, as all first compasses must eventually be. It has been repeatedly redesigned to guide us in widening dimensions and we have not yet distributed the new models. We will not even begin to achieve the new morality which is required today unless we respect the milestones and the repositories of the morality and of the wisdom of the past. Furthermore, some of these ancient and inspiring institutions are yet capable of new vigour and leadership witness the inspired call of the late Pope. We should, therefore, favour the inductive processes of learning, the inductive processes of education, rather than drill only the end-products and facts into the classroom.

Thus to sharpen the mind and stimulate the processes of logical thought you might ask the child "If you were a shepherd, awake most nights gazing at the horizon and the stars, how many observations, and which ones would you have to make before being convinced the earth was round and that it spun?" Merely to stimulate fancy, a different question might be posed as "Given certain conditions of environment, what kind of social order, what kind of religion, what purpose of life would you imagine would take form?" Then the child's answer could be compared with the actual description of a particular civilisation representing such conditions.

Once a belief is held as of a particular kind of God, it takes a very long time to die and usually its death carries its civilisation with it, together often with much that is useful and beautiful. I remember how moved I was to hear when I last was in New Mexico about the sacred Lake of the Red Indians, to which they make an annual pilgrimage and which they would never consider desecrating in any way whatsoever, and the tremendous fight that they had, and still have to put up to protect that lake against the real estate prospectors who, of course, saw it as an ideal place for hot-dogs and stands and camps. Although I hold no brief for their cruelty, I respect and admire the Red Indian's inscrutable pride. They cannot understand the concept of private property that we have; they believe that land is very much like air and water, that you cannot tie it down, cut it up and apportion it — that it belongs to everybody.

Today our lives are as much as ever determined by the impalpable, as for instance radiation of many kinds, chemical food additives, while in the meanwhile our finest senses are being ever more blunted. We almost refuse to accept the testimony of our own taste and smell and thus we further coarsen our five senses. Is it not another duty of the new education to re-awaken lost subtleties of apprehension, for I am convinced that we have hidden natural gifts and capacities which correspond to and anticipate every new realm rediscovered, as it were, by science?

I believe we are on the threshold of a subtler age. Ours has been a rather coarse history all in all — from the Testament eye-for-an-eye to the darkest ages of "applied" Christianity. Today we have the means of making living sense of aesthetics and of morality, of God and of Faith. I would say that Faith is as essential to ensure continuity and to overcome setbacks and disappointments, as credit is in a capitalist economy. In a capitalist economy we have to assume that every customer entering the store can, in fact, pay for what he buys; for the

good of the system, this act of faith is essential. Therefore, for practical purposes and failing any previous knowledge of the customer, and very often in spite of such knowledge, every person must a priori be credited with good intentions, even though every person may fail by the same token. Obviously, where basic incompatibility with society exists, separation of the individual from the group is indicated, but we must never give up the battle for the health of body and soul, any more than the Early Christians gave up the battle for men's souls.

The teacher's responsibilities are, therefore, enormous. They go from the earliest origins of life to the projection of the future and they must, of course, take in the present and living reality and not as some textbook pattern. We must, therefore, teach not only isolated or comparative facts, but critical capacity to make wide choice. We cannot build the new world alone, for that we depend on succeeding generations, but at least to them must we transmit reliable materials and good tools, not merely facts.

Children who have shown a special inclination for a particular field must be given the opportunity of creating their own world and their own climate. This is unfortunately no longer possible in a world where both the home and the streets have become inimical to a child's climate the apartments are too cramped, the parents too busy, the streets polluted. In fact, allow me to make a plea for the inclusion in every apartment house of rooms where children can play, where they can make music, where they can practise the trombone and the violin, where they can use mud and clay, where they can get together, and also where their parents can get together. This is essential today because the ordinary apartment represents only off-time to parents; it is when they have stopped working that they go back to their apartments and children return when they have finished school-hours.

It is a curious fact that the emancipation of women has meant so far that we have fewer teachers and nurses, rather than more; fewer mothers and grandmothers than before, as they turn their backs determinedly on everything which remotely smacks of "Kinder, Kirche und Küche", and they become astronauts and secretaries, foremen and, to my delight, ministers. But without these small islands of intimacy, or privacy, of the fanciful children's world, our schools and our apartment blocks are simply huge, faceless factories out of which no individual can emerge, only the mass, blind and brutal. Children, for instance, love cuddling together in mystery and twilight; children love other living things as dogs, butterflies, trees, lawns and flowers. Where do they find these in our glass boxes, in our asphalt playing grounds? Are these asphalted so that they may be turned into paying car parks?

The child will not have its birthright until it enjoys more space, more scope, more privilege than the motor car. In fact, although always grateful for help, I look upon the tie-up of industry and education with some miss-giving because it is dangerous unless it is balanced with the building of independent minds and with the cultivation of crafts.

In music we can follow the same development as in all other forms of culture, i.e. from the God-given to the man-made; pre-theme, when music was symbol and ritual in the service of God, the individual almost nonexistent in terms of his own life theme, and then theme music, when pure music became an end in itself and wrapped itself around its own theme. Today there are more and more themes. We live in a world which finds itself between the God-given theme and its own theme, as it were, and every man, woman and child, every group must evolve its own theme and build — it's rather corny — a symphony on it. For

myself, I don't think symphony is always the best form! A centralised authority supplying one theme is today inconceivable, for as soon as a man-made theme is available, different men can make it. Even Utopia has different faces some have their Heaven inhabited by angels and others by various other creatures, but on earth the only things, sadly, that can still unite us at present would seem to be fear, hate, ignorance, war and, finally, sorrow, grief and guilt.

We return to the need for a new morality as the one binding thought among a mankind as variegated as each imagination can possibly make it. Morality, therefore, must exist as a climate; it cannot be legislated.

Therefore, when we speak of real life, i.e. where ability and achievement are measured in actual pain or progress, we must allow the schools to encourage individual inclinations which are at odds with the main streams of national life. I mean, for instance, that where ability and achievement usually carry financial tags, we must all the more encourage achievement and knowledge, service, beauty, craft and sport, which draw upon other well-springs.

An overwhelmingly military nation would, for instance, apply the one criterion of automatic integration, absolute reliability and subservience to rank in preference to any other value. As we have seen in the case of Germany, this one-sided excess can prove a nation's downfall.

We realise today that however essential one or two specifications may be in times of crisis, no civilisation can survive without all, each and every tribute. I fear, for instance, that commerce and money, as basically democratic and unprejudiced as their exercise is in an industrial, mass-produced, mass-credit society, are hardly in themselves sufficient to offer a reliable indication of every value. Knowledge of history, artistic excellence, readiness to sacrifice, aesthetic judgments, inspirational goals, as well as the gipsy, the tramp, the poet, the dreamer — these are all multi-shaped pegs that will not all grind down to regulation holes.

The young delinquent too escapes the criteria of commercial and financial value. There is incidentally a good deal of blindness, self-delusion and unconscious hypocrisy in the adult attitude to these "delinquents". They are, in fact, precocious adults. For the first time on such a vast scale has adulthood been available in terms of freedom of choice, time money, energy, example and stimulus; adulthood with all its privileges and none of its penalties, adulthood without responsibility and, therefore, requiring only daring, but no courage — never has such adulthood been available to so young a section of the community.

Their behaviour is entirely patterned on the principles and simplified choice the adult world offers them—at home, at school, on the street, on the screen, in the newspapers, and unfortunately in the current events of the world at large. The choices appear to be only relative to each other, not to a third larger purpose which I am trying to define in this lecture. The choices are on the one hand a "good" life offered them—drab, monotonous, unadventurous, stretching ahead indefinitely with nothing new, not even sex to lure them on; a life of facts, some dry as dust, others sordid and cynical—a "good" life without vision, guaranteed unto death (what a pretence! — We know that where there is no vision, a people perish) ; a life they are expected to accept passively and docilely and, on the other hand the "bad" life in which the initiative, the planning, the decisions rest with them. Although far from behaving with originality, they are surely only imitating the chief forms of adventure, excitement, vio-

lence and destruction, in a search for release and ecstasy, provided by their elder's fictitious models as exposed on the screen, the printed page, coloured advertisements and in the predatory design of their fast motorcars.

If we cannot provide a wholesome environment for infants, children and adolescents within the stream of our daily adult lives, we owe it to them, or at least to the most promising, talented and best of them, if we cannot afford to do better, to take these out of the stream into special, quiet lakes where they can develop beyond such corrupting influences in the time-honoured English way.

But even more important is the quality of adults, the teachers serving such groups of children, for they must be of the brightest quality. It is nonsense to assert in one breath the need for a higher general average of education, which it is officially admitted cannot be accomplished without depriving the better schools of their teachers, and in the next breath to demand more scientists, more astronomers, more of the first-class in every walk of life. I am afraid that, by the sheer force of mathematics, and until we can train many more teachers of the very highest calibre and imagination, we are committed to unequal education. A simultaneous two-pronged drive is the only answer — the highest standards must be defended, even improved, undiluted as much as possible, and the lowest standards raised, broadened and improved as much as possible.

Although I realise that the demands of industry and commerce are justified, I fear somewhat when I see how heavily indebted our culture and our values are both to new wealth and new government. For instance, when we reiterate every day the overwhelming importance of a nation's economy, its industrial capacity, financial credit, technical standards, nuclear knowledge and so on, do we really mean to imply that a country's moral and physical health, its attitude to family, other people, sickness, famine, death and birth are either of negligible importance, or utterly dependent upon the aforementioned items, and do we mean that without these items we ourselves, or the inhabitants of any country, would automatically revert to cannibalism and savagery, filth and desperation? When I look upon the Hindu civilisation, I for one refuse to believe this, but it is nonetheless important to be reasonably sure. I know that humility (e.g. the conviction that we are but one little link in the chain of life), and such terms as knowledge, beauty, love of one's fellow men, the need to act upon faith, reference for a Higher Power, the will to fight and sacrifice for one's loves, virtue and honour, all sound corny and old-fashioned, but they sound hollow only because they have so often been misused and because they carry hypocritical, dark overtones. Yet in a world bereft of all those things we produce today, it would become of supreme importance to know who would be trustworthy, who would nurse the sick and teach the young... wife, mother, husband, father and friend, all somewhat dusty appellations, these would come back into their own.

We need all these people desperately, all these wives and mothers and teachers, but it is most particularly the less gifted children, those who otherwise would adhere to the nameless mass who, even more than the gifted, need social opportunities, practical experience and service, craftwork and games. They must have their senses stimulated: our senses were given us to guide us, to delight and to warn us. These children most of all could enjoy stimulation of their senses; yet children in the cities are herded into conditions that are shocking to our five senses, from the foods they are given to the noise they must suffer. They spend most of their

day, especially if they spend their free time on the street instead of in your beautiful parks, in an aesthetically repulsive environment. How can they be expected to become self-expressive and creative if their own senses that might lead them are blunted and starved?

We must preserve the balance between the world of our senses and all its works from music to architecture, from sculpture to the culinary, and from poetry to mathematics, works of fancy and imagination, and that other partitioned world of knowledge and fact which has found its way into the printed page, the blueprint, the computer, the bomb and the satellite.

I would like to dwell shortly upon the teacher's attitude to children. Children are much quicker than adults in their perception of the vain and pompous, the unsympathetic, the ungenerous, the fraud and the fraudulent — these they all recognise instantly. For my own part I believe there is no shame in owning up to one's own ignorance, to ask a child quite honestly a matter of information about which the child may well be more informed than the adult, or to admit the stupidity, the tragic idiocies and arrogance of adults since creation. We must always be prepared to recognise superiority and pay respect wherever it is due, even if it crosses the line or runs against the stream of established strata of respect and rank. In these admissions there is no shame, for the pompous pretence of being all-knowing is worse than useless. Of course, a teacher must be able to guide and to impart ability, technique and knowledge in an absorbable way; he must also be able, however, to live every moment of his task as if it were his first and his last. His routine must merely serve him to understand the particular moment, the particular child, the particular need and condition; he must not lazily barricade himself behind his position of authority or the text book, not to speak of the cane, however useful these may be at times.

But for the purposes of education, this frozen kind of instruction is dead and, to the extent it may still be applied, it lays the cold hand of death on children's fancy, talent and, eventually, their souls and creative intellect as well. Thus not only should the teacher teach, but every person in the swim of life, as he never abandons learning, should also give part of his time to teaching. Surely a principal justification of early retirement of able people from Government or industry should be to enable such men and women to teach; and the teaching profession must be prepared to welcome assistance from every quarter and every age. I can think of nothing more degrading and humiliating in the human sense than the closed-shop mentality among teachers.

The position on the ladder, the hierarchy, as it were, of the teaching profession, or of any other social ladder, should merely be a skeleton on which the living flesh and blood—on which life itself must be hung. The teacher must have something on the one hand of the nursing mother, and on the other of course of the dignity of his rank and his task.

It was the superstitions we shared which have hitherto bound human beings into groups; it was the God that they had in common, the God covering all the unknowns and all the unspecified. He was there not to explain; He was there to punish. As He also had sometimes to prove His own free will, He, therefore, had to be arbitrary and wilful, like those Red Indian gods of volcanic origin, placated only by live sacrifice. He had always to be available to support us and if possible, to uphold and justify as many of our immediate urges, appetites, survival exigencies and all of our meaner impulses and this was only by proclaiming His superiority over the gods of all our chosen enemies. Thus belief as such is as ready to serve

the wicked as the good; it certainly does not of itself resolve the conflict of good and bad. Even the pardoning, forgiving God who, in the long run in spite of our best efforts, even forgives our enemies, does not quite achieve this. No, I firmly believe our new morality, our new faith, can and must be based on foundations far more solid than have ever before existed. As our teachers change, so will our Gods and vice versa.

Morality may be divine, but it is not dependent upon God. It is by no means the preserve of any one church or "ism". But it is a formula for the highest kind of success.

The test of success in life is a happy and healthy old age, as well as the happiness of those one has lived with, and beyond that, of one's own people and all the peoples of all the earth. Again they are other limited fields of success depending upon criteria: the highest is self-sacrifice to others, as well as for knowledge and achievement in art and science. Somewhere in the middle there is success in finance and other forms of worldly success; in security and various forms of privilege, such as that of being able to order one's life more or less as one would like to. And, lowest of all, is success gained by cunning, flattery or brutality, all of which lead to very pitiful ends.

And finally, the words of a poet who saw more than we can explain

*All nature is but art unknown to thee,
All chance, direction which thou canst not see,
All discord, harmony, not understood,
All partial evil, universal good.*