

## THE SCIENCE OF ETHICS: II. ETHICAL JUDGMENT

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Civilization is hooped together, brought  
Under a rule, under the semblance of peace  
By manifold illusion. (W.B. Yeats, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, 1917/1970)

**ABSTRACT:** *Ethics, to have scientific stature, has to be discovered, as a natural development of social and individual life. An example is provided with respect to the Iran hostages crisis of 1979-80: mass communication news described Iran as "crazy," when the reality was a difference of opinion in the American government as to how to deal with a religious revolution. Quantum factor analysis discovered a moral factor inherent in the opinion. Ethical judgment can be discovered, with morality adherent to it.*

### Introduction

Part I of "Science of Ethics" (Stephenson, 1987a) may seem like solving an Agatha Christi murder mystery. Logic looms large. But if ethics and morality

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have to reach scientific stature they must be *discovered*, like new elements in physics, and must be subject to corroboration in the manner described by Karl Popper (1959). Only what is more or less certain or probable is at issue, not any "literal" or "absolute truth." Yet we like, in Q methodology, to call this *truth-value* (Stephenson, 1987a: 24).

Basically, our version of ethics and morality is that these are facts of nature to be discovered in psychological experience. It is not that "goodness" exists, like the color of flowers, but that ethical value is inherent in psychological events, and it is the function of subjective science to determine what this is. Thus, in *Quantum Theory of Advertising* (Stephenson, 1986) social values (of honesty, reliability, etc.) and convergent selectivity (of pleasing oneself without harm to social values) were distinguished as principles: but the values had to be discovered. It is surely interesting that most of us wander freely in supermarkets and can no more steal or cheat than fly to the moon: we can determine what social controls are maintaining this morality. But women also become remarkably skillful in their shopping, as a matter of "pleasing themselves," as convergent selectivity. This was discovered. If it had been physics, the significance of this would have been like that for the separation of helium from hydrogen, a discovery by Rutherford in 1911 which led to the first observable nuclear transformation and the first artificial radioactivity, as well as to the discovery of the neutron and fission (Condon & Odishaw, 1958:9-72). It will be objected, how can we justify such a comparison, at such a profound level?

But if we are to accept subjective science as such, the quantized factor for convergent selectivity has precisely such a significance, as we shall indicate in this part of "Science of Ethics."

### Hegemony

Basically Q methodology is interbehavioral: and it is gratifying to find that some recent studies in the mass communication field are beginning to look in that direction too. One such is David L. Altheide's *Media Power* (1985). What was described as "social control" in *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (Ste-

phenson, 1967) is hegemony in Altheide's work, i.e., the way in which...

...a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutions and private manifestations. (Altheide, 1985: 57)

There follows a key concept in Altheide's work with regard to hegemony:

...when culture is unmasked, a repressive dimension of social life not previously recognized is revealed. (Altheide, 1985: 57)

As Altheide admits, this is the Marxist viewpoint, of a ruling class suppressing the masses, and *Media Power* documents the social and individual codes that flood the Western mass media, the courts of law, and journalism--all to the effect that truth-value is being suppressed. An example is the manner in which the news about the Iran crisis of President Carter's days focused almost daily (for 444 days) on the Iranian students at the American Embassy gates:

...the fist shakers yelling "Death to Carter, Death to America"...we conveyed a picture of a nation in the grip of madness, and yet just a few blocks away...people are going about their lives in a normal fashion. Mothers are taking their babies to the park. Businesses are opened. Tehran is pretty much working as normal. (George Lewis, cited by Altheide, 1985: 84)

Where, however, is the truth-value? And what has ethics to say?

### The Play-theoretical Position

In chapter 13 of *The Play Theory of Mass Communication*, on the "Army-McCarthy Hearings," there is reference to early work of G.D. Wiebe, psychologist for CBS. He had speculated that ordinary Americans

viewing the Hearings would be concerned about civil rights:

...that it is wrong to assume guilt until innocence is proved; that assuming guilt by association is wrong; that freedom of speech should not be encroached upon; that no man should sit simultaneously as prosecutor, judge and jury. (Stephenson, 1967: 170)

Wiebe found, to his surprise, that his *respondents had no such values in mind, directly or indirectly*, though he couldn't fathom what. Two years later it dawned upon him that their system of values had to do with McCarthy symbolized as a "lone hero"--McCarthy was conceived as *right*, a selfless, dedicated, sincere, courageous man, sticking to his convictions, blameless, fighting a lonely battle against detractors--a David against an army of Goliaths (Stephenson, 1967:170).

Wiebe attributed the "lonely hero" theme to psychoanalytic ego formations, as if Wrath was a godly superego. But educated youthful Americans, given a concourse from Buddha's *Sermon at Benares* (without any knowledge of this source) created their own moralities; they distinguished "spice of life" from ideal modes in ongoing values (Stephenson, 1980a:886). As I said then, "there is the possibility that values are subject to operant factor structures"--"a matter of very great significance indeed!"

I continued as follows: "What holds for the *Sermon at Benares* applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to all conspiring about anything ever written or created in the subjective domain" (Stephenson, 1980a:886). What Altheide expected as Marxist "ideological freedom" is no longer suppositional: we can determine what the truth-values really are. Thus, in my study in 1964-1965 of the *Alliance for Progress*, based on the work of Obaid and Maritano (1963), I found that the value system in Latin America was neither within a purely democratic nor a communistic frame of reference, but something "spiritual"--in the mode of Rodo's *Ariel* (1922)--and indeed the founding Sandanista National Liberation Front was socialistic, founded in 1962 with Catholic concern for the poor

(designed as N.P. Peritore put it, "to build the kingdom of God on earth" [Peritore, 1987: 56]).

All such can be accepted. But note the difference now before us. *When culture is unmasked by Q methodology it can reach truth-values inherent in the situations at issue, independent of the suppositions and speculations of theorists.*

### The Problem of Ethical Judgment

In "William James, Niels Bohr and Complementarity: V. Phenomenology of Subjectivity" (Stephenson, 1987c), the question is broached as to how far "infinite thinking" about situations can arrive at genuine truth-values--such as Obaid and Maritano about Latin America. The basic premise of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology promises as much, and present-day clinical psychology makes hay with the same premise. And do we not credit a few experienced journalists, such as James Reston and Thomas Wicker of the *New York Times* with reaching unbiased positions? Is this just a matter of experience? Or is it not more likely that they too have "hidden consciences," that tugs them into truth-value because they find it essentially unethical to accept the common run of biased mass communication about current events? In paper V, on phenomenology, it is evident that no matter what may be the case, Q methodology offers a scientific approach to the problems.

### Ethical Judgment<sup>1</sup>

Sir Geoffrey Vickers, whose *The Art of Judgment* (1965) is a classic, considers that problems of ethical judgment, whether at governmental or individual levels, are "insoluble, indeed unspecifiable." Art, not science, is at issue. He adds that the problems are unspecifiable for a good reason:

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in this section appears in Stephenson (1987b), but has been retained in this paper (originally written in 1982) due to the fuller elaboration of important points. (Ed.)

...The standards which the policymaker must apply are partly tacit. They cannot be made fully explicit; and this seems to be at least partly due to the way the human mind works. (Vickers, 1973a:327)

He quotes Christopher Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, to support this tacit dimension; but Alexander's system works negatively, by eliminating misfits. Nevertheless, Vickers regarded this dimension as of great generality and importance--"it explains the political process."

The reader will be alert to the closeness of this tacit dimension to our basic principle, that subjectivity is transformable into operant factor structures--all tacit, and indeed due to the way the mind appears to work. And it need be no surprise to learn that *The Art of Judgment* can be transformed by way of Q methodology into a science. For Vickers, ethical standards are "intensely conservative": they serve, he wrote later, to stabilize "self and mutual expectations, by which alone a society hangs together." On the other hand, he added, every ethical system has within it the seeds of its own disruption. So the welfare legislation of Britain in the 1940s (*The Beveridge Report*, with its five giant evils--unemployment, sickness, ignorance, squalor, and want) is now in eclipse. Its basis was a century of emphasis on liberal values, and upon the after-effect of a great depression and the terrible 1914-1918 war. If a new Beveridge Plan were to be produced now, it would undoubtedly be for a different set of evils, reflecting new "self and mutual expectations" by which a society exists.

It is very interesting that Vickers did not use the term "self" in his *The Art of Judgment*: it appears in the essay from which the above quotation is taken, entitled "Communication and Ethical Judgment" (1973a), and in comments he wrote about my own contribution to the same set of essays (Stephenson, 1973; cf. Vickers, 1973b). Everything he wrote about judgment, however, had clearly beckoned to the thesis that self reference is crucial in it. The fact that different values (different evils) emerge under new conditions of "self and mutual expectations" should suggest an interbehavioral

context. In Q methodology this is also subject to quantum factor theory and indeterminism, which may seem to justify Vickers' concept of ethical judgment as "insoluble, indeed unspecifiable." But it is a mistake to think so. Operant factors are decision structures, pointing to possible courses of future action. The essential matter is to look for discovery, not determinism, for answers to ethical problems.

To exemplify this important matter, I have chosen to consider my reaction in 1980 to the Iranian crisis. Its broader concern is with political science, of which there is now a growing awareness of subjective science within it (Brown, 1980).

### The Iran Crisis (1980)

We recall Kant's dictum on moral sentiment, that values are matters of moral, not intellectual judgment. This was exemplified in a study of the Iranian crisis, where, as we shall find, operant factors separated moral from intellectual judgment.

In 1980, a former Attorney-General of the United States, Mr. Ramsey Clark, disobeyed a presidential order not to visit Iran where 53 American subjects were held hostage. For many in America, Ramsey Clark's visit was an outrageous act, treasonable. For Clark, it was what his conscience dictated. Personal conscience was set against geopolitics.

In the flood of opinion about Ramsey Clark's conscience and culpability, we ourselves seem to come to our own positions about the matter with little hesitation--we are either for, or against him, almost instantly. But if we ask, "What is the truth-value in the situation?", it is a very different matter: we become involved in policies and policymaking, besides our own positions. And about policymaking, to quote Sir Geoffrey Vickers,

...problems are unspecifiable. They are unspecifiable, first, because they are unsoluble. In order to choose one of many possible part-solutions, the policymaker must redefine his problem. He must choose one of many soluble problems, in preference not only to the insoluble original, but from among an indefinite number of alternative soluble ones, of which

he can explore only a very few. And his choice of problem is in effect his solution. (Vickers, 1973a:327)

This testifies to the complexity of such situations: but we now know how to choose part-solutions, how to make specifications about them, and although we may explore only a few, the answers are not merely arbitrary and dependent on the problems chosen. For the study now to be reported I chose myself as subject, and, by Q, could determine how ethics entered (by specifications about a few insolubles) into my feelings about the Iranian crisis.

My approach to the problem was made easy by a series of articles by Robert Shaplen in *The New Yorker* for June 2, 9, 16, 1980, ostensibly a profile of David Newsom, the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs and highest ranking officer of the U.S. State Department, but really a policy paper on the Iranian situation. In addition to the innumerable soluble and unsoluble problems there was the usual interlacing with statements of opinion, which entail such problems, as in the following examples from Shaplen's articles:

- The Shah seemed genuine: no one in the U.S. realized how much he was hated in Iran.
- Khomeini and the captors were hostages to each other.
- We have to regret the tremendous attention paid to the hostages by the U.S. press.
- The ramifications will have far-reaching effects on the character and conduct of American foreign policy.
- The strategic considerations of the Middle East are of paramount importance.
- We should have forgotten about the hostages, at least publicly, until the Iranians had sorted themselves out.

...and so on, for a hundred more, all in Shaplen's language, embracing, it seemed, every aspect of the crisis.

A collection of these opinions constitutes a *con-course*, the domain of self reference, and from it I

chose 42 statements to be my Q sample, with which to perform Q sorts to represent my feelings about the crisis, at the height of the situation.

The conditions of instruction for 10 Q sorts are given in Table 1. I chose to represent the feelings (in my judgment) of key persons in the crisis and of some of the "forces" at issue. My own feeling is included (Q sort 7). I performed the Q sorts a day each part, to reduce confounding; the operant factor solution is that of Table 1.

Table 1  
OPERANT FACTOR STRUCTURE  
FOR THE IRANIAN CRISIS

Conditions of Instruction	Factors		
	I	II	III
1. Henry Kissinger's position	X		
2. U.S. press and TV position	X		
3. The Common Market standpoint			X
4. Ramsey Clark's viewpoint	-X		X
5. Iranian religious leaders' standpoint		X	
6. David Newsom's viewpoint		-X	
7. Experimenter's viewpoint (W.S.)			X
8. Viewpoint of Bani Sadr, Ghotb-zadeh	-X	X	
9. The standpoint of Saudi Arabia			-X
10. USSR's position		X	

X=significant factor loading, all other values insignificant

There was no way for me to manipulate the Q sorting to produce this complex structure, which arises tacitly from the context of the 42 statements of the Q sample and the conditions of instruction for Q sorts. In Q sort 1, I merely sought to represent what I believed to be Henry Kissinger's position, judging by his speeches and press statements. Similarly for each Q sort in turn, including my own feeling (Q sort 7).

Three distinct feelings are indicated, for factors I, II, and III.

In this example the Q sorts are not probes by way of known laws, but expressions of my direct judgment in each case. There are laws at issue, however, namely Taylor's (that the Q sorts are reliable), and Peirce's (that the factors will be schematic), and of course Newton's Fifth Rule (that the factors are hypotheses other than those of the initial Q sorts). Each factor is a theoretical Q sort, like any performed by a Q sorter: each therefore consists of the 42 statements of the Q sample arranged schematically, scored in standard pure number units (*quantsal*), which we represent on a linear scale from +5 to -5, i.e., from strong positive feeling to strong negative, with a point of *no* feeling at the center of the scale.

What the feelings are can be grasped sufficiently by statements gaining +5 on a factor, if the statements are discriminative, as is the case in the following examples:

Statements	Scores		
	I	II	III
The chaotic conditions in Iran threaten the political disintegration of Iran, and guarantee USSR dominance there.	5	-2	-2
Because of America's long friendship with and support of the Shah, it was inevitable that anti-U.S. feelings would run high.	1	5	1
The Shah should have been pushed much earlier into forming a more broadly-based regime.	-1	-2	5

The statements are highly discriminative: thus the first statement scores +5 for factor I, and negative (-2, -2) for factors II and III.

The 42 statements of the Q sample find their due places for factor I, representing throughout the factor a preoccupation, apprehension, or fear of USSR dominance in the Mideast. The fear is positive

of course for Kissinger and the U.S. press, and negative (rejected) by Clark and the two Iranian leaders. The underlying feeling is one of distrust, fear, of USSR influence.

The second statement--that because of America's long friendship with the Shah, anti-American feelings must run high--begins factor II, and the 42 statements are now a schema that represents justification for the Revolution. One would expect the USSR (Q sort 10) to support this feeling, and it is loaded on the factor. What is surprising (and it was to me) is the *negative* loading of David Newsom: the position is as it is represented in Shaplen's articles, but it appears as if Newsom really knew what was at issue, and had to reject it. Factor II, then, represents a feeling of support for the Khomeinian Revolution.

The two factors, I and II, have no moral or ethical content: nothing is categorically imperative, nothing is an *ought to be* situation or feeling. On the contrary, the feelings appear to stem from intellectual sources, of knowledge about the situation. Moreover, both factors have truth-value: factor I represents the anti-communism posture of the U.S. as its dominant foreign policy; and for factor II, Khomeini has solidified his religious revolution.

It is very different for factor III, where the concern from top to bottom of the factor, from +5 to -5, is with what *ought* to have been done. An ethical matter, a moral sentiment, is the beginning and end of the factor. The underlying feeling is one of *concern* for the situation, of pity for everyone concerned, since it was bound to be destabilizing.

Factor III represents a feeling of disquiet, supportive of neither the U.S. nor the Khomeinian positions; and it represents not so much a rational, intellectualized feeling, but a moral sentiment.

### Applicability

The methodology has separated, empirically, moral from intellectualized judgments: it was for this reason that I chose to present this particular study, because it suggests inherency for morality.

What, then, are we to conclude about a "moral sentiment"? I had chosen an able journalist's policy paper on the Iran crisis, picking from it statements

of opinion everywhere expressed by leading persons. What was at issue was not an international crisis of "armies marching, or missiles on the ready," but *opinion* as to what the American government must do, along with the Shah, as a matter of national policy. The mass media never represented this in the news: instead, it presented Iran as "a nation in the grip of madness" (Altheide, 1985: 84). In *Media Power*, Altheide makes it abundantly clear that the mass media, for the 444 days of the Iran crisis, described Iran as "weird": it was "neither East nor West; capitalist nor communist," but a country with "a weird, crazy, and unpredictable political and religious orientation" (Altheide, 1985: 91).

How, then, could a moral sentiment, such as factor III represented, enter into policymaking?

It happens, of course, that the Iran crisis of 1979-1980 is being replayed as these lines are being written: the atmosphere in the Persian Gulf is now more warlike than it was when Khomeini took power eight years ago. One doubts whether authorities in the American government have changed their belief that Khomeini is "crazy" and Iran a country of "fury and fanatic zeal" (Greenwald, 1987). One hopes that there is greater recognition that Khomeini's ultimate aim is indeed revolutionary, to "extend Shiite fundamentalism over all of Islam, and to recover the unity and power that the Muslim world has lost since the Middle Ages" (Greenwald, 1987:28). It indeed may seem "crazy": but Khomeini has commanded the attention of both superpowers, and of all his Arab neighbors; Iran is a nation of 50 million people, more than the rest of the Islam nations in the Gulf put together (except for Egypt). The world has to reckon with it. There are reporters (e.g., R. Wright, of the Carnegie Institute) who remind us that today's crisis started with Iraq, not Iran; that the U.S. government is fearful of USSR influence in the Gulf; and that the U.S. government's position remains without a clear statement of policy. It was against this that the "moral sentiment" of factor III was directed eight years ago. No matter who is Khomeini's successor, a spiritual force is at issue in the Iranian Revolution, and this is what factor III has *discovered*.

The reader may not have grasped the force of my comparison of Rutherford's discovery of helium with the discovery of a factor for convergent selectivity in *Quantum Theory of Advertising* (Stephenson, 1986). If subjective science is to be granted credibility, then factor III has every bit as much truth-value as factors I and II, that everyone accepts. But few, other than a rare R. Wright, is cognizant of the spiritual force loose in Islam and seek to give it pity, for everyone concerned, because that is bound to be destabilizing. Half a million young men have already been killed in the Iraq-Iran War. Acceptance of factor III, like that for helium, could make tenable policy possible.

### Conclusion

In the context of ethics, there is now a way to lay bare what is, and what is not, of truth-value which reaches into the secrets of one's conscience. Its *modus operandi* is the "single case," which does not mean that everyone is his or her own moral master--on the contrary, one is subject to social controls almost without end. The point is that we can now determine how far a person's conduct is, or is not ethical, in terms of the criteria of matters outside purely personal considerations, and acknowledgement of self as independent of itself, both tacit, both with empirical (operant) roots, supported by a growing "body of knowledge," as shown in Part I of this paper. In the example for the Iran crisis of 1979-1980, the separation of moral sentiment from intellectual policies is inherent in the situation, outside any conscious control by me. The factor issues from Newton's Fifth Rule (Stephenson, 1979), as a new hypothesis, about which I can say, as Kant (1900) put it, that

*I believe, I am morally certain...and not*

*...it is morally certain that something should have been done.*

But there is now available to us something that Kant's pure reason could not provide, the inherent

objective character of the factor, grasped as truth-value, and essentially a discovery.

Method is procedure in accordance with principles: and our principles are very simple--of course as an empirical matter, of Q sorting as heuristic, of factor theory which, though complex mathematically is nevertheless simple conceptually. Ethics has been rendered scientific, to use Henry Sidgwick's term<sup>2</sup>--if not true, certainly systematic and reasonable. It is of course more: anyone may seek to corroborate it, or to find it wanting, in the manner of Karl Popper's logic of science.

What I have been exemplifying is the ubiquity of self reference in all things ethical. This has been the burden of these pages, as it was in the earlier paper of this series, "The Shame of Science" (Stephenson, 1978), "Michael Polanyi, Science and Belief" (1980b), and "An Ethical Problem for Psychoanalytic Doctrine" (1982).

What is at issue is not morality or ethics in any categorized sense, but *my* morality, *my* ethics, in line with the concluding thoughts in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Yet the *my* is sufficiently encompassed, for the advancement of subjective science, by studies of relatively few of us--it does not require looking at a thousand eyes to find that mine are blue: so it is for a President, a Secretary of State, a Pope, an Archbishop, a Field-marshal, a Nobel Prize winner in physics, a Sister Teresa of Calcutta, a Castro, and indeed anyone involved in critical choices of conduct.

The method is applicable to ethical questions quite generally, including the "conscientious objections" people have to this-or-that, and the massive moralities played out in the names of ideologies and religions. There is truth-value to find in all such. Philosophers of the past century, at best, called this

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<sup>2</sup> Reference is to the epigram at the beginning of Part I: "The aim of ethics is to render scientific--i.e., true, and as far as possible systematic--the apparent cognitions that most men have of the rightness or reasonableness of conduct..." (Sidgwick, 1874).

instinctive moral sense, as we find in Darwin's *The Descent of Man*:

I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important. This sense...has a rightful supremacy over every other principle of human action, it is summed up in that short but imperious word *ought*, so full of high significance. It is the most noble of all the attributes of man.... (n.d.:471)

So it could be, but only when conscience and self reference are grasped as the coordinates of the imperative *ought*.

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