

AMORALISM (from Latin *a*—not, *moralis*—customary, moral)—a position that either completely rejects the existence of the moral good (radical amoralism) or subordinates the moral good to other goods (moderate amoralism, relativism).

Amoralism may arise from metaphysical, epistemological, or anthropological premises. In the first case there is a denial of the intelligibility of being, and so also of the intelligibility of human nature, its teleological orientation, and the final good and end of man (nihilism). In the second case there is a denial that it is possible to know objective truth (subjectivism, Skepticism, and agnosticism). In the third case human freedom is treated as an absolute, and in the name of freedom any objective good of the person apart from human freedom is rejected. This freedom is situated beyond good and evil (F. Nietzsche).

Amoralism is not found in classical thought in which being always possessed rationality and was aimed at the realization of the end or good. Man discovered this inclination in the form of obligations and commands to perform the good. The good was conceived as the last end of action and was described as happiness (Aristotle). From the time of Socrates the relation between virtue and happiness ran through all of ancient ethics. Even the thought of the Stoics may be interpreted in this spirit, that their view of reality as indifferent in axiological terms was a quest for virtue as the independence of the soul from what is external, a question for man's internal autonomy and harmony. Although the Epicureans regarded pleasure as the center of ethics, they did not abandon the idea that pleasure is subordinate to virtue as to a certain intellectual calculation that is necessary to achieve happiness as they conceived it.

In Christian thought it is not possible to argue for amoralism. The intelligibility of being is linked with God's omniscience and omnipotence, and human history is linked with His providence. Man cannot go beyond good and evil. He cannot arbitrarily decide what is good and evil and cannot avoid the moral responsibility into which he enters when he comes into existence.

MODERATE OR RELATIVISTIC AMORALISM is ascribed to the Sophists. It arose from their difficulty in defining the nature of man's knowledge and nature. They denied that it is possible to know objective truth. The radical negation of truth was expressed in three theses of Gorgias: (a) nothing exists; (b) or if it does exist we cannot know it; (c) or if it can be known, we cannot express it or communicate it to others. These theses precluded any criterion of truth (Skepticism). Protagoras advanced a less radical position. His starting point was not so much Skepticism as relativism. It is expressed in his basic principle: "man is the measure of all existing things, that they exist, and of non-existent things, that they do not exist". The principle of *homo-mensura* denied that it was possible to distinguish being from non-being or truth from falsehood. It made man the measure of things, that is, it would regard as truth whatever seemed true to any particular man (subjectivism, relativism). Protagoras did not apply this epistemological relativism consistently to moral questions but limited it according to the principle of utility and in this respect he was a pragmatist or utilitarian. The Sophists thought that moral norms are the result of a social convention (conventionalism) and are created by the strong to rule and exploit the weak, or by the weak to defend themselves against the strong. Aristippus of Cyrene defined utility in terms of sensual individual pleasure (egotistic hedonism).

Amoralism reappeared in modern and contemporary ethics. Thomas Hobbes reduced man to the biological instinct of self-preservation. The individual egotistic inclination to survival

and pleasure became a rule of conduct. C. A. Helvetius also set forth a principle of self-love with an emphasis on the benefit of the group. J. Bentham derived the idea of utility from Helvetius. Bentham's formulation of the norm—"the greatest happiness of the greatest number" became the classical principle of utilitarians. J. S. Mill corrected Bentham's exclusively quantitative conception of happiness or pleasure and said that there were qualitative differences among pleasures (hedonistic pluralism). We may regard utilitarianism as an ethical theory in which the good and man's last end are wrongly defined and the normal of morality is wrongly formulated.

RADICAL OR NEGATIVE AMORALISM is a tendency in modern and contemporary thought. We encounter it in the views of M. Stirner who as a radical individualist regarded good and evil as meaningless terms. Man exists outside any obligations or moral imperatives. He may live as if he were the only one in the world and act toward others as he pleases. Man's existence is an unending war of each against all.

The questioning of the objective order of the world, the rejection of objective morality, and especially of Christian morality, found radical expression in F. Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche thought that the world has no purpose or meaning, that there was neither truth nor good in the world. There is only the "will to power" which an individual man or stronger races can use to breed the superman.

J. P. Sartre takes this absolutization of freedom even further. In the name of a negative human freedom he rejects the existence of God, the existence of the objective world, and of moral imperatives. A moral act is good because it is an authentic act of freedom in spite of all imperatives. The subject is his own legislator. The only reason he needs for his laws is that he made them (autonomism).

Likewise, although the reasons are different, contemporary emotivist amoralism deprives morality of any rational justification. Emotivist amoralism developed chiefly within meta-ethics (A. J. Ayer, C. Stevenson). According to emotivists, ethical propositions are pseudo-propositions since they are an expression of irrational emotional states that overcome us. Contemporary culture as an emotivistic culture is full of amoralism. Amoralism is expressed in practice when the idea that there is no truth or good to which we can appeal is used to justify the widespread manipulation of others. Post-modern thinkers (such as J. Derrida, R. Rorty, and L. F. Lyotard) belong to this tendency in which not only objective truth and good are destroyed, but also any language that could express this truth and good.

AMORALISM AS A RESULT OF THE ABSOLUTIZATION OF VARIOUS DOMAINS OF LIFE. The breakdown of the classical connection between *verum*, *bonum*, and *pulchrum* bore fruit in modern times as different domains of modern came to be regarded as autonomous and absolute and were separated from morality.

N. Machiavelli proclaimed amoralism in the sphere of politics. He granted the state and the politician the right to operate outside all moral and religious responsibility. This is close to the amoralism of economism, the beginnings of which we may find in J. S. Mill's *homo oeconomicus*. It developed in various economic schools in which economic goods were regarded as if they were independent or superior to moral goods. The quest for these goods was associated with egotism, hedonism, or various forms of utilitarianism.

Esthetic amoralism arose from the rupture of all bonds between esthetic and moral values. Esthetic amoralism professes that esthetic values are completely independent of moral values, and even that moral good may be reduced to emotional esthetic experiences.

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