

*Moral Evaluation: Old and
Not-so-new Reflections*

***Conditions of Rational Inquiry: A
Study in the Philosophy of Value,***
by David Pole. *London: the Athlone
Press, 1961. 226 pp.*

IT IS REFRESHING to read any contem-
porary British philosopher who does not

flee from the word "value" or use the term as a token of reproach. Consequently, David Pole's *Conditions of Rational Inquiry* is worth a look, if for that reason alone. It is clear on which side of Gilbert Ryle he stands; he acknowledges the influences of John Wisdom without fear or favor.

But Mr. Pole's book is a curious one. In the first place, its title promises a feast that never really arrives. Secondly, it is a book which features some notable criticism and yet is a disappointment as a statement of a position. Perhaps some of the frustration the reader is bound to feel is the result of Mr. Pole's style and organisation, both of which are uneven and disjointed and could profit from a keener sense of economy.

Mr. Pole sets himself the task of reviving "moral judgment" (he also urges the restoration of the term "axiology") as an alternative to an intuitionism deeply suspect and a "voluntarism" which seems an ethical cul-de-sac. His analysis of the nature and problems of intuitionism is excellent, perceptive and succinct. His critique of contemporary ethical positivism centers around a devastating appraisal of Hare. Nowhere in the current literature is there a better reasoned rebuttal of positivistic ethics. While Mr. Pole concentrates on Hare as representative of this school of thought, Karl Popper is the subject of a few evaluatory remarks as well. As a commentator, Pole is immensely able.

His own description and defense of "judgment" as an alternative is by no means as precise or lucid. He insists upon the practicability of moral evaluation and its interrelation with inquiry, but he largely fails to provide a satisfactory account of the nature of evaluation. The survey of "rational inquiry" seems obvious and hardly novel. The fact that he advocates a growing zest for "communal" inquiry destined to produce moral "agreement" is commendable, but scarcely of itself significant.

"I have spoken," Pole writes, "of the ideal under which we work as the universal agreement of those who engage in inquiry; this, though we can never wholly realize it in practice, provides our great measure of success or failure." That moral inquiry ought to be about morals is also a reasonable point of view, but it need not be put forward as a fresh proposition.

Mr. Pole speaks of judgment:

What we need is a notion of judgment which shows it to us as a developing faculty, that takes account of the process of its evolution. And then on the other side we must see the body of any science or branch of study—the concepts and the language in which it works—as developing too. Ways of thinking and ways of speaking—the two must reflect one another—reveal a pattern of progress or growth, and to understand them we must study them accordingly. Further, unless reflection and inquiry led, in general, to better and truer views rather than otherwise there could be no such thing as rationality.

While not attempting to trace Mr. Pole's arguments in detail, I think it is fair to say that the fragment above is a just sample. It is paradoxical that after excoriating the linguistic tricks of Hare and Popper, Mr. Pole has fallen into the same trap himself. Surely it must be said of numerous working philosophers today, especially in Britain, that they are playing the game of clothing second-hand ideas in erudite and breathless language. "Breathless" is an appropriate adjective, since these encomiums are delivered with such a vivid sense of the exhilaration of discovery. Perhaps Bentham's quip about methodology is fitting here: that it teaches us less and less about what everyone knew all along. This is not to be construed as an outright condemnation of Mr. Pole or his book. His essay is

often enlightening and frequently stimulating. It is to be regretted, however, that it fails to realize its promise. That ethical investigation lies within the realm of the rational is certainly a hypothesis deserving of defense. Mr. Pole has made a useful contribution, a half defense, if you will, but as he doubtless scored against the positivists, so could they roughly treat the ambiguities of the concluding portions of his book.

Reviewed by DONALD A. ZOLL