

the occasional stirring in the limbs of the presumably-dead myths about human freedom, by the author's penchant for blackwashing the opposition in derisive adjectives, and by his occasional oversimplifications and hasty generalizations. But these are small matters when weighed against the value of a book that provokes as much thought as this one does, and lets as much fresh air into the musty chambers of perennial problems.

Reviewed by HUGH MERCER CURTLER

Of Dilemmas and Confusions

The Moral Choice, by Daniel C. Maguire, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1978. 477 pp. \$10.95.

Right and Wrong, by Charles Fried, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1978. 226 pp. \$15.00.

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT to imagine two books dealing with the same general subject of moral values more different than the two brought together in this review. The first is encyclopaedic in nature, ranging over wide fields of literature and human experience, vividly aware of dilemmas in ordinary life, intent on providing guide-lines for conduct amidst the vast complexities of our contemporary world. The second is cool, restrained, probing a severely limited range of issues, seeking to establish certain basic principles which can govern the behavior of, for example, the lawyer and the doctor in the pursuit of their professional duties. The first is geared to the interests and questions of students of all kinds: the second is very much the product of the Harvard Law School.

One is inclined to wonder whether ethical issues have ever presented greater problems than they do today. Yet as far as the ordinary

individual is concerned it often seems that he has no choice any longer: the immense systems of control made possible by modern technological developments leave him powerless in face of what are crucial moral issues—armaments, human rights, methods of diplomacy, economic strategies. A few individuals are burdened with the responsibility of making major decisions: the multitude, it appears, must bear the consequences. How, then, can the individual any longer enjoy the freedom to make decisions at all?

Fortunately we are not yet held fast within a totalitarian technological system, and in home and college and business the individual is still confronted daily by alternative possibilities of behavior. Can he be supplied with normative, guiding principles? Mr. Charles Fried believes that he can and seeks to establish a moral system in which certain acts must be regarded as right or wrong in themselves, whatever the consequences may turn out to be. It is a bold claim in face of the pervading climate of relativism and the widespread hostility to authority of any kind. "In the view I shall elaborate," he writes, "right and wrong have an independent and overriding status because they establish our basic position as freely choosing entities . . . "Right and wrong are the expressions of respect for persons—respect for others and self-respect."

I have spoken of guiding lines. Perhaps for Fried's system it would be better to speak of a guiding star which, as it were, hovers over his whole exposition. This is the star of "personhood" or "moral personality": respect for persons may not be compromised in any way for the value of personhood is "the presupposition and substrate of the very concept of choice." It is not sufficient to allow our actions to be determined by what are likely to be good or bad consequences. Rather it is necessary to recognize that there are certain actions which are plainly *wrong* and must not be done at any cost. The two primary examples treated at some length are doing bodily harm and lying. Each is regarded as a form of deliberate disrespect to the person and therefore as wrong in all circumstances.

Fried grants that the questions of what is

right and of the nature of human *rights* are more complex and cannot be answered with the categorical firmness which is possible in regard to what is wrong. But so far as wrong-doing is concerned he is ready to use the term *absolute*. The norms surrounding respect for persons are absolute: any action which denies to any other the status of a "freely choosing, rationally valuing, specially efficacious person" is wrong without any qualification. The sanctity of the self must not in any way be undermined by consideration, for example, of the common good.

This is a book of careful analysis and balanced judgment whose central hypothesis I should wish strongly to support. But I am surprised that so little attention is paid to problems of language and meaning and that virtually no reference is made to psychological and sociological interpretations of human behavior. Most of all I am puzzled by the use of the term *absolute* and then by the qualification "limited absolutism." I do not understand how *personal* relationships can be governed by any kind of *impersonal absolute*. It has been the contention of such thinkers as Martin Buber that the only final sanction for respect between persons is the recognition that all are dependent upon the God who is personally related to men.

In contrast to Fried, who concentrates attention upon the one criterion—respect for persons—Daniel Maguire rings the changes on a succession of criteria: he uses the model of a wheel to represent no less than nine evaluational processes which can take place in dealing with ethical problems. He defines two phases in ethics, the expository and the evaluational, the first being concerned with the gathering of facts, data, records, the second with the pluriform possibilities of evaluation that are available to man as he seeks to come to terms with the data. These evaluations are like spokes in the model and consist of such factors as creative imagination, affectivity, reason, and group experience. As far as the expository aspect is concerned he pleads for a passionate realism which is prepared to ask questions fearlessly. To the evaluational aspect he devotes a succession of chapters each full of

concrete examples and literary references. There seems to be hardly any sphere of human activity which the author does not touch in some way.

A key phrase taken from the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas is of vital importance for Maguire: "human actions are good or bad according to the circumstances." Not that this implies a boundless relativism. Rather he defines his task in this way: Ethics, in fact, can be seen as a dialogue conducted by the moral agent between the moral meaning found in principles and that found in the unique circumstances of the case. Principles, he continues, are thus tied to the empirical order by reason of their origin and their application.

I feel bound to say that I find the conception of dialogue far more congenial than that of absolutism—even limited absolutism. Maguire is well versed in the writings of Aristotle and Aquinas and Kant, but he stays very close to the problems of the contemporary world. It is through a running dialogue between ancient and modern, between principles and actual situations that guide-lines can be constructed and courage to act stimulated.

So many subjects are treated in this book that it is impossible to summarize them. Conscience and guilt, myth and ideology, tragedy and comedy, reason and affection, individual and social experience, authority and exceptional cases. All of these are dealt with in a lively and constructive way, and though their precise reference to ethical problems may at times seem a little tenuous, the author is determined to leave no spoke out of the picture in his description of the stages of evaluation within his wheel model. I greatly admire the breadth of his vision derived from wide reading in all manner of subjects for there is no department of life from which ethical decisions are excluded. "Ethics," as Maguire comments at one point, "is concerned with the systematic discernment of what does or does not befit the mysterious and complex totality of personal life." This means that if the teacher of ethics is to deal with actual situations, and not only with abstract principles, he must make himself aware, as best he can, of the enormous increase in complexity brought about by scientific

developments in communications, in medicine, in warfare, in sexual relationships, in commerce, in government.

It is an almost frightening task but it seems to me that Maguire has made a valiant attempt at it and although no man can speak with finality on the "moral choice," he has given us the fruit of his long experience of teaching and reading in a way which inspires confidence and clarifies the kind of issues which may confront us at any time. I could wish that he had given more attention to the connection between morals and religion, which he mentions briefly. He dwells at some length upon the significance of what he designates the "supreme sacrifice," the willingness to die for certain "person-related values," but he does not connect this

directly with the place of the Cross in Christianity. But "supreme sacrifice" in Maguire and "absolute" in Fried are in many, if not most, contexts *religious* terms. That religions have often been weak in moral practice must readily be allowed, but that morality can be sustained and that individuals can be lifted to new heights of moral endeavour without any kind of religious sanction seems to me at least open to question.

These two very different books, each the fruit of careful scholarly investigation and organization, are worthy attempts to shed light upon the moral dilemmas and confusions of our own time.

Reviewed by F. W. DILLISTONE