

# Alienation and Self-realization

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Self-realizationist theories are among the classical attempts to develop a comprehensive normative ethical theory. Plato and Aristotle, in giving classical statements of such theories, argue that a man's distinctive happiness, a man's distinctive flourishing, will only be realized when he realizes himself, i.e. when he achieves to the fullest possible degree his distinctive function. And to achieve one's function is to develop to the full those capacities which are distinctive of the human animal. In doing this we are being most truly ourselves and in doing this we are doing what it is our own nature to do. Men who cultivate to the fullest that which men and only men have will be the happiest men and in so acting they will realize themselves most fully; they will achieve their maximum potential or their fullest distinctively human growth. To so realize oneself is the final end of all moral activity. It defines what is to constitute 'the good life' and what is to count as 'a good man'.

A self-realizationist would argue that to find a good *x* is (1) to discover the function of *x* and (2) to find which *x*'s will fulfil this function effectively. And to find the best *x* is to find the sort of *x* that most effectively (efficiently) fulfils this function. We will find the end or rationale of all human activity when we clearly apprehend the function of man. The man who realizes himself most fully is the man who develops to the full his distinctive capacities as a man. This is self-realization, this is human growth, and this is the end of all moral endeavour.

More generally, and apart from Plato's and Aristotle's particular formulations, the ultimate moral ideal should be to attain the fullest degree of self-realization. That is to say, the end of moral activity is to enable us to be most truly ourselves. This, a self-realizationist is contending, should be the underlying rationale and justification of morality. Moral rules, actions, practices, attitudes and institutions are judged good or bad just to the extent that they contribute to self-realization. Rule A or action A is better than rule B or action B if A is more conducive to self-realization than B. The aim of all moral action is to further self-realization to the highest degree. We should always aim to realize our potentialities or capacities—that is, ourselves—as fully as possible.

This comforting formula, as Rashdall calls it, has some very serious ambiguities and difficulties. Taken together they raise a serious challenge to self-realizationist theories of ethics. In fact many philosophers think such accounts are thoroughly discredited—that self-realization is not, and

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cannot be, the end of moral endeavour or the ultimate standard of moral appraisal. However, in rejecting what has been called—not without point—‘the murky doctrine of self-realization’, philosophers have neglected to attend to what may be important insights embedded in the theory. I shall try to show why it will not succeed as an ultimate moral criterion but I do not want to throw the baby out with the bath-water. I think there are insights in such accounts that need to be brought out and that there are problems raised by such a moral theory which need to be faced.

First, we need to ask whether on such an account we are to realize or seek to realize *all* our potentialities as a man or only some. If, in realizing our great Gyntian selves, we are to seek to realize all our potentialities, we are in reality seeking something that cannot be achieved, for we have an indefinitely large number of them, and furthermore, we frequently have conflicting capacities. The plain fact is that they cannot all be realized. We must choose which capacities we ought to realize. But to do this, it would seem that we would need some other criterion than self-realization, for, on the above account, to realize ourselves is simply to realize our capacities to the fullest extent.

It might be replied that where we cannot realize both of two conflicting capacities we should realize that capacity which would tend on the whole to enable us to realize the greater number of our capacities to the fullest extent. Suppose Jones has a considerable potential for, and indeed a liking of, boxing and rapid driving, but he also has a potential for, and extensive liking of, intellectual work. If he develops the latter and inhibits the former he, in turn, is much more likely to develop more potentialities that are distinctive of the human animal. More generally, and in accordance with the above, a self-realizationist might argue that our self-realizationist standard should be: each man should realize as many of his capacities as possible and, where his capacities conflict, he should choose those capacities which will contribute as fully as possible to the actualization of his other potentialities.

To argue in this way is, in effect, to argue that we should become ‘good, all round people’. But it seems to me that Rashdall is quite correct in claiming that such an ideal is, in effect, a defence of mediocrity or dilettantism. I can hardly develop my talents, such as they are, as a philosopher, bookie, long-distance runner, preacher, boxer, neuro-surgeon and pianist all at the same time, or without prejudice of one to the other. The analytical powers I develop as a philosopher hardly further my emotional outpourings as a preacher. The time I need to spend at the piano to play it really well, will hardly allow me to become much of a long-distance runner and the punishment to my hands in boxing will hardly serve me well in performing delicate operations or in playing Prokofiev’s Second Piano Concerto. I could seek to be an ‘all around’ fellow and develop all of these capacities a little, but then I will most surely end up doing none of them well, so that in

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anything I set my hand to I will be a mediocrity. Is such a dilettantish life the best possible life? Would I not do better for myself and for others by developing my philosophic talents to the fullest? That way I indeed do not achieve the harmonious fulfilment of as many of my capacities as possible, but do I not, by doing something else instead—in this case developing my philosophic talents—do something which is more worthwhile and which also serves my own interests more adequately?

If this last question is answered in the affirmative, then self-realization appears at least *not* to be our ultimate moral standard. If answered in the negative, the question immediately springs to mind: what reason is there for claiming that each individual ought always develop as many of his capacities as possible? Why not argue, alternatively, that each individual should develop those capacities that he *wants* most to develop? Or why not, instead, argue that he should develop those that will make for everyone involved the greatest amount of good all around? It seems to me that in opting for the fullest development of all one's capacities and potentialities, such a self-realizationist theory is offering us an ultimate moral standard that will not survive critical scrutiny.

## II

Suppose instead we mean by 'realizing yourself' essentially what Aristotle meant, namely that to realize yourself is to develop those capacities which are distinctive of *homo sapiens*. That is to say, we should develop those capacities which are distinctive of, that is peculiar to, our species alone. This is the quintessence of self-realization and morality. Our injunction should be 'Develop those potentialities which will most fully realize your distinctive human function'.

The rub is that man—if he can correctly be said to have any function at all—can be said to have many distinctive functions; that is to say, there are many things which are peculiar to man—that men and only men do. Even *if* being able to reason or more plausibly to carry on rational discourse and act in accordance with what is deliberated upon is distinctive of the human animal, so is having guilt feelings, the capacity for anguish and alienation, the capacity to laugh, to commit atrocities, to drive automobiles, to slaughter one's fellow human beings and other creatures with complicated weapons, etc., etc. There are a multitude of things which are distinctive of man. Why should we pick out reason over such other general distinctive traits or at least putatively distinctive traits as having an opposable thumb and walking upright, having a long period of infant dependency, having permanent sexual drives, having a sense of right and wrong, suffering anguish, or having the ability to laugh? Reason is indeed thought by Plato

and Aristotle, and by others as well, to have a special excellence but that is not based on the fact that it is distinctive of human beings, for there are other things which are ignored in a specification of the function of man, which are also distinctive of human beings. This makes it evident that no adequate reason has been given for taking reason—the capacity to reason or the activity of reasoning—as the function of man, as that which makes a man a man.

In defending Aristotle, people may reply to the above argument by saying that to find the function of a thing we not only need to find what is distinctive of it but we also need to find its *essential* characteristics. When this is recognized, it will become evident that having the capacity to laugh is not essential to man while having the ability to reason is.

With respect to this argument, it should be noted that ‘essential’ in ‘essential characteristic’ itself functions evaluatively. Thus, in order to specify the function of man or self-realization, one must invoke some unspecified but still more fundamental *normative* criterion to establish what counts as an ‘essential characteristic’. There are many activities which are distinctively and peculiarly human but some are more important than others and thus are more essential. But what is our criterion for importance here? Surely if A is taken to be more important than B, A is something we take to be more valuable, i.e. desirable, as we take the ability to carefully deliberate and reason to be more valuable than the capacity to laugh. But then we still have not decided how we ascertain what is more or less valuable. Certainly we do not do it by appealing to a criterion of self-realization, for we have to know already what counts as a more essential and hence more valuable characteristic in order to know what would count as attaining or approximating self-realization.

It might be replied that we can easily tell that the capacity to reason is more essential to the human animal than the capacity to laugh, for the human animal could survive without laughter or even the ability to laugh but not without the ability to reason. And to the response that this argument presupposes, as a still more fundamental value, the value of survival, it could in turn be answered that it does not presuppose it as a higher value but only as a necessary condition for self-realization. That is to say, trivially speaking, unless man survives, he cannot achieve self-realization or anything else. But this does not mean that the end of life is mere survival without equal attention being given to questions concerning the quality or character of that survival. Moreover, just as there could be some fundamental genetic shift in man such that men no longer laughed, so too there could be a radical change so that men no longer reasoned in the complicated way prized by Aristotle. Both changes are compatible with the continued existence of man as a species, though, given such changes, if we (the present group of people who might read such an essay), unlike the rest of mankind, continued as we are, we would no doubt say that such men

'were scarcely human'. But in saying this, we reveal the *normative* way we are using 'scarcely human'.

We have many characteristics which are distinctive of (peculiar to) mankind, but not all of them are regarded as essential characteristics, yet the standard by which we decide which characteristics are essential and which are not remains unspecified and whatever the standard is, it is plainly not derived from a conception of self-realization, but is actually *presupposed* in the specification of self-realization and in the specification of the function of man.

We might argue alternatively that by realizing his *highest* and *best* capacities man does what is most distinctive of him. And thus in recognizing what these highest and best capacities are, we find out what the function of man is, and so come to see what constitutes self-realization. But here we even more obviously presuppose, as a still more fundamental moral standard than self-realization, some alien and unexplained criterion. For how do we ascertain what are our highest and best capacities? If we knew what they were, we could know what self-realization is but then we wouldn't need self-realization as an ultimate standard. But that aside, just how do we ascertain what our highest and best capacities are? We are not told. We only have an unexplained and unexplicated reference to 'highest and best capacities'.

### III

There are further difficulties in any self-realizationist account which appeals to a conception of the function of man. For the very notion of man's having a function to have even a tolerably clear meaning, it must be the case that man is conceived on close analogy with an artifact, a functional part of the body such as the liver or heart, or with someone such as a policeman or barber who has a social role. But man *qua* man has no social role and he is too unlike an artifact or a functioning part of a body for that analogy to be helpful. We can say quite unequivocally what it would be like for a corkscrew to be a good one by specifying the function of a corkscrew and by saying what constitutes an efficient performance of that function. The concept of the function of a corkscrew is not at all problematic. Similar things hold for our bodily organs even though they are not artifacts made for a purpose. We can find out what it is to have a good heart or good liver by finding out what hearts and livers are for, that is by finding out what role they play in the bodily economy. Similarly, people have different social roles to play in society and we can find out what a good policeman or barber is by finding out what roles policemen or barbers play in society. When we understand what policemen and barbers are for, and what it is to perform that function efficiently, we know what it is for someone to be a good policeman or barber.

The function of a policeman or teacher is not quite as definite as that of many artifacts, but we are still not at a loss for words here, and the notions are by no means utterly indeterminate, though they have their controversial aspects. But the fact still remains that to the extent that we understand what teachers, policemen or barbers are for and what it is to efficiently perform that function, we understand what it is for someone to be a good teacher, policeman or barber. But a man may be a good policeman or barber and still be a bad man; he may be good in several social roles and still be a bad man; conversely he may be a good man and a bad teacher or barber. The fact is that men are not unequivocally *for* anything in the way barbers and policemen are. Being a human being is not the assuming of a social role, though human beings are socialized animals.

Only if we assume some extremely questionable theological framework in which we say that man was made to worship God and fulfil his commands, can we give much sense to the claim that 'human beings are for anything'. But even here we are reluctant to assert quite literally that human beings are for something. And furthermore such a theological claim, particularly if we try to construe it literally, is quite arbitrary. The claim that human beings have a function is quite baseless. There is no unproblematic answer or even sense to the putative question: 'What are human beings for?'

If, to escape these difficulties, we speak instead of a man as realizing himself or fulfilling his own natural tendencies, powers and wants, we should recall our earlier point that man has many different powers, tendencies and wants, and that sometimes they conflict. He cannot do them all, so again it is not clear what he is to do to realize his own nature.

#### IV

However, let us assume that somehow I have been mistaken in what I have asserted above and that man does have a function and that it is what Aristotle says it is. That is to say, let us now assume that man's essential and distinguishing mark is his capacity to reason—this is what distinguishes him from other animals. Now, assuming for the sake of the argument that reason is such an essential characteristic, we still face difficulties. First, we face difficulties concerning exactly what it is that we are claiming. Surely on some readings of 'being able to reason', it is not something unique to men. The way a cat stalks a bird would certainly seem to involve reasoning, i.e. thinking, on the cat's part. We need a characterization here of the ways human beings alone or distinctively act in accordance with or for the sake of reasons. We need a specification of the distinctive ways 'the rational element' is embedded in human nature.

In talking about the function of man, we are talking about what consti-

tutes being a man. As playing the flute is that which constitutes being a flute player, so, Aristotle claims, acting on reasons constitutes being a man. This is presumably the demythologization of Aristotle's remark that 'the function of man is an activity of the soul in conjunction with the rational element'.

What exactly is it on Aristotle's account to act on reasons? One commentator understands it as 'organizing or co-ordinating our desires and emotions, and controlling or checking the immediate impulses to action so as to enable ourselves to secure what we really want'.<sup>1</sup> Human beings presumably can act intentionally in this way and only human beings can so act. (We are assuming now that this is a distinctive and essential human characteristic.) Being able so to act is what constitutes human rationality. This is what makes us distinctively human.

If this is what acting on reasons most essentially comes to, then it may well be the case that two men, acting in quite different and conflicting ways, could on such an account be acting equally rationally and each could equally well be doing what on this account is right. For if they had different and conflicting wants—wants which conflicted, even where they took the most efficient means to satisfy their desires—it would still remain the case (given the above reading of Aristotle) that they were both being equally rational in so acting and were both equally justified in their moral judgments. But if this is so, then ethical relativism, at an extremely important point, would not have been overcome. But it is one of the accounts which claims to overcome relativism and to show how it is that moral beliefs can have an objective basis. This is one of its main attractions; without this promise such an obscure and puzzling account replete with its metaphors would have little attraction. Moreover, what is reasonable to do and what constitutes self-realization would be crucially dependent on such a reading on what *we just happen to want*. We would have no fundamental moral criteria by means of which we could make a critique of wants. Rather what was good and bad on such a theory would be very dependent on what we just happened to want. The kind of subjectivism and relativism that Aristotle's theory was intended to combat would hardly be overcome.

It might be replied, deliberately shifting the grounds of the argument somewhat, that I am neglecting the fact that Aristotle lays great stress on the worth of contemplation. To understand the function of man as that of acting on reasons, we need to understand that contemplation is really the highest form of rationality. In it, according to Aristotle, man's rational nature has its full flourishing. It is in this that man realizes himself and achieves his full humanity.

However, it should immediately be recognized that while the capacity to act on reasons is common to all human beings who are not mentally

<sup>1</sup> G. C. Field, *Moral Theory* (London: Methuen Publications, 1966), 75.

defective in some way, contemplation is not such a common trait. There are many people who are highly intelligent and indeed are reasonable human beings as well who are not contemplative and do not particularly prize contemplation. Moreover, there are many people who by ordinary criteria at least are fully moral beings and thoroughly reasonable beings, who are not at all given to contemplation. It would appear that in placing such a stress on contemplation, Aristotle is doing little more here than expressing a rationalist prejudice. Contemplation is no doubt unique to man but so is making change. No reason has been given for taking contemplation to be that which is most essential to his human nature or as being that in virtue of which a man realizes himself. It is arbitrary to claim that contemplation is the human activity which is of the highest value.<sup>2</sup>

Suppose we drop the bit about contemplation and continue, in spite of the above arguments, to claim that the function of man is to act on reasons or to reason in his actions and that only by doing this can he attain happiness.

If this is the move, it should be straight away noted that with such an appeal to happiness a new criterion has been introduced. Living in accordance with reason, i.e. acting on reasons or reasoning in one's actions, is not intrinsically good but good because it tends to be conducive to happiness or (more sceptically) if anything like happiness is attainable, it will only be attainable by human beings who generally act on reasons. But then self-realization is not the ultimate standard, happiness is.

Someone might try to avoid this conclusion by arguing that when we consider what Aristotle meant by the concept of happiness, to wit, a virtuous activity of the soul, we will see that happiness and self-realization are not independent concepts independently specifiable. The point being made here is that human happiness is distinctive and can only be understood in terms of understanding man's function, namely his acting on reasons or reasoning in his actions. A man will be happy if and only if he does this well.

However, this surely does not seem to be true of our ordinary and indeed reflective concept of happiness. One might, by acting on reasons intelligently and efficiently, achieve one's aims and attain happiness, but it is also the case that one might be miserable and alienated. And a man who did not think too clearly might be happier than a non-evasive, clear-headed individual who understood his condition very well. This might even be true of an individual who was deceived or even deceived himself. We need Dostoevski as a supplement to Aristotle's rationalism. We need to recognize

<sup>2</sup> This stress on contemplation and this conception of rationality also fits badly, as Bernard Williams observes, with his stress on practical wisdom and the importance of citizenly activities. Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 60.



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that self-knowledge is often bitter and disillusioning—one loses certain consolations and an illusory flattering image of oneself. Indeed a clear insight into ‘what makes one tick’ may be self-destructive rather than something that furthers self-realization. From Plato to Freud we have assumed that self-knowledge, though difficult, is a good thing and ultimately a source of happiness. Both of these rationalist assumptions need challenging.

One thing to be said in reply here is *not* that we will be happy *if and only if* we act on reasons or are reasoning in our actions, but that we will be happy *only* if we act on reasons or are reasoning in our actions. A reasonable creature may be unhappy but he cannot be happy unless he is at least in some measure reasonable.

This is surely far more plausible than claiming one will be happy if one is reasonable. But all the same, it is not a claim that is obviously *universally* true. Yet it seems reasonable at least to believe that it generally holds and incorporates what appears, at least, to be the true claim, indeed the truism, that if a ‘man has goals or aims in life it is unlikely that he will achieve his aims if he does not act on reasons’.<sup>3</sup> There is a value to be reasonably placed on rational activity. We need to understand what we are doing and we need to be able to reason in order to get what we want. But this does not entail or even go very far toward establishing that the fullest possible clarity about ourselves and the rationale of our actions carries with it a greater happiness than a life in which one remains confused about some, humanly speaking, very central things. A minimum kind of rationality, where reason is clearly a servant to one’s desires and a watchdog concerning desires which are likely to be destructive, is absolutely crucial to anything approximating a human life or a happy life. But a fuller measure of rationality might be counterproductive as far as happiness is concerned.

Perhaps it is an illusion to think that life will ever be substantially freer from human degradation and exploitation than it is at present, but all the same, believing that it could be might enable a man to give sense to his life where otherwise it would be without sense. But a clear knowledge of what was involved here might lead him to despair and suicide. A man with a clear grasp of his condition could be a man in despair and a man with a confused conception of life might be happy. All Aristotle shows about human happiness and rationality is that if a man cannot reason at all well, he is likely to make mistakes which will make him miserable. But people can have an acute rational understanding of their positions and still not flourish and they could be confused and happy and indeed not terribly intellectually acute and still be thoroughly good human beings.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Siegler, ‘Reason, Happiness and Goodness’, in *Aristotle’s Ethics: Issues and Interpretations*, ed. by James J. Walsh and Henry J. Shapiro (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1967), 36.

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Self-realization can be so construed that it is tied to acting on reasons or for the sake of reasons, in which case it need not be a way to enhance human happiness to the fullest extent. By contrast self-realization may be so construed that it is conceptually tied to happiness, but then self-realization is no longer something which conceptually requires the greatest rationality possible no matter what the circumstances. Rationality and happiness are related but not so tightly that it is the case that human beings *must*, when there are alternative ways of acting, be happiest when they do that action which gives them the clearest—the most rational—understanding of their situation.

In sum it should be stressed here that if what constitutes being a man is acting on reasons, it needs to be pointed out that by so acting it does not necessarily follow that one is discharging a moral obligation or even doing anything beneficial to oneself. No justification has been given for saying that by so acting we realize ourselves or achieve the highest good. If it is responded that, if we act on reasons and consistently reason in our actions, by definition we realize ourselves or achieve the highest good, it should be replied that this definition is arbitrary and stipulative. There is no reason (*pace* Plato) why an unprincipled and immoral man could not act on reasons. An immoralist need not be an irrationalist.

## V

In a way that has been too little noticed, self-realizationist theories suffer the same central defect from which so-called ethical egoism suffers. Recall that for 'ethical egoism' the ultimate guiding principle is that each person is to seek what he, on careful regard, takes to be in his own self-interest and he is to consider the interests of others only when doing so will directly or indirectly further his own interests. Similarly for the self-realizationist theories the fundamental moral imperative is for each person to seek to realize himself. But we have moral rules and principles and indeed the institution of morality itself, primarily or at least importantly, to adjudicate in a fair manner conflicts of interest.<sup>4</sup> If that is not its *raison d'être*, it is at least a central function of such discourse. But just as 'ethical egoism' is of no help in adjudicating such conflicts, for on such an account each man is told to seek his own self-interest, including someone asked to arbitrate such disputes, so too the self-realizationist tells men to seek self-realization and this tells everyone, including the arbitrator of a dispute, to look within himself and do that which will most realize himself. But this does not tell us

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958) and Kai Nielsen, 'On Moral Truth', in *Studies in Moral Philosophy*, ed. by Nicholas Rescher (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968).

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what to do when a course of action which will lead to A's self-realization conflicts with a course of action which will lead to B's self-realization and both cannot be done. It does not guide a judge, adviser or arbitrator of such a case in deciding what he is to advise except, unhelpfully, particularly where his own self-realization is not affected, to tell him to seek to realize himself in such situations. But that is not what is needed or wanted in such a situation, and in many cases it is not at all evident what would contribute toward his self-realization. But the crucial thing is that what would contribute to *his* self-realization is not what is at issue in such situations. In fact it very much looks as if self-realizationist theories are in reality a *form* of 'ethical egoism'.

If it is retorted that what a self-realizationist theory should be understood as claiming is that we should work for, advocate, or at least hope for, the greatest amount of self-realization for as many people as possible, this indeed gets the theory out of the difficulties associated with 'ethical egoism' but only by making it into a kind of utilitarianism. We should always seek as our overriding aim to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. Only here the individual good, which is to be maximized for as many people as possible, is not, as in hedonistic forms of utilitarianism, pleasure, but individual self-realization. This may be a plausible theory, provided that utilitarianism stands up to critical scrutiny and provided that our earlier objections to self-realizationist theories can be overcome. But that, of course, is a big if and it is also the case that the theory in question has been so modified that it is no longer a pure self-realizationist theory, for now it has a utilitarian structure. It only differs from the more standard forms of utilitarianism in that it makes the claim that for each individual what is good for him, when others are not counted in, is self-realization.

## VI

Given the extensive array of mistakes I have trotted out and shown to be involved in self-realizationist ethical theories, how can I possibly be justified in claiming that in spite of all that, such a theory contains its moral lessons and insights as well? I will argue that, while it does not serve as an ultimate moral standard or principle and indeed cannot be coherently put in this role, it is an important, though tantalizingly vague, element to be utilized in spelling out personal ideals of moral excellence. Furthermore, in any adequate systematic, normative ethic, consideration must be given to these ideals; yet it is just such conceptions which receive scant attention in non-self-realizationist theories.

In this connection, we should not forget that we do not only ask: What am I bound to do or what ought I to do, but what should I become? What

should I make of my life and how should I live to live in a non-alienated, non-self-estranged way? What, that is, should my life be like if I am to overcome self-estrangement? But in answering these questions self-realizationist idioms come in quite naturally and indeed perhaps unavoidably. If A can be estranged from himself, he must be able to find himself or perhaps even realize himself. If there can be an alienated self or estranged self, there must be some concept of a true self or an unalienated self.

Suppose that this is resisted and what is claimed instead is that to make sense of your life—to attain your full human flourishing—you should go in an intelligent and single-minded way after pleasure.

However, this in turn should be challenged, for firstly, one typically does not attain much pleasure by going after it, it is rather something of a concomitant of certain activities—activities that can often be brought off only if one does not think about getting pleasure from what one is doing.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, and secondly, even if pleasure could be such an end of action, it is hardly the only end of action. A satisfying life indeed has pleasure in it, but it is not constituted by a life in which the rationale of all of one's activities is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

When we ask: what sort of things are *worth* having for their own sakes, we will indeed say pleasure and we will also, if we reflect, very likely say, an ability and an opportunity to direct our own lives. But we are also very likely to say a 'fullness of life' and resist the question: 'What do you want a full life for?' as somehow conceptually inappropriate.

Yet how are we to understand 'fullness of life'? What is the literal rendering of this? In trying to get a grip on it we are very likely to invoke notions such as 'a life in which one develops and flourishes', 'a fully human life', 'a life in which there is a measure of self-improvement and growth'. But are not all of these notions, notions which presuppose or imply a conception of self-realization? To grow or develop is to grow or develop into or toward something and is not that something naturally called one's more 'authentic self' or 'true self' or indeed a self which has achieved something in the direction of self-realization?

Note also that we frequently speak of creeds, institutions, forms of life, or practices which compress, stunt, or dwarf us. Are not their opposites those which aid or do not stand in the way of our self-realization? There could be no conception of a dehumanized humanity if we did not at least have some conception of what a humanity that attained or retained its humanity would be like. But to talk of this again is another way of talking of self-realization. The same type of contrast is at work in talk of empty lives, really dead people, zombies and the like. And when we talk of a good life as involving self-expression we imply that there is a 'true self' to be realized.

<sup>5</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre has importantly criticized such conceptions in his *Against The Self-Images of The Age* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 173–190.

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When Marx spoke of the estrangement of one's self from one's self and from one's own humanity and the humanity of others that we experience under capitalism, he contrasted this with a truly human life and a truly human society wherein man could attain emancipation and where one's labour would not be alienated. But in these very notions we have operating, though expressed by other words, conceptions of self-realization and the non-attainment of self-realization. What exactly this family of notions comes to remains vague—the doctrine of self-realization is indeed a murky one—but it all the same signifies something, we know not clearly what, that we quite unequivocally take as precious. An account of morality and the moral life which ignores these features of morality is plainly thereby impoverished.

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