

Craft and Morality

by

Dr. Thomas Weiss

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I have always known that there is an intimate connection between craft and morality.

Everyone knows that in craftsmanship, in its activity and aura, something utterly moral is centered. But just why there is this connection is not easy to answer because morality has become a very problematic and exclusive concept.

I will try first to turn to the question of crafts and would like to look at the problem from the point of view of history and of mankind. Then I would like to go into the question of morality and the connection between craft and morality to the individual.

It is difficult to find the first beginnings of craft. We know that it was at its height during the Middle Ages. But if one looks back into primeval times one finds that craft did not exist separately, and it is probable that man's creativity started as art and not craft. The more that becomes now known of primeval human activity the more one sees that in the beginning of time, humans created artifacts, things they made with their own hands, for magical but not practical purposes. Probably the first dwellings were not built for men but for the gods to inhabit. Probably the first things were made in an attempt to communicate with divine beings and forces rather than to deal with the needs of earthly existence. We know countless paintings that are 10, 15, and 20,000 years old. We know sculptures of these times as well as articles of daily use. But as far as one can assess the primeval epochs of mankind, it seems that the physical material creations were, to begin with, of a religious and cultic nature and only gradually of a practical nature. This would seem to be an indication that craft may be a further step from art.

Among the very early artifacts of art or craft there are symbols, symbolic forms and shapes. One of the earliest and most frequent is the human hand. In some French and Spanish caves containing primeval paintings, hands are depicted in all kinds of positions. In some caves hundreds, thousands, of hands are painted: in others just one hand. Some walls are painted with abstract hand and finger forms. Not only in Europe but also in other countries of primeval

times one finds the symbol of the human hand. Other symbols of the early artistry of humankind are the female and male and the animal but amongst these forms the hand seems to be the most widespread and possibly the oldest.

Some of you will know the German word for craft is *Handwerk*—a very expressive word because craft is bound to the hand. Only things made with the hand are objects of craft. The hand is the organ, the place, the origin, and even the meaning of craft. The hand is a unique organ and distinguishes Man from all other kingdoms of nature. It is an organ that to begin with did not belong to the earth: it was originally an organ of sense and communication. It was not meant to work but to speak, to sense, and to experience the world. Thus craft might be seen as the result of a sacrifice on the part of the hand in giving itself to the needs of the earth.

In the earliest cultures of which we know, Sumer, Egypt, Ur, one can distinguish definite craftsmanship of the highest skill and achievement. We see in some of the magnificent Egyptian, Sumerian, and Chaldean sculptures and earthenware in the British and other museums how the hardest and most resistant of materials were shaped and formed to utmost perfection. Much was not done as works of art but as crafts.

What do we mean today when we refer to arts and crafts? These two concepts have changed and moved to some extent and when I mention the old art and craft I use terms as we use them today. But we mean something different and the essential difference is the following:

We have an object of craft when we know exactly what we wanted to make and proceeded to make it as exactly to our plan as possible. Therein lies the craft. For example, a cabinet maker may plan to make a table knowing exactly what it will be like, but if it turns out to be a bed he is a bad craftsman. Equally if a man sets out to make an ashtray and makes it exactly as planned he is not an artist but may be a good craftsman. The essence of art is that something new arises, not only materially according to a given plan or form, but that between the artist and a wide realm of influences something entirely new appears. It may be a work of art if the artist develops a new form. He may have it completely in his head but if he has not developed it in connection with a particular material again he is no artist.

The craftsman wrestles for the expression of an existing entity, and it is the process of incarnation into material existence with which he deals. The artist wrestles for new form, new content that is to come about between him and the world. Probably because of artistic endeavor, crafts have developed. But craft is a further step and enters into a sphere different from that of art.

I have already said that in ancient history craft existed in the sense of my attempt to separate it, somewhat artificially, from merely artistic activity. The iconoclastic aspect of art is the craft aspect, which has played the greatest part throughout the history of mankind. The task of art was the material incarnation of forces determined out of the human being's spiritual and religious life.

In our present day meaning, crafts reached their height and fulfillment in the Middle Ages. In it an interesting occupation played an astonishing part and that was the work of the mason. In connection with building and a revival of primeval impulses of building not for the sake of shelter but for the sheltering of divinity, the houses of God, quite a phase in the development of craft began: the fact that one man can make an object with his hands out of material. It is not an object assembled but one made from material by one man with his own hands. The great cathedrals of Europe were built in this way. One man carved a stone wanting it to be as perfect as possible and put it in place. They began to acquire perfection not as artists or sculptors wanting to bring about something new but wanting their hand-made stone to be a worthy part of the House of God, which they were helping to build. That is the origin of the magnificent sculptures of Romanesque and Gothic Churches all over Europe. And in other fields, too, this striving of one man to perfect his handiwork developed.

Schools were set up in which these skills were taught, not only physical skills but skills in spiritual knowledge. You will understand the development of craft life at that time if you think of another activity that was developing at the same time. Men's professions were varied: there were always hunters, soldiers, traders and those who rendered services, the carters, the barbers who were the surgeons and doctors, and the clergy. In medieval society the tendency to dissipate life was very marked not only amongst soldiers and traders but also amongst the clergy and generally what one calls morality was weakened and endangered. Within this society there were two groups of people who developed very earnest schools of moral training: the craft guilds and the alchemists.

The alchemists are remembered largely on the basis of misunderstanding. They were the scientists of that time who tried to study processes of nature as examples of the development of the human soul. What has been described and handed down as secret knowledge of the purification and transformation of base metals into gold was an attempt to train the individual human soul, to enable its base qualities by observing chemical processes in nature that seemed to illustrate processes of inner development. This was one attempt to improve the moral nature of the human being.

The other attempt was the craft guilds. The schools of alchemy largely failed whilst the schools of craft produced notable and striking success. Throughout

Europe the craft guilds established schools and training centers to which young people were admitted as apprentices. After a number of years of training, including menial tasks necessary to the craft, they ascended to the second degree of fellow, mate, or journeyman. To this craft training was linked the fascinating wisdom that home, town and country had to be left. The fellow or mate after achieving a certain amount of learning had to set out on a long journey spanning a number of years and covering a considerable area of Europe. This was done because the type of training given by a craft guild would unavoidably bind, and limit that craftsman to a certain place in society. Before that sacrifice could be made it was necessary for the learning craftsman to have time to wander and encounter as much of the world as possible. The third degree of training was that of master, the one who achieved the perfect incarnation of the plan into a given material.

Try to hold onto the few basic ideas, which we have encountered: that craft incarnates, through the organ of the human hand, a pre-existing form into earthly material. You can sense here a fundamental Christian principle. Christ in His youth, as the Man Jesus, can be imagined as the Craftsman: in all cultures it is the image in which he is seen. And Craft is the exercise that implants, through the hand, spirit into matter. We may feel that this has something to do with morality in the highest sense. The problem which arises in our time is that we have not found a new way to do what the crafts from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, or the beginning of this century, did for the moral existence of the human being. The development that started with the Industrial Revolution caused the physical economic justification of craft to disappear. What was done as a purely spiritual exercise and at the same time, satisfied man's basic material need, was pushed away through the developments at the end of the last century. Modern production methods have made craft impossible and have not as yet allowed the development of any other form in which to realize the spiritual and moral aspect of craft.

Britain and other countries are now looked upon as being lazy and incapable of competing with work. Large groups of men frequently come out in protest knowing that this will cause serious hardship to their country. The reason is hardly the desire for increased monetary return for their labor. They earn more each year but, with rising cost of living, their earning remains more or less the same. But this is not the issue. The issue is that they are men and though they may have a bit more to eat and wear and have cars, they must also find their moral dignity and they cannot find it. They hope to find it by setting off one guild trade union against another. They try to introduce differentials, to work slowly and deliberately because, that instills the memory of craftwork in them .

Craftwork cannot be done in a hurry. Craftwork is basically a differentiated organized way of incarnating spirit into matter. This happens individually in the craftsman when he relates his work to his hands. He may not know it, but it happens. When man is robbed of it he senses his deprivation and degradation. He needs what only the craft can do—creation of moral substance.

I would like to describe the skeletal nature of the human hand. We can hold our palms so that it looks upward, or so that the palm looks downwards—it is called subination and pronation. We can do this because between the upper arm and hand there are two bones, the radius and ulna. When the two are parallel our hand looks upwards, when crossed, downwards. The foot is similarly built but we cannot lift the foot anymore. It is permanently turned down onto the earth. This has been done by the two bones, which cross when we turn the hand down having been broken and grown together. In the foot the bones now stand permanently.

You know that when Good Friday is described in the Gospels, it says that the Roman soldiers broke the bones of the two who were crucified on either side of the Christ but they did not break His bones, it was said in the Scriptures: “His bones shall not be broken.” This does not refer only to the external but to the archetypal fact that our feet were unbroken before we descended to earth. We have retained the freedom of turning up to the world of our origin only in our hands. Craft uses this organ to descend in freedom into the bondage of earthly matter thus expressing the divine essence of the human being.

II

We want to face the very difficult question of morality so that we can see its connection to craft. When we consider the beginning of morality, how it emerged out of primeval time and displayed itself in history, it is quite obvious that the question of morality arises with that of good and evil. You know the magnificent description in Genesis of the birth of Good and Evil in the consciousness of man when, living in Paradise under the direct guidance of divinity, he transgressed the original command and ate of the forbidden fruit of knowledge. This is the moment when his eyes were opened and he knew Good and Evil. Morality has throughout history been variously linked, and especially in our time, to the question of sex, however, it is written that when Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge his eyes were opened, the world appeared and he knew that he too could be seen by the light. Thus the problem of Good and Evil is the problem of knowledge. But is the problem of morality one of knowledge? I do not think that it is. I think that morality is the opposite of knowledge.

In modern development we have learned to value highly pure intelligence. We educate our children to the greatest possible intellectual independence. They learn to look up all answers in textbooks so that they become as self-reliant as possible. They become ever more clever and when they leave school they understand that they are now meant to be successful. They set out to find out how they can best provide money, they read papers, statistics, and they inform themselves. Obviously morality does not flow from that source. I describe this to show that it is not so simple to interpret the primeval story of eating the apple of knowledge as morality. It is a most puzzling and difficult problem.

Various widely divergent moral codes exist. Probably all of us and the majority of the population of the Western World would agree that high-jacking trucks filled with electronic media is not moral. Among Eskimo tribes they have the practice of allowing their elderly to leave their camps to go outside in the wilderness to be eaten by wild animals. The old people accept this as their duty. For us it is shocking. In certain African tribes when a child is born and before it is fed, it is shown to the father: if he considers it to be imperfect it is destroyed.

Another thing that seems to have been universal up to the time of Christ, and is still held as a high moral code by some small groups of modern man, was the principle of vengeance. The value of a man was measured by the degree of persistence in avenging any offence done to his family. A man who would take an offence unrevenged would become an outcast. It is still the case in some parts of Sicily and is so intensely valued as a moral code that imprisonment for life as a result of an act of revenge is accepted. The interesting thing is that to many revenge is not only not a very high principle but the more modern we are the less we possess the power of revenge. Those of us who still have a strong heritage from the past have slightly greater powers of revenge but a truly modern person forgets an offence. [An exception is the modern Moslem and Israeli world that still takes revenge very seriously.] This is a mysterious fact. Moral values seem to arise from a far greater depth than our ideas.

Moral codes may vary tremendously in the course of time—and equally in different cultures and societies. They vary even within the same society, in different levels and different age groups.

Cultured Asian people are trained to say that which the other wishes to hear: it would not occur to them to think that they must say the factual truth. This would be regarded as impolite. They feel morally obliged to tell lies for reasons of politeness and do so every day.

We have made the problem still more confused. I should like briefly to describe something that Rudolf Steiner said in a lecture course to teachers of the first Waldorf school about morality. He spoke then not about morality but about

will: the problem of morality is actually a problem of the will and not of the thinking. Rudolf Steiner said that there are three aspects in the forces of the human soul: thinking, feeling, and willing. Thinking is the soul's ability to relate images in the soul in an ordered way. Will is the source of action but is completely hidden from consciousness. If I lift a glass of water it is an action of my body. The glass of water can be in my consciousness and I can have the intention of lifting it—but nothing happens. There is a difference between intention and action. And this difference we call will. If I will to lift the glass I lift it, but if I only think about it I may not lift it. Obviously there is a world of difference in the will and yet it is a world that does not appear in my consciousness. This is an essential aspect of morality—we are apparently involved fundamentally in a realm, which to begin with is not accessible to our consciousness. Our will is completely asleep and is yet the most real and consequential way in which we are put into this world.

Rudolf Steiner describes something very interesting about the polarity of thinking and willing. Our feeling is interplay between the two. Our feeling is will that has not yet stepped into the reality of action; if intensified towards reality it becomes will. Further, our feeling is a confluence in which a certain slight will tendency meets the image tendency in our thinking so that our soul experiences, though not consciously as a thought, but in a kind of dream consciousness. Steiner then makes the following statement: Our existence on earth is determined from two sides. The physical body is prepared from heredity through our parents in order that something of a purely spiritual nature can manifest. This is very much the picture of craft! There must be a plan. A table must exist in concept, an ideal. Once tables exist the craftsman can, with the help of suitable materials, with tools, bring about the materialization of the idea of a table. Equally, if the individuality of man did not spiritually exist we could not incarnate as infants and develop as persons on earth.

Our type of thinking, feeling, and willing are not part of the eternal idea of man but are part of incarnated man on earth. Rudolf Steiner says that we enter from a purely spiritual existence through birth and begin to work in our physical hereditary body. In a given environment we work out our destiny on earth and unfold the three soul forces. We have been thrust out of a previous existence and the door shut. Hardly any man on earth has any memory of what he was before he was born though a very few poets have a faint glimpse of this pre-birth existence. It belongs to our human existence on earth that the door is shut: we are really thrown out. The force that closes the door when we are born is the source of the force within us, which gradually develops in us the power of a mirror.

Do we know why we see ourselves in a mirror? What makes a mirror show us ourselves? Why do not other substances reflect? It must be a mirror, a polished surface. As long as substance or a piece of material receives the light that falls upon it it does not mirror. But once it becomes shut off from the light everything is thrown back and the approaching light is straight away repulsed. This is the nature of a mirror: this is the nature of thinking. It is a mistake when someone takes the grimace in the mirror as a threat and hits back. Very many wars arise not because we want to hurt one another but because we are frightened that the other may hurt us. This is a most typical situation in man's destiny: that he does not know himself, that he does not know that the fear in the other is the mirror picture of himself. This is the force of thinking, the mirror force arises because when we were born we left and were shut out from the other world. We bear that force with us and the further away from the other world we grow the stronger the mirroring force.

But we go towards another gate, that of death. In reality with our first breath we go towards death. That is will. If we think that to be born is not to die we delude ourselves—but the harmony, which arises between the two is our feeling.

Why have I told you all this? It is basic but has little to do with morality. Steiner says the following: The will which leads us back to our own existence is the only thing in us which is individual. Thinking is universal, we share our thinking with all human beings. If we read today Plato or Aristotle we can ask whether we have really developed. Comparing any philosopher of the past with those of the present we have to admit that they knew it all. There is no real progress in thinking. But read Plato and you will see that in his time there were slaves. Divine authority ordained this. Read Paul, that most modern of men, and see that he advises slaves to do what their masters tell them and to be grateful because they are his masters. How we would revolt against such feelings. Our feelings and values are totally different. We have made fantastic strides feeling-wise. Why? Because this is truly individual: it leads always to the future.

We do not hold moral codes in common with mankind. We hold such codes in common with groups of men because they flow from the will and begin to dawn in our feeling man. How is it with the source of morality that we suspect belongs here? Morality is mine: that makes it morality. It is not that I conform to a social code: this I may do but I know that it is not my morality. My morality is that little wellspring, utterly individual, that I do it. The agreed norm is not morality but that at a special moment I do this—that is morality.

Rudolf Steiner says the following interesting thing: Will works in everything that is alive—not only in man but in everything that is divine and incarnated. It works in man through his fourfold nature: through his physical organization,

into his living, etheric organization, into his emotional, astral organization as well as into human ego nature.

What does the will do in the physical body? It creates instinct. The fact that beavers can fell trees so that they fall to form a dam, or that bees collect pollen from far distant plants, produce, and deposit the wax in such a way that a honeycomb—one of the most highly differentiated, mechanical structures—arises.

This is instinct. Will working in the physical. Will working in the life processes creates drive, forces that govern modern life, govern nutrition, the excreting of substances, procreation. Will working in the emotional creates desires, longings, passions. Will working in our essentially ego nature creates something that, though it is probably the most important aspect of human existence, is hardly known as a word—motivation.

In our schools we have increasing numbers of children who are very intelligent—more so than their teachers—yet they are completely incapable of living harmoniously with other people and fitting into society. They may be able to do very intricate things but they perhaps cannot eat at a table with other people. Sometimes one says that they are emotionally disturbed children but sometimes they are completely undisturbed and undisturbable, because if motivation rolls too far no feeling arises. They are not disturbed in their feeling, they are impartial.

There are many things that you are capable of doing but would not do because you have a harmoniously integrated motivation. This means you are in one world with everybody else. We have a highly integrated, well-fitting common world out of our organized, differentiated motivation. Imagine that we were a group of twenty lions, five cows, three seagulls, and so forth. It is not the lack of intelligence in the seagull that would cause the problem but a completely different motivation. We are only capable of living together as human beings because there is an all-pervading motivation among us. Most crimes of today are a breakdown in motivation. They can be brilliantly engineered and efforts are made not to injure anyone. What they want to do obviously must be done in the best way possible.

Not only does the will in the human create motivation, it does something else. Steiner says that though will brings about motivation there is by necessity a slight discrepancy between physical execution and the idea. For example, I think a point and the point I think is mathematical, it has no size. Whether I make such a point on the blackboard or with the sharpest of pencils it is unavoidably a blotch. It lies in the nature of things. Anything that is physically present only approaches approximate perfection. You cannot think a wrong

triangle. And that lies equally in the nature of the spiritual. Therefore, whatever we bring about through motivation practically can never express the idea. That is the link with craft. When we make something with our hands we are responsible for it. If I sow corn it is not my work but divine enactment, which makes it grow. If I teach a child and the child learns have I brought this about? Learning is an activity of the child and not of the teacher.

Steiner said that because of the relationship between the physical and spiritual, when we have done something with our hands, craft wise, there usually remains an unsatisfied element of wish: I could have done better. This is the seed for incarnation into consciousness of the next higher divine principle of the human being, beyond his ego.

We are distinguished from animals because we know our own ego. Animals have much more majestic spiritual beings behind them, the wisdom of all cattle not only domesticated, is far greater than the wisdom of individual man. But the individual cow has not got it and is only part of it. She is directed by a great spiritual power.

We have a glimpse of our spiritual nature, the lowest bit of the totality of man's spirit. The totality of man's spirit exists but it is God. In the end this divinity wants to live completely in man as it once lived in Jesus. This is the meaning of human existence. It is slow, there is time and we must always do something about it to bring into incarnation or manifestation the divinity.

Nobody can deny that if we look at man and the world from the viewpoint of natural science, there is nothing divine in man. On the contrary man appears as one of the animals with peculiar habits. He is only part of a tremendous universe.

We are endowed with another way of looking at all this but it is not fashionable because man is convinced that he should be born but not die. This is at the root of many of our problems. Though we can survive if born prematurely no one wishes to be so born. Equally, no one wishes to die prematurely. But because he does not wish a premature birth it does not mean he does not wish to be born. But it is a largely accepted fact that not only do we not wish for premature death but feeling-wise we do not wish to die at all. This is a fallacy and not human.

When the will works in the ego bringing about motivation there remains the wish to do something better. Steiner speaks of two further steps: the resolution that can arise and the decision that can follow. This lived in the Middle Ages in the craftwork. It is the morality created power of craft; something only conceptually known embodied by the human hand into matter and never absolutely perfect. This is par excellence the fine wish to do better.

This and nothing else is morality. Although it works out feeling-wise into a variety of moral codes, morality is the human being's willingness to bring to greater realization his/her divine nature. This is motivation and we have to strive for it in our time not in physical work with our hands but in the encounter of man to man. When I greet someone in the morning there must arise in my soul the wish that I should be able to do that better—even only just that greeting as, if we are truly honest, we know that we have in fact shied from giving a true greeting. We have become so sensitive and so much on the threshold of new motivation that we feel in every meeting with another person the wish to do better. If we will learn to listen to that wish in our soul we shall have provided a foothold for further development of morality.