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TORE NORDENSTAM: Sudanese Ethics. Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968. 239 pp. Sw. Kr. 15.

This book is a revised version of Dr. Nordenstam's thesis *An Analysis of the Traditional Sudanese Virtues* for which he was awarded the degree of Ph.D. in the University of Khartoum. It is not the usual kind of work that one expects from a philosopher in that it is concerned with descriptive ethics (giving an account of people's moral opinions) rather than with normative or meta-ethics. Nevertheless, Dr. Nordenstam believes that it is significant for moral theory of the kind which primarily interests philosophers. But this, he holds, is not its only value: it is of the utmost importance for educationalists and for those who are concerned with development planning and the "implementation of development programmes".

Intrigued by the Sudanese students' concept of the good man – "the good Sudanese is the man who is generous, courageous, honourable, respects himself, and so on" – Dr. Nordenstam selected for elucidation the ideas of courage, generosity and hospitality and the interrelated notions of honour, dignity and self respect. These concepts were investigated by means of recorded interviews with three Khartoum University undergraduates. The book is divided into three parts. In part one methodology and methods of analysis for descriptive ethics are discussed; part two contains an analysis of the interviews and an elucidation of how the young Sudanese conceive of the virtues under consideration; and part three contains the transcripts of the interviews. Parts two and three should be of special interest to anyone coming to work in the Sudan.

As this is an exploratory study designed to formulate hypotheses which later can be tested in more extensive investigations involving statistical methods of treatment, etc., Dr. Nordenstam is not concerned to put forward his findings as representative although he believes – and I think he has good reasons for his belief – that in fact they are representative of students' ideals. His investigation is an investigation of patterns of thought rather than patterns of behaviour. His concern is not so much with ethical prescriptions or actual moral behaviour as with the ideal type, i.e. with what is ideally thought to constitute the good Sudanese man or woman. How far people live up to their ideals is another matter and would require observation of their behaviour. But the danger in a purely behaviourist study of morality is that if we do not first establish the moral ideas or concepts as understood by those whose moral behaviour is under investigation we are liable to interpret what we observe in terms of our own moral beliefs. Hence the importance of a prior investigation of the moral code through the subjects' expressed moral opinions. It is the kind of investigation which could be carried out with profit, not only in the Sudan, but also in European societies which are far from being culturally homogeneous. Only in this way can we come to see how certain moral concepts are understood by different people and classes. For example, how does one react to the

claim made by a girl student in an essay that "A dignified person would ... never change his opinion even if he found it is wrong" (p. 122)?

Dr. Nordenstam, as already noted, regards the discipline of descriptive ethics as of theoretical value to moral philosophy. For the benefit of those without a philosophical training: descriptive ethics is the discipline concerned with giving an account of actual moral opinions, normative ethics is concerned with providing a rational or philosophical basis for moral beliefs, and meta-ethics or theoretical ethics is concerned with the analysis and definition of moral terms.

In Nordenstam's discussion of these terms and the relations obtaining between the disciplines I think there are signs of some confusion – a confusion which I suspect may be due to his uncritical reading of the relevant passages in Ladd's *The Structure of a Moral Code* in which I detect the same confusion. On page 14 of the work under review, Dr. Nordenstam claims that "normative ethics", which term he uses to cover a "system of norms, values and ideals", is the subject matter of descriptive ethics. But on page 18 he refers to normative ethics as "the inquiry into the good life" and the task of normative ethics is "to determine what kind of life one ought to live". And on the same page he asserts that descriptive ethics is concerned with the description and analysis "of systems of normative ethics". This might suggest that descriptive ethics is concerned with the actual "inquiry into the good life" and with the arguments philosophers develop in support of the "kind of life one ought to live".

But descriptive ethics is not an inquiry into the rational basis – assuming that there can be a rational basis to ethics – for if it were it could not be neutral (as Nordenstam claims it is); instead it is, as this book illustrates, an inquiry into moral opinions. And such an inquiry, again as the book illustrates, can be neutral. It is in this that much of its value lies.

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