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Miscellaneous

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p. 25: ...But before proceeding to speak of Valour, let me linger a little while on what I may term a derivation from Rectitude, which at first deviating slightly from its original, became more and more removed from it, until its meaning was perverted in the popular acceptance. I speak of Gi-ri, literally the Right Reason, but which came in time to mean a vague sense of duty which public opinion expects and incumbent to fulfil. In its original and unalloyed sense, it meant duty, pure and simple, -- hence, we speak of the Gi-ri we owe to parents, to superiors, to inferiors, to society at large, and so forth. In these instances Gi-ri is duty; for what else is duty than what Right Reason demands and commands us to do? Should not Right Reason be our categorical imperative?

Gi-ri primarily meant no more than duty, and I dare say its etymology was derived from the fact, that in our conduct, set to our parents, though love should be the only motive, lacking that, there must be some other authority to enforce filial piety; and they formulated this authority in Gi-ri. Very rightly did they formulate this authority -- Gi-ri -- since if love does not rush to deeds of virtue, recourse must be had to man's intellect and his reason must be quickened to convince him of the necessity of acting aright. The same is true of any other moral obligation. The instant Duty becomes onerous, Right Reason steps in to prevent our shirking it. Gi-ri thus understood is a severe taskmaster, with a birch-rod in his hand to make sluggards perform their part. It is a secondary power in ethics; as a motive it is infinitely inferior to the Christian doctrine of love, which should be the law. I deem it a product of the conditions of an artificial society -- of a society in which accident of birth and unmerited favour instituted class distinctions, in which the family was the social unit, in which seniority of age was of more account than superiority of talents, in which natural affections had often to succumb before arbitrary man-made customs. Because of this very artificiality, Gi-ri in time degenerated into a vague sense of propriety called up to explain this and sanction that, -- as, for example, why a mother must, if need be, sacrifice all her other children in order to save the first-born; or why a daughter must sell her chastity

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to get funds to pay for the father's dissipation, and the like. Starting at Right Reason, Giri has, in my opinion often stooped to easuistry. It has even degenerated into cowardly fear of censure. I might say of Giri when Scott wrote of patriotism, that "as it is the fairest, so it is often the most suspicious, mask of other feelings." Carried beyond or below Right Reason, Giri became a monstrous misnomer. It harboured under its wings every sort of sophistry and hypocrisy. It would have been easily turned into a nest of cowardice, if Bushido had not a keen and correct sense of courage, the spirit of daring and bearing.

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April 17, 1989

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Date: *April 22, 1989.*

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