

Psychology

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Question 2

Define psychological egoism and altruism as well as ethical egoism and altruism. Do you believe that the basis of morality is altruism or egoism? Or is it perhaps an absolute moral code either handed down to us by previous generations from an original revelation by God? Or is it based upon self evidence moral principles which one should follow whether or not it furthers either our own interests or the

interests of the others? Should we do right simply because it is prima facie right? Give reasons for holding your views.

There is common belief that humans are hardwired to be self-centered what is termed as egoism although they never always act this way but extend a hand of selflessness at times referred to as altruism. When egoism holds that the intentions of any human action is self-directed, altruism holds that humans are also motivated by the putting the needs of others first (Sober). According to May (2011) Psychological Egoism is the claim that human actions are motivated by the gratification of own self interest.

This claim holds that every action that any human makes is driven by some self benefits and gains. Although any human may not justify his/her action as self-gratifying, it is by nature the craving for the satisfaction of one's own welfare that propels them.

Assessing Mother Teresa's actions, one would say that human actions are motivated by satisfaction earned after a completion of a task which is referred to as psychological egoism of which failure to gain that satisfaction leads to the termination of the action.

On ethical egoism, Rand (1961) stated that "the achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose. In congruence to this, Glaucon, Plato's brother presented an argument that if one possesses a magic ring that could make him invisible, whether that person was known or not would be forced to act selfishly since no punishment would befall him.

On the other hand, the extent to which humans sacrifice for the need of others is referred to as altruism. Cited by Paul and Miller (1993), Auguste Comte defined altruism as the devotion to others' interests as action guiding principles. Feigin,

Owens and Smith (2014) on their own words define it as voluntary acts and intentions to benefit someone else or the society as the primary motive without an expectation of any reward. The difference between psychological altruism and ethical altruism is that the former seek to act out of the concern of others wellbeing while the latter focus solely on the impact to other individual regardless of individual consequences.

To understand what should define the basis of our morality an assessment of the diabolical works of Mother Teresa by Robert White is critical. In his argument, “Mother Teresa would have done much good for the poor had she become something useful, like been a drug dealer or a prostitute, a banker or a multi-national corporation head” (Sullivan and Pecorino, 2002). Morality in this case is the system that helps determine what is right or wrong. If the attainment of the ultimate good is through a bad egoistic course then principle of the end justifies the means would hold. For Mother Teresa, her means justified the end, hence driven by altruism. In understanding the logic behind this argument an assessment of the features of both egoism and altruism is critical. As pointed out by Sullivan and Pecorino (2002), egoism is plagued by a number of criticism that include: it has no moral basis for conflict solving between people, it obligates that the right thing should be in accordance to one’s self welfare, it can not advice others to be egoists since it would work against the first’s egoist’s interest and that it can not be universalized just to produce the most pleasure to one person. The criticism to the Immanuel Kant and the stoics of his age is on the claim the ‘to the degree that you earn you highest sense of worth deny virtue.’ This rules out the value of others and the society which makes altruism of much worth and the basis of morality.

Unlike egoism that prohibits the infringing of one own interest, egoism obligates one to be concerned for others. However, cited by Farsides (2007) Scourfield et al. (2004) and Sutton et al. (2006) pointed out that altruism can be nurtured and especially among the young people.

Different morality theories however have been research as to how one is propelled to act. Is morality nurtured and handed down from generation to generation from God's revelation to human or is it defined by self evidence principles based on fulfillment of one's interest or others? The theory of moral subjectivity in this case indicate that right or wrong is on the basis of what one thinks. An act can be right to you and hence tend to do it simply because it is prima facie right to you, and this has defined the concept of moral relativity. Close to this although different is ethical egoism that defines what is right on the basis of how it is aligned to maximizing one's self- interest. This has been defined as forgoing some urgent pleasures for a long term goal.

Utilitarianism as a morality theory claims that an action is right or wrong on the basis of the overall good (Smart, 1961). However in utilitarianism, no action is right or wrong, what matters is the consequence of an action and that no individual interest surpasses other's interests. For those that ascribe to this, the ultimate goal is to maximize the happiness of others as opposed to ethical egoism. This has been the bedrock of democratic and welfare economic principles.

Another theory that explains the basis of our morality is the divine command theory, whereby an action is termed as right simply because gods command it (Helm, 1981). This belief presupposes that God or gods exist and that we can know what he/their command to be right. This however has raised criticism with Plato question

whether an action is right because God commands it or God commands an action because it is right.

Another theory that has been criticized is that of Kant universality that points out that an action is right if it can be universally accepted (Harsanyi, 1977). This and all other theories have begged the question, what is the ultimate duty of humans which should define their morality. Virtue ethics has tried to answer this by placing pleasure and happiness at the core of it claiming that the “ultimate end of human action is happiness” as according to Aristotle. This happiness however should be acted in accordance with reason which should have all the distinguishing features of the traditional virtues.

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