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Morality

Good decision making is the foundation of a fruitful life. Decisions are made according to a standard of values, and this standard is the guidebook for one’s life. The Japanese samurai dedicated themselves to a life of courage, benevolence, and respect. This code shaped every moment of their lives. Muslims have their lives dictated by the rules of the Qur’an, forcing their women to a life of obedience and submission. This code affects the relationship between man and woman. Each culture has their own code of values – a standard to which they judge their actions. The quality of each man or woman’s life within the culture is monumentally affected by this code. In this day and age, however, individuality is stressed more than cultural living. Just as with these cultures, individuals have their own standard of values. The founding of America came about from the moral convictions of British citizens who realized the actions of their government did not fall in line with their standards. Millions of Jews were slaughtered in the Holocaust due to Hitler’s personal code of values, and those Jews that survived were liberated due to the convictions of their saviors. Individual standards are just as important as cultural standards, if not more so, and they affect every aspect of one’s own life. Furthermore, it is important to have a pre-defined standard for one’s own values. A standard of values by which one makes decisions *is* one’s moral code, and morality is the bridge between desired results and a concrete outcome. Through discussing how my definition of morality differs from the Christian definition of the term, how morality stresses for a standard of values, and the fact that morality is arbitrary when one of these standards is not present; I will effectively define the term morality and stress its necessity in one’s life.

Humans are beings of choice. We were born with the power to choose, and this reveals the need of an objective morality to guide these choices. Morality is hinged upon a standard, and this standard must be identified before it can be employed into one’s life. Determining one’s standard is not quite as daunting a task as it may appear, for the process is simply the choosing what one values most in life. My standard is my own happiness, and I established this standard by identifying what in life I value most: happiness. This is not to be confused with hedonism, however, in that I seek a long-term happiness rather than pleasure in the moment. Once a standard is introduced, however, a conceptual understanding of the term morality is still needed.

The concept of morality is best explained through a very elementary question: Why is it wrong to steal my neighbor’s food? The answer to this question falls back on the issue of standards. If my standard is to take what I need when I need it from whatever source is convenient, then my actions are moral based on my standards. On the other hand, if my standard is to take what I earn from those that owe it to me, then it would only be moral to take the food if my neighbor was indebted to me. Made evident with the first example standard, what is moral is not always just. While, based on my standards, it may be moral to take food that I have not worked for, it is not just. If one has not worked for it, one does not deserve it – regardless of one’s moral stance on the issue.

Just as it is irresponsible to feed a child poison or steal from the poor, it is irresponsible to follow a moral standard without understanding the reasoning behind it. My definition, morality is the bridge between desired results and a concrete income – *but why?* Morality is the guidebook for one’s life, and it is logical to conclude that what is “moral” is what can bridge what one desires with what one attains. It is argued that my definition of “Morality” is subjective due to its reliance on standards which are inherently subjective. This argument is quickly silenced, however, with my definition of morality. This definition is objective through and throughout, although the standards of which morality is hinged upon can vary from person to person. This definition is not easily accepted, however, and is often questioned.

Two questions soon arise: *How do we know if a value or standard is good or bad? What is the standard for my standard?* Craig Biddle acknowledges these exact questions in one of his many journal articles, and argues that reason and rationality are the keys to determining one’s standards. In citing Ayn Rand, popular American philosopher, he argues that one simply has to find what they value most and that it is most evident through their day-to-day life. He is quoted as writing: “Some people choose to play soccer; they value footwork, teamwork, and winning. Some choose to dance ballet; they value grace, poise, and flight. And some choose to attend church; they value sermons, faith, and prayer… A man who treats his wife with respect values certain qualities in her. One who abuses his wife values having power over her. A General who fights for mandatory "volunteerism" values involuntary servitude. One who fights to defend individual rights values freedom. And so on. Different people act in different ways; they value different things.” (Biddle) Through these examples, Biddle is showing, by example, how the daily lives and actions of the individual are one of the main sources for identifying one’s standards; thus, what is determined as moral. Even when a concise, objective standard for morality is determined, there are still situations of moral ambiguity that can arise.

In an article entitled “Kill the Cat That Kills the Bird?” a man is in trouble with the law for killing a cat who is killing birds. (Barcott) While animal rights activists were up in arms, a deeper, more fundamental argument took place. *Was what the man did moral?* The standard of the man may have been to help those who cannot help themselves; and, in that case, his actions would be moral. The prosecuting judge in the situation, however, may have a standard which has man to not involve them in the flow of nature. Even when both sides of the argument are presented, the situation still remains morally vague. If the man interferes in the situation, the cat dies and the bird lives; however, if he chooses to save the bird, the cat dies in the process. Whether the man involves himself or not, one of the two animals will die. In either side of the argument, regardless of any evidence to support either stance, an animal would surely die. There is no clear-cut path that the man in question should have taken even with a proper standard of values. Situations of moral ambiguity such as the story of the Cat and the Bird arise fairly often, and this serves as a large area of debate among philosophers and scholars alike. While there are several problem-areas within my definition, such as those of moral ambiguity, it still remains more logically sound than that of a Pentecostal Christian.

Pentecostal Christians are likely to define “Morality” as the compliance of one’s actions with God’s will, and will argue that “God’s Will” is clearly defined in the Bible. One reference many give is from the Ten Commandments, which includes several laws, such as “You shall not murder.” “You shall not commit adultery.” “You shall not steal.” and “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” (Bible Gateway)The issue with this definition is that it is not all-encompassing. Under the general rules listed in the Bible, “modern interpretations” of the rules can be derived, but they are inherently subjective due to the sheer number of these “modern interpretations” which are drawn from a single passage of scripture. When a clear cut answer cannot be drawn, the all-too-common “have faith” response is often given as a cop-out, and the individual is left to wait upon “divine inspiration” to guide them toward their choices. Whether or not faith is credible or not is a different discussion, but there is no logic behind faith so it is tough to objectively criticize it. I understand the inclination for a Christian to found the term “Morality” in an abstract foundation such as “The compliance of one’s actions with *God’s Will*” and judge actions as moral or immoral on a case-by-case basis, but that gives the individual no true, objective standard for morality. However, my intent is not to slander Christians for using a system of morality which is reliant on abstract deities, but to advocate the benefits towards using a definition of morality that is not hinged upon such an incomprehensible base.

Ranging from the samurai of ancient China to the Holocaust and, ultimately, today, having an objective definition for the term morality is key for living with any sort of consistency. Good decision making is essential to a fruitful life, and decisions are made according to a standard of values. As with cultures over time, the values of the societies had a daily impact on the lives of those within them. Not to undermine the standards of the individual, however, for these are equal, if not more important than those of the society. My definition of morality differs from the Christian definition of the term, morality stresses for a standard of values, and morality is arbitrary when standards are not present. This is all not to insult Christians for their viewpoints, but to advocate to them the benefits of defining morality objectively – giving them reason and logic to back up one of the many points of the religion that are under fire in the twenty-first century.

Works Cited

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