

My Contemporary Version of Ethics

“Contemporary Moral Problems”

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Preface:

This is our 3rd and I'm proud to say I have finished another accomplishment. It might not be much but how many nineteen year olds can you find who have made 3 books during his college life. The challenge might not be as hard as what we did in the past but it is still worth it.

Dedication:

This book is dedicated to me for pushing myself always and fighting of the temptation to procrastinate at every chance I get.

This book is dedication to all my colleagues who have felt the same way I have and who also have went through the horrific times of sleeping late and waking up early

This book is dedication to the people who I have spoken to at night to ask for help and keeps me awake and sane. They are the reason I can keep going on even if it is 45 minutes past 4am.

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James Rachels: Egoism and Moral Scepticism

What I expect to learn: What is egoism, how does it affect our lives, and how does an action become selfish or unselfish.

Quote: “If we describe one person’s action as selfish, and another person’s actions as unselfish, we are overlooking the crucial fact that in both cases, assuming that the action is voluntarily, the agent is merely doing what he most wants to do”.

I guess the real topic on this story is what egoism really is and how it affects us. Egoism explains that “No one is commonly believed, would have such iron strength of mind to stand fast in doing right and keep his hands off other men’s goods, when he could go to the marketplace and fearlessly help himself to anything he wanted, enter houses and sleep with any woman he chose, set prisoners free and kill men at his pleasure, and in a word go about among men with the powers of a god”. It shows that people will only do actions that benefit themselves. Egoism is when we do what we think would be most advantageous for our position. Being moral does not play a role since morals at times disadvantageous. This affects our lives when we think of how we go about our day. This is when we take time to think why or for what reason we should do something.

What I have learned:

- Not every act is selfish
- There are people who prioritize others before themselves
- People need other people to survive

John Arthur: Religion, Morality, and Conscience

What I expect to learn: Learn the differences of morality and religion. How our conscience affects our morality. If religion can co-exist with morality and its guidelines.

Quote: “The practice of morality and religion are thus importantly different. One involves our attitudes toward various forms of behavior, typically express using the notions of rules, rights and obligations. The other, religion, typically involves prayer, worship, beliefs about the supernatural, institutional forms, and authoritative texts.”

The question is how we can cope with the different beliefs of our morals and religion. These have their rules and guidelines. Even if morality and religion are not connected there are times when they show conflict within each other. There will always be consequences in our own actions and this where morality and religion can come to play. Morality can define how we behave in our everyday lives. This is what we believe in and could affect how we see other people. There are times when our religion says no but given the circumstances and situations our morality says yes. We must learn to decide on what is right, as John Arthur thinks that we still depend on our society. We still need other people to survive.

What I have learned:

- We depend on our society
- Religion and Morality is different

Friedrich Nietzsche: Master- and Slave- Morality

What I expect to learn: What is master and slave morality? Which offers the better outcome and why.

Quote: “The noble type of man regards himself as the determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: “What is injurious to me is injurious to itself”; he knows that it is he himself only who confers honor on things; he is a creator of values.”

This talks about the idea that there are only two moralities in the world. There is master morality which talks about how the rich governs over the poor, that being part of the rich is a status within itself. It is believed that anyone who is not rich or at the same status does not belong to their stature. They set the ground for what they think is right and wrong. The rich does not help the poor out of pity but of purpose. Because of all the resources they have they are made to give to the poor. Slave morality is being the safe man. Stick to what is good nature even if exposing themselves to stupid takes. What is said here is that you cannot choose over slave or master morality. If you are not part of the rich then you are part of the poor.

What I have learned:

- How oppressed the poor is.
- The rich sees themselves as high beings
- This is not a world we want to live in

Mary Midgley: Trying Out One's New Sword

What I expect to learn: The effects of moral isolation. How different cultures affect us. How we act towards cultures we do not understand.

Quote: "If there were really an isolating barrier, of course, our own culture could never have been formed. It is no sealed box, but a fertile jungle of different influences – Greek, Jewish, Roman, Norse, Celtic and so forth, into which further influences are pouring – American, Indian, Japanese, Jamaican, you name it."

Moral isolation assumes that we cultures are secluded to the people who follow them. But the idea seems false because each culture reflects a small part of every culture. But this does not mean that we can understand each and every culture. Like said, a samurai must use his new sword to test its sharpness. A wayfarer who happens to pass by will be cut or "tsujigiri" as the Japanese calls it. If the blade does not cut the wayfarer then the samurai's honor is tainted. As a Filipino we can understand the concept but cannot grasp the reality and truth of this. We do not mindlessly hurt a stranger walking down the street just to test a new kitchen knife we bought. This is an example of an instance where we cannot understand a part of their culture. Even so, the Filipino culture is mixed with a lot of different races. Seeing our history with the Spanish, American and Japanese, we all have inherited a part of their culture. This also reflects for other countries which culture shows a large mix.

What I have learned:

- We can be a part of every culture
- Moral Isolation is about the mix of cultures
- There are instances where a culture seems wrong to us but right to them

John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism

What I expect to learn: What is utilitarianism? How does being happy prove in ethics?

Quote: “It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.”

John Stuart Mill sees it as it is not the greatest happiness but the amount of happiness altogether. Happiness becomes the sole center of our lives. We see it as the greatest achievement a person can have as a human. There is a principle followed and it is called the principle of pleasure because this means it is the greatest good that can contribute and fulfill to the happiness of other people. This shows that everyone wants pleasure may it be quick or long. Most of the time happiness comes with pleasure and vice versa. This becomes our true goal and we must see to it that it happens. Yet we must learn that not all forms of happiness is good no matter what pleasure it can give. There are those that lead us into temptation and deliver no good. Happiness must come with goodness and should not hurt other people. Like the principle of pleasure other people must be filled with happiness too. No matter what are the consequences we must make sure to see to it the outcome of our pleasures.

What I have learned:

- The meaning of happiness
- The Greatest Pleasure Principle
- The temptations

James Rachel: The Debate over Utilitarianism

What I expect to learn: What is he debating about? Why utilitarianism? Who are the opposing sides between the debate?

Quote: “The happiness which forms the utilitarianism standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent’s own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others utilitarianism requires him to be strictly impartial as disinterested and benevolent spectator.”

I think this statement shows that there are the consequences of happiness. The question is that is that if happiness is the only important thing in our lives? To be honest I think anyone would debate over this issue. There are times that we do ask ourselves if our only significance is to make ourselves happy. Well have different obligations and responsibilities and not all of them gives us pleasure. Does this mean we have to quit these obligations are responsibilities in order to achieve happiness? If raising a child does not show any pleasure then must we give up on the child and find another source. We must also ask ourselves the consequences in the long run, we have to think what the outcomes in the short are and long run. There are times when it may seem un-pleasurable and undesirable but in the long run it pays.

What I have learned:

- Happiness and the other sides
- How it affects us
- What are the different possibilities

Immanuel Kant: Categorical Imperative

What I expect to learn: The uses of categorical imperatives in our daily lives. Can it help us in how we do things? Are we able to see perspectives differently through it?

Quote: “A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes – because of its fitness of attaining some proposed end: it is good through its willing alone – that is, good in itself. Considered in itself is to be esteemed beyond comparison as far higher than anything it could ever bring out merely in order to favor some inclination or, if you like, the sum total of inclinations.”

This tells us that a person acts morally to what the person thinks is right. It becomes right when it treats others for a better cause. We choose what we think is right good or bad as it is. Yet Kant thinks that we humans really have no freedom of choice. When we are born there are already a set of rules that we have to follow. We only have the option to follow the given rules. Humans cannot really be free until we are able to do anything selflessly. As long as there is a force that holds us back such as rules, laws and beliefs then we are not free. Today, we choose what we think is right. We do what we think would benefit us and other people. Sometimes the outcome may not be the best for others but rightfully it is correct. This is how Immanuel Kant proposed the categorical imperative. We enjoy accomplishing the tasks we want done.

What I learned:

- The reasons of Categorical Imperative
- How to be free
- What is right and good for Kant

Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue

What I expect to learn: Do we need happiness? What is virtue and do we use it today? Can we both have happiness and virtue?

Quote: “Now such a thing of happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honor, pleasure, reason and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves, but we choose them also for the sake of happiness judging that by means of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one choose for the sake of these, no, in general, for anything other than self...”

We find that happiness is what we aim for or truly seek in our life. We find happiness as the highest form of goodness and states what we have accomplished. We want to make ourselves happy because we know it is good. I guess a problem we see is that in every person they have their own idea of happiness. What makes me happy can be different from the person next to me. We must find happiness ourselves. Aristotle sees virtue as being the best of a certain aspect. For Aristotle being morally virtuous is doing things at the right manner and living correct. This is something we live with everyday. As humans we continue to learn how to survive and deal with everyday obstacles. We face a lot in the problems we have in contemporary times. Being morally virtuous today would be a role model for people.

What I have learned:

- The concept of happiness and virtue
- We need happiness in our lives
- Virtue is important in society

Joel Feinberg: The Nature and Value of Rights

What I expect to learn: What is nature and value of rights? What kind of values is he talking about? What makes it right?

Quote: “Fill this imagine world with as much benevolence, compassion, sympathy, and pity as it will conveniently hold without strain. Now we can imagine men helping one another from compassionate motives merely, quite as much or even more than they do in our actual world from a variety of more complicated motives”

This shows how important our rights are. We should not only think of the morals that come and we know. Our rights are as important as our morals because it is also a basis on how we are treated. We see our rights are the set of what can and cannot be done to us. Even if an immoral person thinks he is moral there are still the rights that tell what and what may not be done. It is our obligation to follow these rights. Just like education, everyone has the right to be educated. Can you imagine a world where no one is educated and everyone lives like cavemen all living off of the rule survival of the fittest. With this in mind there is where rights come into play. We all have to be educated to know what is right and wrong. Our rights show what we must live on.

What I learned:

- What are rights
- The importance of rights
- Duty and rights

Ronald Dworkin: Taking Rights Seriously

What I expect to learn: Why we should take rights seriously? What are the topics that we should take seriously? How serious should we get?

Quote: “Do the minorities whose rights have been violated have the right to violate the law in return? Or does the silent majority itself have rights, including the right that those who break the law be punished?”

The main issue in this statement is the government. We always question how the government rules our country. They are those who set the rules and standard in each country. There are also times when we see if the government is being right and consider the people's rights. This is why we should take rights seriously. If we want to be respected and keep our dignity we must know and keep our rights. Our rights protect us from the anarchy the world can show. If people can do anything they want, the first thing that would happen would be destruction. The government tries to keep us in order but there are times when they need order themselves. Because as people the government can also make mistakes and this should happen as few as possible. When the government starts to oppose us people we also need to tell them that they are wrong. They speak for the majority of the people and when there is a mistake it will be seen.

John Rawls: A Theory of Justice

What I expect to learn: What is the theory of justice? Why justice?

Quote: “In general, the expectations of representative persons depend upon the distribution of rights and duties throughout the basic structure. When this changes, expectations change. I assume that expectations are connected: by raising the prospect of the representative man in one position we presumably increase or decrease the prospects of representative men in other positions.”

There are two principles of justice according to John Rawls. The first principle involves equal basic liberties. Like in the United States of America, their basic liberties are: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Press, Freedom to have peaceful assemblies and Freedom to Petition the Government. These are the basic liberties and show that they are needed in the society. We cannot imagine a world without these liberties. Countries would not be able to coexist if there is no freedom in religion. The second principle concerns the arrangement of social and economic inequalities. Social inequality is not having equal social status. This is when your basic liberties are taken away from you. Economic inequality is the difference of those who have money and those who have not. What the second principle says is that how both social and economic affect each other and how we must put a halt to it.

What I have learned:

- Social and Economic Inequality
- Basic Liberties
- Importance of Justice

Annette Baier: The Need for More than Justice

What I expect to learn: What is more than justice? Is there a difference with the justice today?

Need what of justice?

Quote: "Traces of the old contemporary moral poison still remain in even the best contemporary moral theorizing. Few may actually say that women's place is in the home, but there is much muttering, when unemployment figures rise, about how the relatively recent flood of women into the work force complicates the problem, as if it would be a good thing if women just went back home whenever unemployment rises, to leave the available jobs for the men."

I did a search on Justice and these are a few of the understanding I learned: Justice as harmony, Justice as divine command, Justice as natural law, Justice as human creation, Justice as authoritative command, Justice as trickery, Justice as mutual agreement, and Justice as subordinate value. I question where there are so many forms of justice but as Annette thinks the best form of justice is when there is harmony and care. What Annette Baier does point out is the difference between the justice of men and women. Women plays a large role in every country yet are still treated as second class citizen and some are not treated as citizens at all. This should be an issue because justice promotes equality. There are countries that treat their women like animals having no right to be educated. There are still countries that look down on their women as nothing more than slaves. This is the need for more justices. There are still a lot of places in the world where there is no justice and these are the people that have to live with that fact every day. We must consider the places where justice does not reach and try to imagine what kind of world they live in.

What I have learned:

- Why we need more justice
- The oppression of other people
- If there could be justice everywhere

Integrative Questions:

1. What is ethical egoism?
2. What is command theory?
3. Which is better, master or slave morality?
4. Moral isolation can fit the world?
5. Does the hedonistic principle appeal to you?
6. Can happiness provide all you need?
7. What are Immanuel Kant's works?
8. What is virtue?
9. Do you know your rights?
10. Do rights affect religion?
11. What can you do to stop social and economic inequalities?
12. How will you help the women and children oppressed in justice?

Source:

<http://dictionary.reference.com/>

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>

<http://www.friesian.com/kant.htm>