

Journal Entry 1

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What is the source of my morality? How do I know what is right and wrong?

Morality, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, is “a code of conduct that applies to all who can understand it and can govern their behavior by it...morality should never be overridden, that is, no one should ever violate a moral prohibition or requirement for non-moral considerations” (The Definition of Morality, n.d.). While I generally agree with this definition, I further believe that morality is a personal philosophy based on my upbringing, environment and chosen influences. Because it is personal, my definition of morality might vary somewhat from someone else’s definition of morality but, ultimately, the principles are similar. Rachels (2009) noted that “...the virtuous man is therefore identified with the man of integrity, i.e. the man who acts according to precepts which he can, on reflection, consciously approve in his own heart” (p. 373).

I was raised in a Christian home where my mother and father took me to church every Sunday. Determining whether my beliefs came from my family or my church is a little hard to distinguish. It’s a little like the question of the chicken and the egg. Which came first? While my family based their morality on the beliefs of the Christian faith, I first gained my beliefs because my parents exposed me to those beliefs. Had I been raised in a non-Christian home, it is likely that I would have adapted non-Christian beliefs. That being said, it does not imply that non-Christian beliefs are non-moral beliefs. While I am not an expert on world religion or beliefs of those who do not practice any religion, I would assume that most moral decisions are founded on a similar understanding of what is right and wrong.

I also believe that my definition of morality was challenged as a result of exposure to new environments. As a college student from small-town Ohio in the mid-1980s, I was exposed to new ideas and experiences. While testing the waters of my definition of morality for a very brief time, I returned to what felt right for me.

Morality is a part of human nature. Martin Luther King, Jr., (1998) stated in *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*, that “The first principle of value that we need to rediscover is this: that all reality hinges on moral foundations. In other words, that this is a moral universe, and that there are moral laws of the universe just as abiding as the physical laws” (Chapter 1, 16th paragraph).

Do I agree with Hobbes’ belief that any system of governance that essentially requires representatives to compromise their own interests in the interests of the whole is doomed from the start?

Pojman and Tramel (2009), the editors of *Moral Philosophy*, noted that Hobbes’ theory was based on the idea of “psychological egoism” (p. 69). Feinberg (2013) defined psychological egoism as “the name given to a theory widely held by ordinary people, and at one time almost universally accepted by political economists, philosophers, and psychologists, according to which all human actions when properly understood can be seen to be motivated by selfish desires.” Hobbes (2009) believed that man’s true nature of pride and revenge would forego the laws of nature (justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and the golden rule) unless there was fear of some power that would cause them to behave otherwise. It seems our political leaders have no conscience and no fear of any

retribution. When elections roll around, they will continue to make more promises they fail to keep.

I believe that this is the overwhelming state of our government today. Such behavior is noted in Holland's (2013) article posted to our class discussion group. The author noted that our political leaders have a tendency to respond only to the upper class demands. Such action results in padding their own pockets and achieving a level of notoriety. The only fear is the fear of getting caught.

While I do not usually follow politics, I find that instances such as West Virginia State Senator Evan Jenkins switching positions in his party to pursue a Congressional position in another party exhibit a lack of integrity.

Tenbrunsel and Messick wrote that “[e]veryone is necessarily the hero of his own life story.” In what way is that observation related to Hobbesian thinking and to the question above?

Tenbrunsel and Messick (2004) wrote about self-deception. They argued that “self-deception leads to coding, or framing, of decisions that either eliminate negative ethical characterizations or distort them into positive ones” (p. 232). It seems that many of our political leaders have become desensitized to wrong-doing. In meeting the demands of selected constituents, they have figuratively put blinders on themselves. In only looking toward their self-serving interests, they cannot see the masses whom they have promised equitable representation. Hobbes (2009) noted that mankind has no fear unless there is a power that would cause them behave ethically. They are their own heroes; in essence, they answer to no one but themselves.

In 2008, Marshall University accepted a \$1 million donation to establish the BB&T Center for Advanced Capitalism with the stipulation that MU must teach the philosophies of Ayn Rand as expressed in her novel *Atlas Shrugged* and the College of Business agreed. Is this a moral issue?

I believe Marshall University's acceptance of this donation for the establishment of the BB&T Center for Advanced Capitalism and the teaching of Ayn Rand's philosophy is a moral concern. First of all, the term "advanced capitalism" is a euphemism. Wikipedia states that it is a state where "a capitalist model has been integrated and developed deeply and extensively for a prolonged period." In such societies, schooling, media, and pop culture "indoctrinate the opinions convenient to the powerful." (Yes, I know the dangers of Wikipedia...it was a challenge to find any definition.) I am not sure this is a view that any University should be supporting.

Second, I am not opposed to the University supporting the teaching of the philosophies of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. While I am not yet familiar with her philosophies, I believe that they might be controversial; however, I believe a university is responsible for teaching students to think and form their own opinions by providing a variety of viewpoints. It is then up to the student to support and take hold of those viewpoints he or she finds acceptable within his or her personal belief systems. Through the lens of a philosophy professor, I am sure this would be acceptable. Not being familiar with the philosophies, though, I am not sure how this particular philosophy relates to the teaching in the College of Business.

It is obvious across our campus (and other universities) that prominent donors are recognized by naming buildings and programs. Marshall University has the honor of

having the only college football stadium named after a woman. I also find it interesting that recently the name “Lewis” was removed from our Lewis College of Business. Donations should be provided to support the mission of the University and its students, not to further personal agendas.

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