

Journal Entry 2

Sherri L. Stepp

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Barbara Nicholson, Ph.D., Professor
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Question 1: With whom does your own perspective lie on the question? Are most people's moral acts driven by fear of punishment/disapproval or by the desire to be good people? Which do you think more likely? On what ground?

My perspective lies with Socrates. I do not believe that most people live a moral life in fear of punishment or disapproval. Such punishment, I believe, alludes to our justice system and also to our religious beliefs. In Christianity, this would mean that Christians live a moral life in fear of punishment from God or failure to achieve a trip to Heaven/afterlife. To others, the fear of imprisonment in our justice system might curtail their actions. While I believe there are exceptions to most rules, I believe that humanity behaves morally, not out of fear of punishment or imprisonment, but out of a sense of responsibility to each other and the common good of mankind.

On page 64, the editors of our textbook note that Socrates “...argued that the soul is made up of three parts: a rational part, a spirited part, and an appetitive or passionate part. Justice is defined as a harmony of the soul when each part fulfills its proper function—reason ruling, the spirit courageously serving reason, and the appetites living in temperance, being guided by reason.” Rationality, reason and temperance guide our hearts and actions.

Glaucon presented a question to Socrates: “do you think there is a kind of good which we welcome not because we desire its consequences but for its own sake: joy, for example...knowledge...sight...and health...?” (p. 61). Socrates replied, “Quite right.” I think we humans strive to find joyfulness and happiness. Obtaining these states of mind

does not require fear of punishment. I believe these states of mind are the culmination of behaving morally.

Socrates later noted that “It is not even health he aims at, nor does he consider it most important that he should be strong, healthy or beautiful, unless he acquires moderation as a result, but he will cultivate harmony in his body for the sake of consonance in his soul” (p. 67). Cultivating consonance in one’s soul, in my opinion, is that understanding we have with ourselves that we need to be able to live with the actions we take and the choices we make. Actions that harm others eat away at our souls. We strive to do good for the sake of helping others. In times of great tragedy, like Hurricane Katrina, we somehow manage to set aside our political and religious differences and come together to help those in need. Marshall University students, football fans, and Big Green donors, in a matter of hours, donated \$520,000 to send to Katrina victims via the Red Cross (<https://votesmart.org/public-statement/123765/marshall-universitys-fundraising-efforts-for-hurricane-katrina-relief#.UINCr0mwrIU>).

There are those out there that believe that the “better life” means being better than everyone else, that climbing to the top rung of the ladder is all that’s important regardless of those trampled in the process. We see these actions glorified in pop culture. Those who seek gain, like the shepherd who found the magic ring, ultimately have to deal with the consequences of their actions and perhaps the most vindictive punishment is our own conscience.

Question 2: Is there a distinction between or among them (Nietzsche and Rand) that makes one author either more or less appealing to you? If so, is the distinction

a matter of degree or of kind/substance? Or do you view their philosophies essentially the same? And if you choose the latter, what is your general reaction to their thinking on self-interest?

I do not find Nietzsche, Rand, or Hobbes appealing. Their philosophies undermine the Christian belief system that I have developed since I was a young child. While this class has made me think about the reasons I believe what I believe, my beliefs have become a part of me, like a limb. I would feel handicapped without my beliefs.

Beyond my Christian beliefs, I believe all three philosophies degrade the innate goodness and morality of mankind. In my first journal, I quoted Martin Luther King, Jr., and I believe this holds true here as well. 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).

I think Rand and Nietzsche’s beliefs are different and it is a matter of substance, not degree. I think Rand’s ethical egoism focused strictly on the individual. On page 81, she states that “By the grace of reality and the nature of life, man—every man—is an end in himself, he exists for his own sake, and the achievement of his own happiness is his highest moral purpose.” She further notes, on the same page, that “The purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and love.” In regard to Randian Man, Chambers (1957) wrote that “Man’s fate ceases to be tragic at all. Tragedy is bypassed by the pursuit of happiness. Tragedy is henceforth pointless. Henceforth, man’s fate, without God, is up to him. And to him alone. His happiness is

strict materialistic terms, lies with his own workaday hands and ingenious brain. His happiness becomes, in Miss Rand's words, 'the moral purpose of his life'." Rand summarized her own writings in this statement: "Discard the protective rags of that vice which you called a virtue—learn to value yourself, which means: to fight for your happiness—and when you learn that pride is the sum of all virtues, you will learn to live like a man" (p. 84-85).

The editors of our textbook noted that Nietzsche believed that "we all seek, not happiness, but to affirm ourselves, to flourish, and dominate." This involves the domination of other people. He stated that a "fundamental belief must be precisely that society is not allowed to exist for its own sake, but only as a foundation and scaffolding, by means of which a select class of beings may be able to elevate themselves to their higher duties, and in general to a higher existence" (p. 125).

His discussion of master morality and slave morality defined his ideas of dominance over others. In his idea of Master Morality, "the distinction of moral values have originated either in a ruling caste, pleasantly conscious of being different from the ruled—or among the ruled class...the noble type of man regards himself as a determiner of values; he does not require to be approve of; he passes the judgment...the noble man also helps the unfortunate, but not—or scarcely—out of pity; but rather from an impulse generated by the superabundance of power" (p. 126). Slave Morality referred to those who were "...the abused, the oppressed, the suffering, the unemancipated, the weary...It is here that sympathy, the kind, helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, and friendliness obtain honor; for here these are the most useful qualities, and almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence. Slave morality is

essentially the morality of utility...” (p. 127). Ultimately, Nietzsche believed that power was the ultimate good. He believed that the weak should “even be helped to perish” (p. 130).

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. His beliefs centered on psychological egoism which, defined by Feinberg (2013), is “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.” Of the three philosophers, I believe that Hobbes might have the most evident theory in society today.

Question 3: On what subject(s) do you find yourself least able to persuade others using facts, logic, rational thinking, etc.? Why do you think your listeners are unmoved by your appeal to reason?

I tend to be a bit passive and not venture into situations where I find a need to be persuasive about belief systems that have been developed through family and environment for nearly 50 years. I do not like to argue nor do I like defending religious or political beliefs. After reading the Epley and Caruso (2004) article, I believe this is a good example of an egocentric state of mind. I tend to think that my beliefs are just that—my beliefs. I don’t feel that I need to justify or defend my beliefs as long as they are not affecting someone else’s existence. On the other hand, if my actions affect others, then I must defend them.

Epley and Caruso suggest that "...people making ethical judgments tend to be 'naïve realists' assuming that their perception of the world is a veridical representation of its actual properties rather than a subjective perception of the world as it merely appears to them" (p. 172). When religious beliefs are introduced at such a young age, and even later when political beliefs are introduced (as a reflection of religious beliefs), these topics become personal. When we appeal to reason to defend our own beliefs, it seems that we are personally attacking another's beliefs whose roots are different, yet as deep as our own. Epley and Caruso quote Jonathan Swift: "You cannot reason a person out of a position he did not reason himself into in the first place" (p. 183).

Question 4: Virtues are acquired differently in Smith's version. They are not qualities we need to learn; rather, they are innate, arising out of a natural sense of empathy with others. Whose argument, if either, do you find more persuasive, Aristotle's or Smith's? Why?

I find Adam Smith's argument more persuasive. Smith (1759) attributes virtue to the "man within." He notes that "...our passive feelings are almost always so sordid and so selfish, how comes it that our active principles should often be so generous and noble? When we are always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves, than by whatever concerns other men; what is it that prompts the generous, upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the interests of others? It is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulse of self-love. It is a stronger power,

a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct...”

This “man within” is our conscience, but could also be likened to a higher power. In the Christian faith, those that have accepted Christ believe that the Holy Spirit, the third part of the Trinity of God, lives within them to guide them. Smith further states that “It is from him [the man within] only that we learn the real littleness of ourselves, and of whatever relates to ourselves, and the natural misrepresentations of self-love can be corrected only by the eye of this impartial spectator.”

I find Aristotle’s argument less persuasive. He stated that “virtue of character is a mean and what sort of mean it is; that it is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency; and that is a mean because it aims at the intermediate condition in feelings and actions” (p. 311). I find his procedure of finding the mean between two vices to be complicated. He presents a daunting task of steering clear of both extremes, yet it is “hard to hit the intermediate extremely accurately...take the lesser of the evils” (p. 311). In some cases, even the mean is not virtuous. In Smith’s view, it is much simpler to attune ourselves to listen to the “man within.”

Question 5: In “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn,” Jonathan Bennett arrives at the conclusion that sometimes the right thing to do is allow one’s sympathies to override her moral principles. Kant, of course, would find that poor advice given his position that it is in moral dilemmas that precisely the wrong emotions surface. Which position do you find most persuasive?

In Bennett's discussion of Huckleberry Finn, I think the most compelling thing is the fact that Huck believed he was doing something "wrong" when he was actually doing something "right" or moral. Bennett quotes Huck: "I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right...what's the use in learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right and it ain't no trouble to do wrong...do whichever comes handiest at the time" (p. 345). Huck experienced a moral dilemma in deciding whether to help Jim or turn him in. He argued with his own conscience. While Kant might argue that the wrong emotions surface in the midst of moral dilemma, I believe that Huck's correct emotions surfaced in his dilemma. While Huck didn't understand that slavery was wrong, his "sympathies" led him to do the right thing. Bennett notes that Huck "...cannot envisage revising his morality...he does not begin to approach the thought that slavery should be rejected on moral grounds or the thought that what he is doing is not theft" (p. 345). The moral nature of humankind won the battle.

In my opinion, Bennett was right on target when he said, "So I must try to keep my morality open to revision, exposing it to whatever valid pressures there are including pressures from my sympathies" (p. 346). While I believe that morality is part of human nature, society does affect our view of morality. Slavery is one issue that, at least in our country, has been abolished. Many who held slaves in the times of Huck's adventures did not consider it to be immoral.

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