

Journal Entry 3

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Question 1: “Those Who Walk Away from Omelas” is packed with example and metaphor. Choose one that you find particularly powerful as it relates to contemporary circumstances and explain its relevance to current events/conditions/phenomena. What do you find especially compelling about that example/metaphor?

The story of “Those Who Walk Away from Omelas” is a sad analogy of our American society, or perhaps society in general. I believe the most powerful metaphor is that of the captive child barely kept alive as he or she lives in his or her own squalor. I would like to propose that the child is a metaphor of personal responsibility and accountability. Everyone knows it’s there, but no one wants to do anything about it. Even those who choose to walk away do nothing to save the child; they just walk away.

In America, we strive to be better than everyone else and to have more than everyone else, often at the expense of others. We assume that the more things we have, the better we dress, the nicer our car, that we are “better” persons and the “better” our life will be. We must have the newest and best technologies from which we share how much more we have. Children will brag about their own possessions and degrade those without them. Parents will praise their child’s poor behaviors and not require them to take responsibility for their own actions. Our political leaders make decisions based upon their personal gain when they are supposedly elected to represent their constituents. They are blind to their expected responsibility and accountability.

We assume that things and status will make us happy. I would argue that this is a misinterpretation of happiness. I don’t understand how one can find happiness at the expense of others. Omelas is intended to be a utopian society, but it is just the opposite. Ignorance may be bliss, but it is noted that everyone knows of the child. Most everyone

lives in their own prison of a guilty conscience. Omelas is nothing more than a masquerade party where everyone is hiding behind a happy mask. To achieve real happiness, I think we must be accountable and accept responsibility for our own actions or inactions. Only then can our clear conscience lead us to true happiness.

Question 2A: Within the narrative frame, Huxley examines (a) the dangers of emerging technologies and their potential for controlling society and (b) the incompatibility of happiness with truth (hence, the necessity for concealing the truth. Which, if either, of those two avenues do you think more likely? Are we more likely to be enslaved by the things we hate or by the things we love? And if neither of those suits you, what's your nomination for the phenomenon/phenomena that we'll allow to divorce us from reality? Or do you think we are so perceptive a society that we simply won't permit that to happen?

I would anticipate that we are more likely to be imprisoned by the things we love than the things we hate. We have an awareness and avoidance of the things we hate, while the things we love sneak up to take us prisoner with an element of surprise.

In *Brave New World*, Huxley has Mustapha Mond tell us that the Inventions Office "is stuffed with plans for labour-saving processes. Thousands of them" (Huxley, 1932, p. 224). Mond explained that they did not execute the invention plans "[f]or the sake of the labourers; it would be sheer cruelty to afflict them with excessive leisure" (p. 224). In the BNW society, the citizens already had too much leisure or perhaps the inventions were not executed to prevent the society from gaining knowledge.

I think we are allowing ourselves to be imprisoned by our technologies that are supposed to make our lives easier. Email has ruined the art of a good telephone conversation with a colleague, family member, or friend. Text messaging is even less personal. People would rather email or text than talk. While I love my cell phone and its capabilities, I no longer fully enjoy the evenings away from work, a weekend, or even a

vacation. I have allowed myself to be available at all times. Is that my phone's fault? No, it is my own fault for allowing that to happen. I have imprisoned myself by making myself available to everyone at all times. I have no leisure time or time of relaxation because I fear that next email or text message and what it might bring. I tell myself that I pride myself on keeping up with everything and that I am the one in control when in actuality it controls me.

Question 2B: What are the “Feely Corporations” in our society? How do they operate?

I believe that advertising companies are one example of “Feely Corporations” in our society. While they are not solely responsible because they are expected to represent their clients, they are the creative minds who offer to sell us perfection, youth, sex, a hope. We all know that the image of the perfect woman is spoiled by the image that advertising companies sell us with photo-shopped bodies. We know that Oil of Olay will make us look twenty years younger and every teenage boy buys Axe body spray because it makes him irresistible to women. In essence, advertising companies sell us the unattainable as opposed to reality. They sell us a vision or dream.

Advertising is everywhere. It is on our streets, on our televisions, at our sporting events, on our radios, in our magazines and magazines, in our mail, on our websites, on our buses and vehicles, and even in our bathroom stalls. It is overwhelming.

There are some that would argue that advertising companies and McDonald's have made their children fat because their children beg for Happy Meals. Beer and wine commercials allude to everyone having a good time and being responsible drinkers. The commercials do not reflect the bipolar father who starts his drinking binge at 8:00am or

the depressed mother who hides the wine bottle under the sink with the bleach and other household cleaners. We are led to believe that drinking the right brand of beer and wine is all about getting together with friends and having a good time. This might reflect a partial reality, but not the whole truth.

The video game industry is another example of a “Feely Corporation” in our society. The games are so advanced that players can become lost in the action of the game. They create avatars and become a part of the game. I think many of our youth (and adults, too) use video games to escape reality and become something that society prohibits or forbids them from being.

Question 2C: Is there value in learning forbearance? In suffering?

In Nietzsche’s Moral and Political Philosophy in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Leiter (2013) surmised that Nietzsche found a definitive value in suffering. In essence, the badness of suffering balances the goodness of happiness. Leiter wrote that Nietzsche admired suffering and would have believed that suffering is necessary for the “cultivation of human excellence” and is a “prerequisite for any great human achievement” (Leiter, 2103, para. 43 and 44). He mentions artists whose great works came as the result of suffering.

Leiter’s discussion of Nietzsche’s beliefs of suffering closely model the situation in Brave New World. He believed that Nietzsche feared that “the risk is that a culture — like ours — which has internalized the norms *against* suffering and *for* pleasure will be a culture in which potential artists — and other doers of great things — will, *in fact*,

squander themselves in self-pity and the seeking of pleasure” and, therefore, undermine human excellence (Lieter, 2013, para. 46).

I think there is a lot of truth in Nietzsche’s beliefs about suffering. I think suffering brings an appreciation for the good things in life. Without the experience of suffering, one does not fully comprehend the state of true happiness.

Question 3: Reflecting on your own life (*really* reflecting – take some time with this), with whose position has your moral decision-making most closely coincided – Hume’s or Kant’s? What is your evidence for that answer?

I believe that in my youth my moral-decision making most closely coincide with Kant’s position. Growing up in a Christian home and a small Baptist church, I was presented with a strict list of rules and regulations. I understand that others might have felt oppressed by some tyrannical rule in their homes or churches, but I never felt that way. I was raised to believe that these rules and regulations were just the right thing to do. The scriptures taught me that I was not supposed to lie, kill, steal, covet, commit adultery, not to drink “strong drink,” etc. These themes are universal among most religions and I believe that this universality exists because these rules do represent the right things to do or not do. When I messed up, I didn’t feel that some unknown god was going to send me to hell. I was taught that I had a forgiving God who would accept my apology if I repented. I lived my life at that time *with* duty, as Kant said: “[d]uty is the necessity of an action done out of respect for the law” (in Pojman & Tramel, 2009, p. 223). My laws were the laws of my religion.

As an adult, while still living my life based on Christian principles, I learned that I was capable of making my own decisions but those decisions were still based on the

religious values and rules on which I had been raised. In Kant's terminology, I found that I no longer made life choices "with duty" but "from duty." I learned to make life choices and decisions through thought and reason with the basis of my reason being the laws of my religion. Kant was quoted as having said: (p. 223) "...passages of Scripture which command us to love our neighbor and even our enemy. For love as an inclination cannot be commanded; but beneficence from duty, when no inclination compels us and even when a natural and unconquerable aversion opposes such beneficence, is practical, and not pathological, love" (in Pojman & Tramel, 2009, p. 223)."

All of this said, I would argue that I do sometimes make decisions based on the expected outcomes without deference to a strict set of rules. These days, information travels at the speed of light and we are too concerned about what others will think of us. We want to be liked, and if not liked, we want to be respected. Hume said that "[n]othing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason" (Hume, 1739/40, para. 1). I may battle within myself the urge to make decisions based on the laws I learned, but understand that a "little white lie" might prevent someone's feelings from being hurt. I think many times, we don't actually tell a little white lie, we just fail to offer the truth. When I ask my husband if my outfit looks okay, does he tell me the truth or what I want to hear? Many times, we tell our friends, family, and colleagues what they want to hear in respect of (or fear of?) the consequences. Hume believed "that since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them" (Hume, 1739/40, para. 15).

I do believe that, as a human, it is impossible to live a perfect life. As an adult, I still have that opportunity to repent any poor decisions, whether they are made from reason or passion.

Question 4: In Langston's article regarding Kant's young female correspondent, a central question is whether it is morally right to clear one's own conscience at the expense of harming or causing pain to a significant other. Most often, people are quick to say no – that it's never right to engage in behavior that one has reason to know will hurt another. Why? Think back to the authors we read earlier in the semester in the unit on individual ethics, particularly Nietzsche, and Rand. How would you convince someone who subscribes to a Nietzschean or Randian perspective that it's wrong to unburden yourself? With which ethical model(s) does suffering one's guilt in silence conform?

Ms. Maria von Herbert acknowledged that she offended her friend and lost his love 'because of a long drawn out lie' that she disclosed to him (Langton, 1993, p. 482). She wrote to Kant to ask him to confirm that she did the right thing, "either damn me or comfort me" (p. 482). According to Langton, Kant asked her whether she reproached herself for the confession or for the "immorality intrinsic to the lie" (p. 483). It seems as though he thought she should suffer the repercussions of her actions: "But if your reproach is grounded in a moral judgment of your behavior, it would be a poor moral physician who would advise you to cast it from your mind" (p. 483).

Kant believed that "Everyone must admit that if a law is to be morally valid, i.e., is to be valid as a ground of obligation, then it must carry with it absolute necessity" (in Pojman & P. Tramel, 2009, p. 218). I think he would have believed that Ms. Von Herbert would be obligated to tell the truth regardless of the circumstances. By not abiding by this belief, it was her punishment to suffer the circumstances. I believe that Hume (1739/40) would have looked at this differently. Hume would have said that Ms. Von Herbert should have considered the outcome and based her decision on what would

happen upon confessing the lie. If the outcome was not anticipated to be favorable; then she should not have confessed.

Rand would not have made the confession. Under the same circumstances, Rand would have continued her relationship in its pre-confession state of bliss. If she chose to confess, it would be on her terms when she was ready to end the relationship and move on for her own happiness. Rand believed 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...the purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and love” (in Pojman & Tramel, 2009, p. 81). She continued to say that tragedy should be bypassed by the pursuit of happiness. As long as she was happy, she would not disclose the secret.

Nietzsche believed that “we all seek, not happiness, but to affirm ourselves, to flourish, and dominate” (Pojman & Tramel, 2009, p. 123). This involves the domination of other people. He further believed 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” (in Pojman & Tramel, 2009, p. 125). I am not sure that Nietzsche would have confessed. I think he would have held the confession until there was an opportunity that it gave him the upper hand in a situation.

Since I believe that neither Rand nor Nietzsche would not confess the lie, I am not sure that I would need to convince their followers that it is wrong to hurt someone. In general, though, it would be very difficult to convince them when they are so focused on their own situation and the ensuing happiness. I suppose I could use Adam Smith’s

(1759) belief that we each have a “man within” that guides our conscience. I could also discuss the belief found in many religious and cultural realms that one should do unto others as one would have done unto himself. If we are striving for our own happiness, then we should allow others to strive for their own happiness and we should not interfere.

In Kant’s deontological/utilitarian viewpoint, he would want one to suffer in guilt for any immoral acts. Rauscher, in his discussion of Kant’s beliefs about retributivist theory of punishment, wrote that Kant claimed “the only proper justification of punishment is guilt for a crime” (Rauscher, 2012, para. 31). Kant would have believed that Ms. Von Herbert’s lie was a crime.

Question 5: Please provide examples of individuals (reasonably well-known ones, as much as you can manage that), including the necessary circumstances of the incidents, who demonstrate each of his [Nagel’s] categories of moral luck. *(Since this is an informal journal, I feel comfortable in using Wikipedia as an informal resource for the responses to this question.)*

I would first like to address the moral luck in the way one’s actions and projects turn out. When I read this question in relation to the Nagel article, I immediately thought of the person who accidentally created the adhesive for Post-it Notes. As a scientist at 3M, Dr. Spencer Silver was working on a project to develop a “super-strong adhesive.” He failed in creating the desired adhesive but he “accidentally created a ‘low-tack’ reusable, pressure-sensitive adhesive.” Wikipedia quoted a source (About Post-it Brand.com), which stated that Dr. Spencer had created a “solution without a problem.” He did not know what to do with the adhesive. After several years of promoting the low-

tack adhesive within the company, a colleague, Art Fry, found that he could use the low-tack adhesive to attach his bookmark to his hymnbook. Fry later developed what we now know as the Post-it Note. The product was hugely successful in a Boise test market in 1978. In 1980, the product was released in the United States and released a year later in Canada and Europe.

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-it_note and http://www.post-it.com/wps/portal/3M/en_US/Post_It/Global/About/).

I would next like to discuss luck in antecedent circumstances. As you noted in the questions, this would be a situation where the right circumstances would arise to make someone a hero. I thought of the events of September 11, 2001, but specifically thought of the passengers aboard Flight 93 who willingly sacrificed their lives in bringing down the plane in Stonycreek Township, Pennsylvania, to prevent the plane from reaching its designated target. In telephone conversations, these passengers learned of the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centers and presumed the plane was headed for another Washington, D.C., target. The passengers attacked the hijackers and attempted to obtain control of the plane, but the plane crashed killing all 33 passengers, 7 crew members, and the terrorists.

It was later presumed that the target was the U.S. Capitol. Crashing the plane potentially saved hundreds, if not thousands, of lives. At the one-year anniversary of the tragedy, former Pennsylvania Governor and Director of Homeland Security Tom Ridge declared all 40 passengers to be “citizen soldiers” and heroes for their actions.

(Sources: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_93_National_Memorial and http://pittsburgh.about.com/od/flight_93/a/passengers.htm.)

The next type of moral luck is constitutive luck or being nice or doing good without fail. The first person I thought about was the Nobel Peace Prize winner Mother Theresa. She believed that she was called to help and live among the poor. She founded the Roman Catholic organization called the Missionaries of Charity. This organization was comprised of 4500 sisters located in 133 countries. Until her death in 1997, Mother Theresa directed these sisters in running homes and hospices for HIV/AIDS patients, patients with tuberculosis or leprosy, counseling programs for families, orphanages, schools, and soup kitchens. The participating sisters adhered “to the vows of charity, poverty and obedience, and the fourth vow, to give ‘Wholehearted and Free service to the poorest of the poor.’”

Mother Theresa was quoted as having said: “By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus.” Yet at other times, she seemed to question her faith. It was still evident, though that Mother Theresa was human and humans are not perfect. While her life was dedicated to doing good, she was later accused “of failing to provide medical care or painkillers, misusing charitable money, and maintaining positive relationships with dictators.”

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Theresa.)

The fourth type of luck discussed by Nagel is circumstantial luck. According to Nagel, this type of luck depends on the circumstances. I understood this to mean that one could be considered to be moral or immoral depending on which side of the fence you viewed the circumstances. I had to think about this one for a while, but I finally decided to discuss President Harry S. Truman in relation to his decision to bomb Hiroshima and

Nagasaki at the end of World War II. To make a long story short, the bombing is a horrible action; however, the bombing was carried out in an attempt to end the war and save American lives. From a Japanese standpoint, and probably from many Americans, this action was hugely immoral. For the majority of Americans, particularly military families, this action was humane and moral.

In 1945, the war in the Pacific had escalated. “Of the 1.25 million battle casualties incurred by the United States in World War II...nearly one million occurred in the twelve-month period from June 1944 to June 1945. After multiple military strategies, the bombs were dropped and Japan surrendered six days later.

(Sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atomic_bomblings_of_Hiroshima_and_Nagasaki.)

Nagel noted that “[w]hether we succeed in or fail in what we try to do nearly always depends to some extent on factors beyond our control” (in Russell & Deery, 2013, para. 5). While I am determined to complete my doctoral degree, I realize that there are circumstances that could deter that from happening. My prevalent worry is the health of my parents. As an only child, I know that it will be my responsibility to take care of either or both of them should their health fail. In addition, there is my own health and that of my husband and daughter. Should luck fall in my favor, I plan to complete this program in two years, but unforeseen circumstances could interfere and delay, or even terminate, that dream.

Question 6: Was he [Weisel], do you think, immoral for even thinking about his father’s death? Or was it merely circumstantial luck that brought him to that thought? And are we immoral for even thinking mean-spirited or evil thoughts?

I do not believe that Weisel was immoral for thinking about his father's death to obtain his food ration. This is an example of circumstantial luck as the situation was not under Weisel's control. In the deplorable conditions of the concentration camp, his body and mind were trying to fulfill his basic needs. Maslow referred to the basic needs as deficiency needs. These include water, shelter, air, sleep, warmth, sex, and food. When these needs are not being met, our minds and bodies start searching for any way to meet those needs. Nagel wrote that "[p]rior to reflection it is intuitively plausible that people cannot be morally assessed for what is not their fault, or for what is due to factors beyond their control" (in Russell & Deery, 2013, para. 4).

For this same reason, I believe that thinking mean-spirited or evil thoughts is an immoral act, but I would like to note that I believe one immoral act does not make one an immoral person. If we are not in a situation where our thoughts are impaired by the deficiencies of our basic needs or some other psychoses, I think evil, mean-spirited thoughts are wrong. I am sure there are some that would argue that it's not immoral until such thoughts are acted upon; however, I believe one should be able to control his or her thoughts. Nagel stated that "even if one controls the impulses, one still has the vice" (in Russell & Deery, 2013, para. 21).

Kant would have considered a man to be guilty for even thinking mean-spirited .others: "In ethics he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so" (Brainy Quotes, n. d.).

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