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Ethical and Moral Problems: Final

Section 1: Answers

1. The concept of Autonomy in the Ethical and Moral reasoning, can be thought be involved the concept of personhood, responsibility, will, ext. There is no clear, or agreed upon definition of the concept, but it approximates personhood throughout the two philosophers work, Mill and Kant. From the Kantian Perception, autonomy is in affect “the will” the only thing worthy of moral consideration, and the “end in itself,” in Kant’s Kingdom of Ends. The will is that element of Human Rationality that allows for individuals to choose between Maxims, every rational being has this capacity, so every rational being is an end of themselves. Autonomy is for Kant, a will that is guided by Rationality. For Mill, the notion of autonomy is quite different. Mill’s Utilitarianism, views human autonomy as being guided by desire, in line with the Epicureans Hedonists, the desire to eliminate one’s suffering, and pursue one’s happiness. Mills concept of autonomy does have a special place within his moral theory, that is, the society and every in it, is responsible for “to increase the greatest good for the greatest number.” At base, the distinction between Kant and Mill, is their theory of the human motivation, that being rationality v. desire. Connecting Mill’s theory moral issues today we first need to look for, the good for the greatest number argument which should be present. For example, the notion of notion of poverty that we’ve discussed inside of the class, from a Utilitarian perspective (such as Peter Singer’s Marginal Utility,) we have a moral responsibility to the pursue the eliminating of the pain. While we are autonomous being, who’s happiness should be a factor, and perhaps helping others would be difficult, even painful. However, the collective pain that comes from our in-action, supersedes that autonomy. There then could be a moral argument made for the relinquishing of luxurious wealth from the upper-classes that are a minority, to serve the benighted majority. In Kant’s theory, it is wrong to use an individual as a means to an end. For example, the context of the Capital Punishment debate. Kant would consider the notion of using capital punishment as a deterrent against furthered crime, as we have already violated the autonomy of a rational being under the categorical imperative, by using his life as a means to an end.
2. Individuals are guaranteed equality as rational beings through Kant’ categorical imperative in which every rational being is an end in themselves, therefore worthy of equality. Rational Beings are ends in themselves, because they are the only things which can perceive themselves as intrinsically valuable. Kant’s notion of equality is connected to the ability to have rationality.   
   Mill’s concept of equality is the ability to feel pain, is something has the properties that allow it to feel pain, that it is worthy of moral concern. However, equality in the Utilitarian concept isn’t as founded on unshakable principles, as in the deontological point of view. The social system that Mill proposed within his essay, *On Utilitarianism,* would be a social system that would guarantee a level of social equality to every individual within the society. However, regard for the greatest good for the greatest number, can be understood as a justification for violating the equality of the minority. In a way, Utilitarianism is concerned with the majority of the minority, if it’s justifiable. As discussed in the class, the right to life principle in the abortion debate can be understood in the context of Kantian Deontological. If we agree that a fertilized egg has personhood, then under the categorical imperative it should have the right to life, on principle. Equality within a Utilitarian framework we discussed when discussing the issues of poverty and famine, and Singer’s principle of Marginal Utility. In principles of equality, need to be realized for the greatest good for the greatest number.
3. Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue, found in his work Nicomachean Ethics proposed a theory of human nature, in which what it means to be a virtuous person is to fulfill one’s “function” to the highest degree. Human beings have a function, which can be separated into two categories Moral and Intellectual, and to pursue the “flourishing” of these faculties is what he call’s Eudemonia. One achieves Moral Eudemonia, by choosing right between those virtues and vices that we’re influenced by. We choose between virtues and vice, by holding to the golden mean. A modern ethical issues that deals with virtue theory is virtue theory, as it involves what it means to be a good person, in the face of difficulties or death.
4. Nietzsche argued that all moral systems and conceptions have been the result of the Aristocratic Society, and their power structures. Out of this, two forms of morality were created. Master Morality and Slave Morality, each have their own precepts and conditions for action. Justice on one hand is the result of a slave morality, because it demands that men would have to theoretically govern their pursuits by the will of another. Nietzsche believed in the struggle against pain, as being the formative aspect of good character. Power and Domination, in Nietzsche’s “barbarian caste” is what is moral and what it means to be a human. Nietzsche’s work poses problems for the field of the Ethics, because it maintains that morality is merely a misguided perception that seeks to contain powerful men.
5. Marx view on human nature is a human nature based in a materialistic world view. Marx saw human nature as a desire to create, and to own the fruits of one’s own labors. The society that Marx describes, alienates the worker from his means of production, and from the fruits of his labors. As a result, turning the worker into a commodity, and mere machine. A Marxist society would allow for humans to cultivate their own interests through their leisure, which is made possible if we allow for the massive amounts of production that is capable, and by distributing it to the masses. Applying Marxist principles might apply to the notions of inequality and poverty existing within the society unnecessarily. We could easily feed the world as we have a surplus of goods. Moreover, the society that is based around commodity fetishism perverts our value systems, and trains use to revolve our lives around the capitalists system. We touched on these issues, when we discussed the consumerism within the class, and how representative of our actual human nature it is.

Section 2:

Hobbes Social Contract -

Hobbes lays out a framework, founded in a hypothetical history of man, in which he claims that any society not governed by a “sovereign” or civil government, would descend into chaos, because of the human’s natural inclination for self-preservation. In this purely hypothetical history of mankind, humans formed social contracts (or governments) which enforce through common law, agreed upon social standards and codes of conduct. Hobbes notion of human nature is informed by the ideas found in psychological egoism. The social contract is a means of escaping the “perpetual war” that would be found societies that existed pre-governmental institutions.

Darwin and Hume -

Both Darwin and Hume put forward a theory of human nature that involves biological endowment with the faculties like sympathy, and mutual and social concern, which are a result of, in the case of Darwin, our evolutionary history as a social creature. Both of theories are based in a form of self-interest, not entirely for the individual but for the greater society that surrounds the individual. Those that work against the society are perceived as immoral.

-Reflection Answers-

1. In all of the topic listed within this question, in particular those issues of Abortion and Capital Punishment, I found to be concerned with fundamental questions of fairness and justice. More complexly when the question deal with personhood in the case of Abortion, but I think the work done by the applied ethicists, like Judith Jarvis Thompson, showed that concerns over complexes issues like personhood are really on the periphery of peoples’ minds. In fact, what is of real concern is what are people owed, for example: What is mother of child conceived because of rape owed. The same can be said concerning capital punishment, the issue of whether or not the death sentence is a proper punishment, in keeping with this notion of Justice. Give people what they deserve. Whether retributively, or distributivley. Issues concerning poverty, famine, and inequality are similar in this respect. Euthanasia is similar also as it involves, whether or not it’s correct to allow someone the right to kill themselves, an element of fairness is at play within this discussion. If we can discover what the humans basic understanding of justice perhaps we can have a unifying theory on all three topics, this is difficult however. But something we should have the courage to pursue, regardless of our ignorance. We understand more fully, the proper behavior of individual within groups and the actions taken to ensure this notion of justice, I think I could shed light some of these basic ethical and moral questions.

2. Three distinct ways in which typical American life has been morally questioned are, Inequality and Class, Consumerism, and the matters of environmental ethics, which I include animal rights within this category. Marxist theory describes the nature of class systems, the exploitation of the poor for labor, and how this relates to a consumerist lifestyle. Our consumerist lifestyle also has disastrous effects on the natural environment, and is predominantly centered around institutions like factory farming, and the burning of fossils and manipulation of the natural resources. Beginning with the question of the consumerism, applied ethicists (such as Peter Singer) have argued that the role of the privilege and luxury within our society, is immoral in the face of the massive inequality and poverty which we could easily eliminated, if we have the courage to move towards those ends. Marxian theory is correct in its condemnation of capitalist value systems.

Paper: Environmental Ethics

What I would like to do is analyze and to put a very critical view on some commonly held arguments for what one might call environmental ethics. Firstly, defining environmental ethics on whole is a difficult task, but I think it can reasonable separated into two main concerns: these being intrinsic moral worth of the environment, and the environment being protect for human use. In fact, these two needs coincide, and cannot be separated. The influence of say, non-human creatures, which we may not define as having moral worth, we are in-fact dependent upon. You in a way, can’t take away the fragile ecosystem of earth, and maintain a habitable planet. The notion that it’s for our own survival only, that we should be concerned with is what is referred to in the literature as an “anthropocentric” point of view. I’d like to focus on, and argued for this distinction, as being the only true moral concern, and challenge the notion that the environment, in and of itself is of moral concern. The debate between these two ends is muddle as I said, and making a clear argument will require a level of abstraction from reality, into the actual moral principles that surround the issue.

I would first like to propose a thought experiment, which might yield some interesting insight into the cause of human motivation. Say for example, there was an epidemic disease, that was causing the destruction of biological life throughout the globe. In this situation, we know that at the rate the disease is spreading, the entirety of biological life while be eradicated within a couple of years, assuming we know this as an undeniable fact. Say then that the disease was isolated, and an airborne vaccine was created that could be released into the atmosphere, that could save all of the biological life on earth. However, the vaccine released is detrimental to humans, and within the same amount of time. Human kind will have died from the vaccine, instead of the disease. The result for human-life is the same, however, within this scenario human life. What would the reaction of the public then be, would any human being think of releasing the vaccine into the atmosphere, even though the fate of humanity was nonetheless sealed? In fact, in fact I think that most humans wouldn’t much see the point. They might consider that releasing the virus to control their own fate, but I don’t think many would consider the act of the releasing the virus as moral. It might be beneficial to the biological life on earth, but not moral. In fact, the only thing that humans can really regard as moral, is themselves, and their own interests. Humans are naturally specialist, and view morality through the scope that allows them to perceive their own societal ends. No human, when consuming a plant or an animal regards the animal as being moral on-par with a human. We might refrain from hurting animals, or treating them cruelly, but that’s only based on a feeling of moral sentiment, that arises within us. We sympathize with the animal, but that doesn’t necessarily entail that we regard that animal with moral regard, equal to our own. In fact, our selective sympathy only furthers this point. Humans don’t feel regard for all biological life, say plants or trees. Some might refrain from eating meat, and prefer to eat plants. What is the distinction. Is it the element of pain involved for the biological creature, a plant cannot feel. I don’t think, that if a vegetarian was given the chance to the consume an animal that was raise outside of a factory farm, or was raise in the wild and then killed painlessly that they would then eat the animal. On principle, the notion that certain animals have moral concern, is undermined by the selective nature in which they attribute this value to different various organism. I would believe that the only true moral concern that humans can have the environment, are those that are directly influence by our stake in the matter. Whether it be our own survival, or some misplaced sympathy or feeling for an animal, which we really don’t have any principled reason to feel. We don’t have a moral duty to care for the environment, outside of our own survival or prospering. (This is for the assignment, I’m a better person than this. ;-) )

Citations

Environmental Ethics (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/envi-eth/#H1>)