

Don't be a Dick.

A discussion on whether morality can be reduced to a
simplistic principle.

Jack Millen

1501310

Dissertation submitted in partial completion of BA (Hons.) in
Philosophy

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Lampeter

May 2018

Word Count: 9,596

Acknowledgements.

I would like to take this time to thank those who helped me get to this period of my life.

I would like to thank my lecturers for teaching me such a unique outlook on how life can be. I would also like to thank Ute, who put up with countless hours of listening to boring philosophical jargon and helping me fix a million spelling and grammar mistakes.

I would like to also extend a special thank you, the people who brought me into this world kicking and screaming and also had the patience and perseverance to make me the man I am today.

To my Mother I would like to thank you for the wisdom you bestowed to me and the countless times you had faith in me, even when I had lost faith in myself.

To my Father I would like to thank you for teaching me that everything that I do in life, I should do it to better myself and for always believing that I could be better.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1.....	7
Myths, religion and progression.....	7
Science and Ethics.....	10
Chapter 2.....	17
Civilisation's change, society's change and philosophy changes.....	17
Hobbes.....	18
Hume.....	20
Kant.....	24
Chapter 3.....	27
Kindness is not necessary, truth is necessary.....	27
Conclusion.....	30
Don't be a dick.....	30
Bibliography.....	32
Primary Sources:.....	32
Secondary Sources:.....	32

Abstract.

In today's modern age where science is used as the means to answer all manner of subjects, there remains an area which has made little progress in over three thousand years. Science has helped progress human kind in building civilisations, new technology and even helped enhance the human mind and body. However, throughout its lifespan science has contributed to the diminishing belief in traditional religious views, which in turn has left a grey area in relation to ones moral and ethical thought. Where once humanity sought religious doctrine or pagan myths to help contemplate or even answer the moral questions of life, now find themselves without a higher authority to dictate right from wrong.

As part of a species of extremely social creatures it is crucial that one's intrinsic moral guidelines should be as heightened and informed as one could possibly achieve. Humanity has been left with the responsibility to lay out the foundations of moral principles for future generations to follow and adapt. Technology has increased and advanced our social boundaries beyond anything our ancestors could have imagined and so our moral principles should be equally evolved.

What our human constructed ethical principles have shown us so far, is that everyone has an opinion or at least every opinion should be taken into consideration. It has proven to be extremely difficult to construct a set of moral principles in which every single human can on one level or another agree with, not to mention the added hardship of ensuring each principle is universally applicable and structured using sound logic and reasoning.

This paper is an attempt to piece together what I believe to be the core principles each human being should consider in order to have a meaningful and happy life throughout their time on this planet.

Introduction

This dissertation is an investigation into the main guiding principles behind the philosophy of ethical and moral thought. This paper is an attempt to grasp a deeper understanding of what ones' individual moral conduct means to oneself and also to the rest of society. The goal of this enquiry is to assess whether or not science and the enlightenment has disrupted society's moral values by limiting the belief in a higher authority. The premise is to assess whether moral values are evolutionary traits passed down from our ancestors or whether they are universally inherent within our living code. Are there some morally generated laws put in place by a divine command, or, are they simply man-made structures designed to ensure that human kind continuously strives to get the best outcome of their time on earth? From this, I will assess a selected set of moral principles that previous philosophers have made available and investigate whether or not they contribute to the progression of human nature.

I aim to assess firstly what we know so far about today's moral values and where they originated from. It has been a widespread occurrence for many thousands of years that human beings have had a tendency to use stories to explain phenomenon that they do not understand. Our ancestors used these stories and myths to better understand how the basic mechanics of life work, and how to live peacefully alongside the environment as well as with our own species.

Secondly, I intend to assess whether or not the social rules and regulations that society lives by today are helping us or hindering us in regard to the nature of our human progression. Certain social traditions that are held sometimes shield us from vital lessons which can be necessary in order to understand more about the fundamental aspects of life. It is my intention to enlighten certain individuals on the responsibility we have as a rational intellectual species, to discover the world and the knowledge that it holds. This discussion uses sources from varying times such as the ancient Greeks to the modern day contemporary philosophers. I believe there to be evidence to show how each philosopher has been influence by there surrounding and the period in which they lived through. From this I wish to

make clear the danger this can have if not taken into consideration when assessing modern or even postmodern moral principles.

Lastly, this dissertation will outline what I believe to be the foundational rule for what constitutes a good life, taking into account what has been stated by previous ethical thinkers, and using their theories to construct a personal modern principle of ethical motivation. Each individual moral agent is responsible not only for their singular contribution to the world but as a representative of the human species and should proceed to act accordingly.

Chapter 1

Myths, religion and progression.

The fundamental questions about the nature of life, the cosmos and one's place in it, have occupied humanity's minds for thousands of years. To this day, people are still seeking answers to questions such as: how was the universe created? Is there a higher meaning behind the actions that people take or the things that happen in the world? Is there a life after death? Is there a right or wrong way to live one's life? There has been no civilisation or culture discovered that has managed to answer these sort of questions, though not from lack of trying. With every new generation formed new questions must be raised.

Before people had started to discover and use science or technology to explain the occurrences of nature, human beings used different myths, legends, fables and religion to explain the occurrences and situations in the world around them. Human beings used to question why the sun disappears every now and then and is replaced by the moon, why does it rain or what happens to a person after they die? These type of empirical questions before the enlightenment could not be accurately answered by a simple discussion. Many people could only imagine what forces were behind such events as the full moon or a rain storm. Nordic countries, for example, used the stories of their gods such as Thor, Loki, Fraye and Odin to explain the reasons behind why it rained, why storms happen and made the night sky look like a battleground, and why this was a necessary process in order for life to thrive.¹ Explanations such as these were widespread amongst many cultures across the globe. It would be difficult to imagine having no scientific knowledge of the world and then attempting to explain to others how the world works. Generally, those who had the most influence or even those who

¹ Crossley, Holland, K. 1980. *The Norse Myths*. New York: Pantheon Books

were fortunate enough to transcribe the spoken word were able to proselytise to others whatsoever they wished. Nonetheless, human beings subsequently were able to view a correlation between rain fall and the growth of plants and crops. Humanity's ancient stories about the creation and the mechanics of the world that they lived in did not necessarily explain the precise mechanisms of the world in the same way that people know them today. However, people did manage to use these stories in a way that taught their families and their children valuable life lessons which helped them survive alongside their environment. People may not have known exactly why an acorn that is nurtured in a certain way has the ability to turn into a magnificent oak tree, but they knew that it did it for a purpose and not just because it simply does.

Human beings have been using stories and myths to explain the occurrences that take part in the world for thousands of generations. Throughout time we have eventually figured out certain events and facts using science. Most people no longer believe that the Nordic god Thor smashes his hammer against his anvil to make the sound of thunder,² nor do they believe that the moon is made entirely of cheese. Throughout time, these types of questions that seek answers for how the world around us works have slowly been answered one by one by many biologists, astronomers and physicists. The people who answered these questions dedicated their lives to the obtainment of knowledge and constructing their findings in order to master the art of utilising their surroundings. They were people who trained and disciplined themselves to observe the world around them with acute attention to detail. They documented what they observed in the world and assessed what they found using sheer logic and reasoning.

The ability to think logically and rationally is what many philosophers believe are the features that make human beings morally and intellectually superior. Humanity has answered mysteries surrounding the environment, nature and how things grow. One clear example of how human beings have gained an intellectually superior edge is that we know what a footprint is. A footprint is something that has a deeper meaning towards human beings than any other

² Crossley, Holland, K. 1980. *The Norse Myths*. New York: Pantheon Books

animal; it is something that tells us who or what has been before, where they are going and how long ago they were there. Humans do not have an enhanced sense of smell or hearing, unlike animals. In order to survive we had to use our logic and our intelligence to protect us from being killed by wild animals. People used the same logic and intelligence to explain the phenomenon of day and night cycles and use them to have a concept of time. This is something that has helped human beings progress and evolve more efficiently. The stars have been mapped by millions of minds in order for humanity to cross the globe without losing their way. Human beings now even have the ability to estimate roughly the size, weight and mass of the earth that they stand on. One could say that the only place that science has yet to fully explain physically is space, however, space is considered so incomprehensibly large that it is referred to simply as 'space'. Many of the questions that humanity's ancestors believed to be unanswerable have now been answered. Occurrences such as the growth of an acorn and the conditions necessary for rainbows to be formed are merely simple trivia to most of humanity. Yet, in the process of answering these questions people have generated entirely new questions to which they now trust their descendants to one day find the answers.

Today, modern philosophers are left with questions that cannot be explained fully by science alone. Throughout humanity's time on earth people's advancements in science and technology have aided their ability to answer more and more questions which were deemed philosophically impossible. Human beings now have a deeper understanding of the exact process their bodies go through from the point of birth to the time of death. They know how their bodies grow and change and what nutrients aid or restrict their health. People now know that the rain falls from the sky due to water becoming warm enough to evaporate as vapor into the air and have the capabilities to measure this. When water droplets grow heavy enough, the gravity (another discovery on the behalf of science) of the earth pulls them down as raindrops. Humans no longer rely on the hope of there being a cosmic power in order to understand a complex occurrence or subject.

In this modern technological day and age humans tend to ponder questions such as: is it ethically right to cryogenically freeze people? Can a mind be placed into a computer? Can biological human beings become more mechanical or digital? By this I mean combining machinery and one's organs to enhance the human body. Could people one day have a computerised heart that will continuously beat regardless of time? These are questions that have no conclusive answers and cannot be entirely explained by the means of science, as of yet.

The difficulty with these questions is mainly due to the possibility that humanity has yet to fully answer the previous questions concerning their personal identities. Humans have been wondering about their place in the universe for as long as humans have been able to wonder. Not to mention the added difficulty of finding a middle ground of moral philosophy, where every person can agree on what the right and wrong thing to do is. There seem to be some forces that extend beyond time enticing philosophers to investigate the true meaning behind the nature of being. It seems that humans as a species will never cease to wonder about their own existence and the existence of the universe.

Science and Ethics.

Questions of morality and questions of right and wrong is a domain where science does not particularly belong. The topic of ethics or moral philosophy is a domain where science can tell us what is, not what ought to be. It seems that science can help us achieve what we value but does not tell us what to value. Science and ethics can share some basic mild similarities. They are both used to better understand the human nature. However, this dissertation is not discussing the ethics of science, which is a legitimate branch of philosophical thought. The ethics of science assesses controversies concerning specific ethical and unethical behaviour on behalf of the scientific community. The question that ought to be looked at is whether or not it is possible to deduce what is ethically right or wrong

using the information and evidence that science has produced on our behalf so far. A lot of people may doubt that science has the capability to answer the most important questions in human life such as what is worth living for? What is worth dying for? What constitutes a good life? There is no description of the way the world is that tells us how the world ought to be. However, values can be seen as facts about the wellbeing of conscious creatures. For why is it that we do not have any ethical obligation towards a rock? Science is sometimes used to supply the evidence for which one bases their judgement and opinion on, however, science cannot tell us whether that judgement is correct or not.

The laws or words of God or gods were once upon a time reason enough to fear doing the wrong thing. People acted in a moral way because they feared whatever supreme deity watched over them. People would not steal or harm things, less from fear of being caught, but from fear of being punished in the afterlife. If a person was to commit a crime, then that would supposedly have supreme cosmic consequences on the individual. Their entire moral integrity would be at stake. At one point in time human beings had a genuine fear of God, even to the point of saying or thinking something that went against the teachings of their deity or the church that they adhered to, was deemed a punishable sin. The British Empire was certainly a contributing asset to spreading the influence of the Christian God to many corners of the globe. There was a point in time when the British Empire covered at least two thirds of the globe, which subsequently meant that most of humanity followed the laws of Christianity whether they truly believed in it or not.³ The sheer influence that a supposed celestial deity can have on a civilisation is beyond immeasurable.

The vengeful God of the Old Testament has fallen out of fashion, as a result of this, religious doctrine has become less important, which means that the fear of an almighty intergalactic celestial being who could smite thee at any moment is no longer there. People are more likely to steal or do harm when they know they will not be caught simply due to the lack of the fear of being punished by a higher

³ Lloyd, T. 2001. *Empire the History of the British Empire*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.

power. When there is nobody there to see a crime, then the crime is more likely to be committed.⁴ What happens if there is no consequence to an immoral action? Unless a person is caught by the law and punished there are no morally cosmic repercussions to committing crimes. So, what is left to measure what is right or wrong? Who is left to inform humanity of what is good or evil?

Humans have generated theories about the origin of mankind and the origin of the universe. However, the issues concerned with ethics and moral philosophy remain an area in which human kind's advancements in technology and science find it difficult to aid their overall understanding. The question of how we ought to live has been pondered since the days of Plato and Aristotle yet, we are still no closer to finding the answer.⁵ The branch of philosophical thought referred to as ethics or moral philosophy is known as the attempt to understand the nature of human values. It is the attempt to discover how we ought to live and what constitutes the right conduct in the correct situations. However, unfortunately there is no longer a higher authority to dictate what is right or wrong. It is unfortunate as there have always been patriarchal and matriarchal figures who watch over certain families and groups within the human race, why shouldn't we expect there to be a parent for the entire of humanity? The only solution to this dilemma is that human beings create those laws or guiding principles themselves. The difficulty of this is that no human is better than another, why should one follow the rules of another who is equal. So, if science cannot tell us what the right thing is to do or how to act morally, then what can?

One possible theory is that moral values could be considered as objective, in the sense that they may exist in a 'spirit like' realm beyond subjective human conventions. There is the possibility that one's intrinsic moral guidelines are more of a universal cosmic force rather than a simple manmade law. There are philosophers who also hold that moral values are absolute or eternal insofar that they cannot and will not change. It is considered then that because moral values are seen as universal, they must apply to all rational creatures around the world

⁴ Hobbes, T. (ed. By C, B, Macpherson.) 1651. (1968 ed.) *Leviathan*. England: Penguin Classics.

⁵ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

and through time. Plato was among the many philosophers who contributed to this process of thought concerning the objectivity of moral values. He contributed an explanation of this theory through his love of mathematics⁶. Plato acknowledged that numbers are a timeless concept, they never change and are applied at all points within the universe. Humans do not invent numbers, nor can they alter them in some way. This caused Plato to consider numbers as abstract entities⁷.

Today philosophers usually divide ethical theories into three general categories: normative ethics, applied ethics and meta-ethics. Normative ethics focuses on finding moral standards that regulate right and wrong actions. One might say that it is the search for an ideal test in order for an individual to check that their conduct follows the socially accepted moral behaviour or standard. A classic example of a normative principle is the Golden Rule: *“So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you”*.⁸ It would be reasonable to assume that no person would wish to be harmed or stolen from, therefore it is evident that one should not harm or steal anything from anyone else. Using this principle, one could theoretically assess whether an action is right or wrong. The Golden Rule is an example of a normative theory that uses a single principle which we use to judge all actions. The key belief in normative ethical theories is that there is generally one ultimate criterion for moral actions, whether it be a single rule or a set of rules.

Applied ethics is the branch of philosophy which consists of the analysis of specific, controversial moral issues such as abortion, animal rights or euthanasia. Two features are generally necessary in order for a topic to be considered an applied ethical issue. The first feature is that the issue that is discussed must be controversial. There must be a significant amount of interest on both sides of the argument. For example, murder or the act of murdering a human being is not considered an applied ethical issue on the grounds that most, if not all

⁶ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 683-6

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Matthew 7:12

human beings should agree that murder is an immoral act. However, the discussion over capital punishment or euthanasia may be considered an applied ethical issue as there are a significant number of groups that both support and condemn the topic of capital punishment or euthanasia. The second requirement in order for a topic to be categorised as an applied ethical issue is that it must be a distinctly moral issue. Many issues that today's society and political groups must deal with can be emotionally sensitive, such as an individual's right to join the military, energy conservation and private versus public health care. Many topics discussed in today's media can be controversial and have a dramatic impact on how well our society functions. This does not, however, make them moral issues. Moral issues tend to relate to actions which are concerned with a more universal nature, such as the benefits and restrictions of lying. Moral issues are not confined to specific geographical locations or individual societies. A lot of the time issues of morality and political social policies link. For example, the consequence of stealing that which does not belong to you can prove to be both immoral and against some society's set of rules and regulations. Yet, the two groups of issues are mostly separate discussions. For instance, many people would argue that speaking to one's parents in an ill manner is considered immoral, however, one would not see it necessary to implement a social policy to stop it. Thus, in order for a topic to qualify as an applied ethical issue, the issue must both be morally relevant and more than a simple social rule.⁹

Meta-ethics takes place beyond or after ethics. The notion of meta-ethics involves a removed or outside view of the entire structure of the project of ethics. It may be defined as the study of the origin and meaning of ethical concepts. Metaphysics is the study of the kinds of things that exist in the universe. There are some things that are seen as physical such as rocks, plants or the body, other things are non-physical such as thoughts, feelings or the notion of spirit or God. Metaphysical thought concerning meta-ethics involves discussing whether or not moral values are eternal truths that exist within a separate realm or simply a human construct. Is one's moral values created by the individual depending on

⁹ Fieser, J. N/a. "Ethics". in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Available from: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/> . accessed 06/05/18

the social structure in which one was raised or are they a set of universal laws which are considered absolute truths?

A more plain and down to earth view of the metaphysics of meta-ethics is a sceptical approach. A sceptic may reject the idea that moral values exist as a spirit-like object or divine command, yet, does not reject the notion of moral values altogether. An individual human being's values are exactly that, their individual human invention, a man-made moral structure of how they believe they should act. This position has been labelled moral relativism¹⁰. Some moral values can affect an individual in multiple ways, for instance moral values that we hold as individual living beings may not comply with those that are approved by the society one belongs to. This goes to show that there is a difference between individual relativism and cultural relativism.¹¹ Those who follow this approach to the metaphysical status of moral values, believe that morals change throughout time and vary from society to society.

There are also philosophers who feel the need to distinguish between what is known as substantive ethics and what is known as meta-ethics. Substantive ethics is mainly concerned with the analysis of practical conclusions, which kind of actions are good or right, and which are bad or wrong. The aim of meta-ethics, however, is not to assess or justify what is good or what is right but what one means when one states that something is good or right. Who or what has the right to dictate what is right or wrong? Is there even such thing as a good or bad decision? The distinctions between substantive ethics and meta-ethics can be summarised when speaking of 'first order' and 'second order' discussions. The first order is substantive ethics, concerned with the practical consequences and effects that one's actions could possibly cause. The second order is when the discussion moves away from the practical conduct and the individual assesses the

¹⁰ Fieser, J. N/a. "Ethics". in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Available from: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/> . accessed 06/05/18

¹¹ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

actions taken in the first order, raising questions about what it is that made the individual take those actions and what those actions mean.¹²

¹² Norman, R. *The Moral Philosophers, An introduction to ethics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1983) p.2

Chapter 2

Civilisation's change, society's change and philosophy changes

There are many philosophers and great thinkers who may agree that the true concern of moral philosophy lies within the discussion of meta-ethics. This is mainly due to the unspoken agreement among philosophers of not telling people how to live their lives. It is not the business of a philosopher to lay out the guidelines on how to live a good or a bad life, but to clarify the terms and arguments that are used in making such decisions.¹³ People have the innate evolutionary given capability to make these decisions for themselves and thus should use this ability to further themselves intellectually and personally. It is not the duty of a philosopher to preach to a crowd about how life ought to be, nor is it the duty of the individual to sit amongst the crowd and listen intently to someone else's illustration of the world. Each individual person should strive for the obtainment of knowledge in order for them to always make the most informed decision they possibly can.

For as long as human beings have wondered about life and the cosmos there have been philosophers. This would mean that through many different ages and many different cultures there have been many different philosophers with their individual philosophies. As a result of this constant change in civilisation, there is a constant change in what a society views as good or bad. One philosopher might concern oneself with what is important or necessary to obtain a good life, another may wish to know whether or not God exists or if we have a soul. Countless minds have contemplated these questions in an attempt to seek a deeper understanding of the world that we live in and how we should live in it. I strongly

¹³ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

believe that it is necessary to attempt to grasp what each individual philosophers' project is. By this I mean we must try to understand precisely what each philosopher is attempting to find out about the world we live in, yet at the same time also understand how different the world was to them than it is to us now and will be to those in the future. These particular philosophers which I have chosen to support my argument

Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)¹⁴ is a perfect example of how the presence or absence of an authoritative force can influence an individual's perspective of their fellow beings. Thomas Hobbes was at the height of his philosophical and political career when the English civil war broke out in 1642¹⁵. Hobbes was made to spend the next ten years living in Paris due to being exiled from his own country because of his philosophy and his absolute sovereignty. Living through a civil war is reason enough to lose a little faith in humanity. This was a period of turmoil and death, brother killed brother and father killed son, families were torn apart over the choice of leadership of one's country. It is evident to see the repercussions the war had had on Hobbes in his work *Leviathan*.¹⁶ To add to the matter Hobbes was at university when his father's death took place, however it seems that Hobbes never really had a strong patriarchal figure to look up to in the first place.¹⁷ Hobbes' father was excommunicated from the church for supposedly punching another priest in the churchyard. Any act of violence in a churchyard is an excommunicable offence, however, to violently lay hands on a clergyman was a serious crime under ecclesiastical law and he was eventually sentenced to death by hanging by the civil authorities.¹⁸ With limited patriarchal authority as a child

¹⁴ Williams, G, N/A. "Thomas Hobbes: Moral and Political Philosophy" in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Available from : <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmoral/#SH5b> . Accessed 05/05/18

¹⁵ Sorell, T. (ed) 1996. (1999 ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*. USA: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶ Hobbes, T. (ed. By C, B, Macpherson.) 1651. (1968 ed.) *Leviathan*. England: Penguin Classics.

¹⁷ Sorell, T. (ed) 1996. (1999 ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*. USA: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Williams, G, N/A. "Thomas Hobbes: Moral and Political Philosophy" in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Available from : <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmoral/#SH5b> . Accessed 05/05/18

and a civil war as an adult it is clear to see how Hobbes had such a unique perspective on his fellow men.

Hobbes' main concern was with the problem of the social and political order of the state. His ethos categorised human beings as naturally self-centred and concerned with nothing other than their self-preservation. Throughout his work *Leviathan*, Hobbes presents the groundwork for his illustration of the human being's natural state by expressing his argument in three major points. The first section of his argument displays that if human kind was left without a government or a state to control them, then people would start to resort to violently competing to secure simple basic necessities of life¹⁹. His second premise is that he believed that if it came to it people would constantly fight each other as a result of fear to ensure personal safety. Essentially, human beings would always be seen to strike first to ensure survival rather than wait around for actual imminent danger.²⁰ His last argument is that at the same time as fighting for one's safety, one would also wish to seek glory, not so much to be well know, but to spread the same fear to those around and thus ensuring one's own safety further.²¹ To be feared by others acts as a protective deterrent from attacks from others.

Hobbes does not state that all of humanity are selfish and cowardly creatures. The love that a mother has for her child is a marginal case that Hobbes thought transcended the urge of selfish survival. Though it may seem that he believed that people's main and only prerogative is to survive and ensure people know about, he does not deny that some people may be an exception to this. In essence according to Hobbes, the reason that adult human beings will find it impossible to act peacefully towards each other if there is no state, government or higher authority is because we are all equal, though not so much in the literal sense. In fact, Hobbes explicitly states that some of us amongst humanity are not as strong as others.

¹⁹ Hobbes, T. (ed. By C, B, Macpherson.) 1651. (1968 edt.) *Leviathan*. England: Penguin Classics. p. 184

²⁰ Ibid p. 184

²¹ Ibid p. 184

*Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind then another; yet when all is reckoned together, the differences between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one can thereupon claim to himselfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe.*²²

Some humans can jump higher or run faster than many other people. It is one of the reasons why people include sport within culture such as events as the World Cup or the Olympic games, it is to show the best that humanity has to offer.²³ However, what Hobbes means when he believes us to be equal is that we are equal in the capacity to threaten one another's lives.²⁴ He claims that there is no natural source of authority.

Hume

The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-76)²⁵ is probably regarded as one of the most influential philosophers to date. Great figures such as Jeremy Bentham and Immanuel Kant reported that Hume's work changed many aspects of what was previously known about philosophy. Even Charles Darwin regarded Hume's work as an influence on the theory of evolution. Hume's explanation of morality was and still is an important part of the reformation of philosophy during the enlightenment.²⁶ His primary contribution to ethical thought was investigating the origin of moral ideas. He believed that one must understand the cause of

²² Hobbes, T. (ed. By C, B, Macpherson.) 1651. (1968 ed.) *Leviathan*. England: Penguin Classics p. 183

²³ Ibid p. 183

²⁴ Williams, G, N/A. "Thomas Hobbes: Moral and Political Philosophy" in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Available from : <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmoral/#SH5b> . Accessed 05/05/18

²⁵ Morris, William Edward and Brown, Charlotte R., "David Hume", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/hume/>

²⁶ Bristow, William, "Enlightenment", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/enlightenment/>

something to determine what the content consists of. In other words, in order to establish which traits and motives are good and bad one must assess what good and bad actually means.

His philosophy seems to be built around one particular observation, that the key to life resides in feeling rather than rationality. One of the key facts that Hume discovered about the nature of human beings is that, one is far more influenced by one's feelings than by one's reasoning.²⁷ Normally one would assume that an individual should train their mind to be as rational as possible. Under the usual circumstances one might state that a human beings mind is to be devoted to logical reasoning and disciplined to prevent feelings or emotions from ever getting in the way of evidence. However, David Hume believed that reason is the result of what he referred to as passion.²⁸ No matter how much we wished to believe that we pride our intellectual superiority on our ability reason logically, Hume believed that we are in fact motivated by our feelings. Hume's most basic moral theory was built on a foundation that declared the sentiments of disapproval and approval as the source of our moral ideas of goodness and badness²⁹. An individual will decide whether they like or dislike something, what one does with their free time during the day or even who to fall in love with, all on the basis of how it makes one feel. If the motive makes us feel better or good about ourselves, we consider it a good motive. The same goes for people or activities, if the person makes us feel good they are a good person to be around, if the activity make us feel good we consider it a good and healthy activity. Reason can play a small part in our rational thinking, but Hume believe that we are nearly entirely driven by passion.

²⁷ Hume, D. (Intro. By A. D. Lindsey) 1817 (1951 ed.) *A Treatise of Human Nature : Vol.1*. London, Great Britain: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 377

Hume lived in a time where humanity prided themselves on their rationality, it was known as the age of reason or the enlightenment.³⁰ Hume however, strictly believed that we were simply just like any other animal. He noticed that we tend to reason from our opinions rather than to them. We assess and judge a concept on whether it is nice or not and that then declares to us whether it is true or not. Reason only comes in after we have made the argument in order to back up our feelings on the subject at hand. It is because of this lack of reason that Hume did not believe in God. He did not believe it rational to believe in God as he saw no compelling logical argument for the existence of a supreme deity.³¹ He seemed to drift between what is known as a mild agnostic and a mild theist. A mild agnostic is someone who possibly believes that there is a higher cosmic force that reigns over the world but is not completely sold on the idea. A mild theist is someone who believes that there is in fact a supreme cosmic deity, but it does not make a difference to them, their life or their philosophy. Religion for Hume was not a product of reason or logical thinking, so, arguing for or against it on a basis of factual evidence is an impossible endeavour. However, in spite of this Hume was a great believer in religious tolerance.³² He did not think that we should push aside those who were willing to believe in a deity. We should not treat those who disagree with what we say as if they are rational people who have made a terrible error in their reasoning. We should treat those people as passionate emotive driven creatures who should be left in peace so long as they treat others with the same principle.

Hume was known as a bit of a sceptic when it came to theories concerning personal identity.³³ A sceptic is a person who is more inclined to question or doubt accepted opinions. Hume was a person who was seen to doubt a lot of common sense ideas of his time. One particular notion that Hume doubted was the

³⁰ Bristow, William, "Enlightenment", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL =

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/enlightenment/>

³¹ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 378

³² Ibid.

³³ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 379

notion or concept of understanding oneself. The idea of personal identity is when an individual perceives themselves as an enduring character or identical to themselves from one time to another³⁴. Hume disagreed with this notion and believed that man kind were nothing more than a bundle or collection of different perceptions.³⁵ One can never observe oneself without seeing a perception of oneself. This meant that if we were to look internally at who we really are, we can never quite see ourselves only what we are made of. Perceptions such as hot or cold, light or dark, love or hate and pain or pleasure.³⁶ It seems that Hume saw human beings as somewhat similar to binary creatures who exist in a binary universe.

Despite being a sceptic over many concepts of his generation David Hume believed strongly that we should always hold on to our common-sense beliefs. This is due to the fact that our beliefs are what make us who we are, they are what help us make our way in and through the world we live in. He ventured that most if not all beliefs are justified on the grounds that they simply just work. They are useful to us and always have been, so, they must be good beliefs to have. They are what help us achieve what we desire in life and help us through any hardship that we may find along the way. Hume was a firm believer that the test of a belief was not that it's truth could be proven, but how useful it was to us and the society that we live in³⁷.

All of Hume's work on philosophy and psychology built up to his overall view of the philosophy of morality. Hume believed that our morality is not so much about having moral ideas by which we live our lives by, but more about being trained and conditioned at a rather young age at the art of decency through one's emotions. What it meant for one to be a good person is that one has conditioned themselves into to having good habits which in turn produce good feelings. Hume supposed that people should strive for qualities that resembled wit, good manners, sympathy or empathy, simply because these were the qualities

³⁴ Ibid. p. 654

³⁵ Hume, D. (Intro. By A. D. Lindsey) 1817 (1951 ed.) *A Treatise of Human Nature: Vol. I.* London, Great Britain: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd. p. 239

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 378

that made people enjoyable to be around. He wanted society to alter the structure of their education system to influence the development of feelings and passion.³⁸ If we have the desire for people to behave well and act in ways that we deem pleasant and polite, then our teachers and our professors should encourage traits such as compassion, gentleness, pity and shame. Children should be taught and encouraged through the enticement of their passionate sides of their nature of being.

Most of Hume's philosophy has always followed a personal task of answering one particular question. What is a good life? How a human being could be influenced, as well as influence those who surround them for the better. Even though Hume was a scholarly man and a philosopher, he was mostly considered a man of the people. He was always a person who was open for conversation and enjoyed the company of his fellow human beings. This I believe displays how his fundamental philosophy works, it was deeply embedded in the company of others.

Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)³⁹ was an eighteenth-century philosopher who's aim throughout his work was to attempt to work out how human beings could be good and kind outside of the regulations put down by traditional religions. Born into a modest and strictly religious family, Kant himself did not have any conventional religious beliefs.⁴⁰ Despite of this, his upbringing made him acutely aware of just how much religion had contributed to his parent's ability to cope with all the hardships of their existence. He also noticed how useful it could be in developing social cohesion and community.

Like David Hume, Kant lived throughout the age of reason, where he proposed that the purpose for it being such an identifying age was because of the

³⁸ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press

³⁹ Ibid. p. 435

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 434

growth in secularism.⁴¹ At first it may seem that a man of Kant's background would be pleased by the declining belief in religious doctrine, on the other hand, it shocked and worried him. This was mainly due to him having a pessimistic view about human characters. He believed that we are naturally rather prone to corruption. It was this particular ethos on life and human beings that possibly lead him to his work in philosophy. Essentially what Kant's desire was, was to replace religious or traditional authority with the authority of pure reason. This view was firstly expressed in his book *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*.⁴² In Kant's opinion, historical religions had all been wrong in the content of what they believed, that being said, he did consider the fact that religion had presented a great need to promote certain ethical behaviour.

It was this observation that lead to what was probably his most famous contribution to philosophical thought. throughout his work *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*⁴³ he stated that the categorical imperative is that "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."⁴⁴ In a simpler context Kant has used what many religious doctrines before him have used for the foundation of there ethical laws, the golden rule. His belief was that we should aim to grant others the same consideration that we desire others would grant us. However, Kant's categorical imperative is displayed and argued in a slightly different way than the religious version, this is due to Kant forcing the individual moral agent to think and apply the rule universally. The categorical imperative is designed in order to shift one's perspective, to get us to see our own behaviour in less immediate personal terms. Another perspective that Kant's presented his categorical imperative is to treat people as more of an end in themselves rather than a means to an end.⁴⁵ To treat a person as an end, for Kant meant that one should take into consideration that other people also have lives of their own. Lives in which they seek happiness and

⁴¹ Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press

⁴² Kant, I (trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson.) 1934. (1960 ed.) *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

⁴³ Kant, I. (trans. L. W. Beck) 1959 (17th ed. 1976). *Foundations of the metaphysics of morals*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merril Company, Inc.

⁴⁴ Ibid p. 39

⁴⁵ Ibid p. 40

fulfilment just as much as we do, they are also people who seek and deserve justice and fair treatment. Kant believed that the categorical imperative was in fact the way that we all truly think when we are thinking sensibly.

It seems that many, if not most of the philosophical traditions discussed in moral philosophy today at first seem too complex or too long winded for the fleeting motion of life. It is not physically or logically possible to assess every single action one must take in a moral dilemma. In reality there simply is not enough time to debate every single aspect or consequence of a moral action, nor is there an equation that gives us the ability to make the perfectly correct judgement.

That being said, there are certain philosophers that have used their logic, reason and common sense to create principles that have the potential to become universally guiding laws. By using their intensely structured work and while also taking into consideration the time period in which these philosophers lived, it is possible for us to extract certain codes that appear to be timeless in their principles. There are certain character traits in which are more desirable than others because of how they make people feel. There are certain phrases in which force the intellectual mind to think about other people and their lives outside of our own personal bubble of existence. It is these codes that are embedded in their philosophy that I wish to assess further and use to create a single morally guiding principle that has the potential to be universally adaptable.

Chapter 3

Kindness is not necessary, truth is necessary

Why is it that people seek to have an innate desire to be a good person? Why do we seemingly have a connection to a kind of duty-based ethical law that states that: we as conscious beings “should” be good and kind to all other conscious beings. What does one receive in return? This is most likely one of the most commonly asked questions when contemplating helping others. The selfless person may say that it does not matter, as long as you have aided in furthering another being in their happiness. However, for those with a more cynical mind, it may seem a fair question. Life is ludicrously short winded and full of opportunity, so, why is it that one should spend their extremely valuable time doing things for others for no benefit at all? Being charitable could sometimes be seen as more of a hindrance to the individual. Someone who gives possessions away to various people who need them more than they do, will find that through time they will eventually have less money, food, energy and time, yet have very little to show for their efforts. Being a kind and honest person does not make you rich, in retrospect it may even do the opposite. Kindness does not always make you a renowned person. There are nearly over seven billion people on this planet that have the opportunity and the capability to give away a single apple, a jacket or even spare change to someone who desperately needs it. Why should the burden of helping others fall to the individual?

There are obviously some things that one may gain through charitable acts, one of the main benefits of being a good person or doing a good deed is that the individuals involved will experience good emotions. These are emotions which are necessary for self-respect and enlightenment. The process of helping others not only gives you these emotions but also allows you to watch happiness present itself through the world on your behalf. Not only does it expose one to emotions that are vital to expanding one’s self-consciousness, these emotions are what develop good ideas and reasons to progress the world further.

If a human being were to go through their entire life shielded by the bad or evil that resides within the world, would their life then be a good life? How would they know what a good life is if they have never experienced the bad? We live in a binary universe where everything in existence is made up of a one and a zero. The seasons change from hot to cold, the day cycles change from light to dark, the breath that we take goes in and out and things either turn on or off. Even life itself must have death otherwise there could be no life, there either is or there is not. A person will never truly appreciate what it means to be healthy and energetic until they have been ill and incapacitated. Essentially the point that I am attempting to make clear is that life will always have bad in it because that's how the universe works. It is only living through the bad times that we appreciate what is good. When we appreciate what is good in our lives we learn two valuable lessons. Firstly, using passion as a guiding mechanism we learn what we value and do not value in life. Secondly, and most importantly, we learn how to deal with the bad or evil that we encounter in a more efficient way, so, when it comes to the next time that we fall on hardship we know better how to cope with it. In practice this would mean that going through the hardships of life makes you a better person. Having the patience to struggle through something shows determination and passion for what ever it is one is striving to achieve.

One should live through life in a way that one feels is one's interpretation or version of what the best human being should be. In order to develop one's character, self-esteem and personal being, one should strive to be better, know more and question more. In order for one individual to have the best outlook on how life should be, that individual should constantly strive to know more. The more knowledge that an individual accumulates, the better their judgement on life will be. Every being should not only strive to be a complete person, but also to have a complete point of view and a complete understanding of the world around them. People should also have an appreciation and also understand the responsibility of what it means to be part of the tribe of humanity. It is a unique and special situation to be living on earth with other human beings and other species and no one has the ability or authority to tell people how it should be done.

There are a multitude of laws, rules, principles and values that one must evaluate before making a moral decision? We as human beings seem to enjoy placing far too simplistic labels on extremely complex notions and concepts. We seek out a binary answer, for questions that give us a copious amount of properties and equations to consider. We ask the fundamental questions, is this right? Am I being good? However, what we should firstly be considering in depth is the matter of where the origin goodness and badness comes from. For some it may be the belief in a supreme cosmic deity, or the spiritual trust in the universe. For other's it is simply down to individual instinct and reaction, or their willingness and determination to deal with the consequences of their actions. All morality presents itself to us as a system of rules of conduct, yet all techniques to deal with moral dilemmas are equally ruled by maxims that recommend a certain type of behaviour for the agent depending on particular circumstances. Morality portrays a certain authority in which we inherently obey due to the notion of duty.

The truth is probably one of the most valuable assists a person can obtain, it is understanding what is in accordance with what reality has presented to us. It is completely necessary for the progression of human kind. It is also extremely dangerous when used in certain situations. For instance, there was once a time where physicians and doctors would be laughed out of their profession if told to wash their hand or even their clothes before seeing a patient. Now however, with the discovery of germs and bacteria it is considered a very different story. Some may state that truth can sometimes be pushed aside if there are social norms or traditions at stake, however I believe this to be an absolute travesty. As Carl Jung once stated:

*I feel it the duty of one who goes his own way to inform society of what he finds on his voyage of discovery...Not the criticism of individual contemporaries will decide the truth or falsity of his discoveries, but future generations. There are things that are not yet true today, perhaps we dare not find them true, but tomorrow they may be.*⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Jung, C. G. (trans. by R. F. C. Hull) 1953. (2nd ed. 2014.) *C. G. Jung The Collected Works. Volume seven Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. London and New York. Routledge. p. 119

Conclusion

Don't be a dick

If hypothetically then, we were plunged into a state of nature, much like what Hobbes describes, would we fall into dismay and turmoil? Would we end up killing for the sake of protection or would our moral integrity be able to find a middle ground so that humanity may still progress forward? It seems that if we were to be plummeted back into an age of lawlessness, then we should strive to all have a single unspoken rule to restrict the chaos of our primal urges. If we were to all live under a single guiding principle, what should a single universally guiding rule be or at least strive to be.

A single guiding moral principle would have to be universally applicable. This means it must transcend time, space and language. It must also have the ability bring out or create the best possible outcome for everyone involved in the situation. Yet, considering that every situation is completely unique and that every person has a different perspective on what a good or bad deed is, it is seemingly impossible to decide a single principle. It is because of this I do not propose a rule or a law that we should adhere to but a guiding principle that we should all contemplate when the time is needed. Life is simply there for us to live it, there are over seven billion people living it right this moment on this planet, and there are over a billion more species who are also existing in various states of consciousness and sentients. If we have nothing else to live for apart from just existence itself, then we should strive for knowledge of this life. We should explore what we can, meet who we can and live all we can. However, while we are doing all of this living we should keep one principle in mind, and that is: Just don't be a dick.

For the purpose of this essay I do not mean it in the physical and literal sense of the word, but in the social aspect of the word. A dick would be considered a person directing their behaviour in a somewhat indecorous manner, to provoke or sometimes irritate others. To be a 'dick' would be purposely be obtuse, tactless, callous, naïve, arrogant, ignorant and overall not a pleasant

person to be around. Every single human being on earth is in the same boat, be it a slight variety in privileges amongst some of our kind. In spite of that we are all trying to achieve the same thing, a good life. There is enough evil, and hardship thrown at us during life that we do not need not need to present any more than there already is.

A wise man once said to me *“Touching the line is at your own risk, However, if you cross the line well that’s your own fault.”*⁴⁷

This accommodates the don’t be a dick principle extremely well. Firstly, every person should know exactly where the line is drawn in a moral situation, it is our job to stay clear of that line. Secondly, if there is a subject where a moral agent does not know where the line is drawn then it is his duty to draw that line for the rest of humanity to observe. One can poke a sleeping bear to check it is asleep that is at one’s own risk, however to kick it in its head is a clear breach of the principle and thusly one’s own fault for getting into trouble.

This guiding principle could be applied in any given situation. As for it creating the best out of any situation this is seemingly impossible. So, as an individual human being one must take up the responsibility of mankind and decide for oneself what one believes is the correct thing to do. What the rule does instead is to ensure that the options that are left before you will hopefully only benefit oneself and others. It does not guarantee it; however, it ultimately (if used correctly) stops there being any unnecessary evil put into the world on our part.

⁴⁷ White, J. Pers comment. 04/05/2018

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Hobbes, T. (ed. By C. B. Macpherson.) 1651. (1968 ed.) *Leviathan*. England: Penguin Classics.

Hume, D. (Intro. By A. D. Lindsay) 1817 (1951 ed.) *A Treatise of Human Nature : Vol. I*. London, Great Britain: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.

Jung, C. G. (trans. by R. F. C. Hull) 1953. (2nd ed. 2014.) *C. G. Jung The Collected Works. Volume seven Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. London and New York. Routledge.

Kant, I. (trans. L. W. Beck) 1959 (17th ed. 1976). *Foundations of the metaphysics of morals*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.

Kant, I (trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson.) 1934. (1960 ed.) *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

White, J. Personal comment. 04/05/2018

Secondary Sources:

Bristow, William, "Enlightenment", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/enlightenment/>

Crossley, Holland, K. 1980. *The Norse Myths*. New York: Pantheon Books

Duncan, Stewart, "Thomas Hobbes", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/hobbes/>

Fieser, J. N/a. "Ethics". in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Available from: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/> . accessed 06/05/18

Honderich, T. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lloyd, T. 2001. *Empire the History of the British Empire*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.

Morris, William Edward and Brown, Charlotte R., "David Hume", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/hume/>

- Norman, R. *The Moral Philosophers, An introduction to ethics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1983)
- Sorell, T. (ed) 1996. (1999 ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*. USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, G , N/A. “Thomas Hobbes: Moral and Political Philosophy” in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Available from : <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmoral/#SH5b> . Accessed 05/05/18