

## **Mother Night and Decalogue**

### **Introduction**

Morality pertains to the distinction between right or good conduct or between good and evil. The former would presuppose that morality carries the concept of behavioral standards with regard to how people act in relation to its environment while the latter assumes the conscience of people or ethical motive with a nuance of religion or personal belief. Morality is a purely human experience. In as much as humans are gifted with rational intelligence, we are also the only creature capable of right or wrong action.

Morality often describes the principles that govern our behavior. These principles are often reflected on our laws, which we use for our societies to survive. Our behavior is controlled by laws which are based on socially accepted standards. These standards are often directed to ensure fairness and harmony among people, to make good persons to have a good community and to maintain a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship among people.

### **Kantian Ethics**

Kantian morality is based purely on logical reasoning. Rightness or wrongness is measured not by its purpose or consequences but in the fulfillment of one's duty. Some actions are categorically right (categorical imperatives) or wrong. Honesty is always right while lying is always wrong. This philosophy states that what ought to be done

must be based upon pure reason but it does not clearly explain how pure reason is made to achieve a categorical truth. It basically proposes guides that need to be fulfilled to check if the actions are right or wrong, to wit: will everyone act the way I intend to act (to make it categorical) and will the action be for my own interest or will it partake or reflect the goals of all human beings. The problem with this guide is that it did not give explanations or at least hierarchy of importance if conflicts arise between categorical imperatives or the goals of people as in case of dilemmas. Finally, duty plays an important role in Kantian ethics because it is precisely what produces moral worth. However, if the action is done for some other reason i.e. compassion or pity, then the action have no moral worth.

### **Aristotelian Ethics**

Unlike Kantian ethics, Aristotelian ethics does not provide a particular list of actions that is categorically good or bad. It does not propose that rightness or wrongness is based on consequences (utilitarianism), intentions or duties. Instead, morality depends on the circumstances or the conditions at hand. Ethics therefore is a case to case basis which will be decided on its own merits. However, this does not mean that every person is free to decide on the basis of what is practicable and practical that best serves his interest. Cultural relativism poses the problem of lack of a standard rule that will govern how people will behave. Since values are derived and dependent on people or groups of people, some issues/ acts regarded as morally wrong in one culture may be considered as morally right in the other. Aristotle argued that decision should be based on reason and

not on feelings or a simple desire to achieve that is pleasurable (utilitarianism). That reason will basically strike a balance of promoting one's own good and that of others. Finally, Aristotle still holds that people are fundamentally good. Only actions are subject to right or wrong depending on the circumstances. Aristotelian ethics holds judgment on people.

### **Mother night**

Howard W. Campbell Jr., an American, grew up, lived and considered Germany as his home. However, when the Second World War broke loose, he became a spy for the Allied Forces at the expense of his life. As spy, he betrayed the country to which he placed allegiance to and placed himself and his wife in danger. His wife, whom he dearly loved, was eventually assumed to have been killed by allied forces during an attack. After the war, Campbell went back to the States and tried to live in anonymity. He was later discovered and was transferred to Israel where he was imprisoned while waiting for trial.

### **Kant on Mother Night**

Following Kantian perspective, Campbell is morally wrong. In allowing himself to become a spy, he betrayed his duty for his country and his duty for his wife. Honesty is one of the categorical imperatives that should be followed and maintained at all times, at situations and at all cost. By being a spy, Campbell committed dishonesty to his country

to which he has a duty to protect. It must be noted that Campbell was politically apathetic and is therefore indifferent to Nazism nor the destruction and oppression of lives that it has caused. If he agreed to become a spy because he shared the plight of the oppression of the Jews out of pity, then Kant would such situation to have no moral value. His being a spy is also a treachery and dishonesty to all his German family especially to his wife, who died during an Allied assault on a Nazi camp where his wife performed. When he got married, he has the moral duty to protect and be loyal to his family through thick and thin. But he was not able to uphold that duty. While imprisoned in Israel, Campbell was preparing himself to be hanged instead of defending and saving his life by telling that he was indeed as a spy and was on the side of the Allied forces. He wanted to end his life not for crimes against humanity, but rather for crimes against himself.

### **Aristotle on Mother Night**

Following Aristotelian perspective, Campbell's action is morally right. In allowing himself to become a spy that basically compromised his country and his family, he tried to balance that oppression, destruction and death that Nazism causes that has inflicted more pains to more people than his. His deception to his country and his family for being a spy served a higher cause that is the abolition of racism, which is an irrational form of oppression or hatred based on race (anti-Semitism). Such crime against humanity is far greater than the crimes he committed against himself. Aristotle believed that man is a social animal, which reflect his great emphasis on the importance of society as part of an

individual's personality and responsibility. In becoming a spy, Campbell was able to promote his own welfare and that of the larger community because he actively partake of the responsibility to protect society which is in the long run is beneficial to him because he is also a part of that society.

On the second thought, Campbell's life of loneliness and despair at the point in which he waits for his death in prison is inconsistent with the objective of Nicomachean ethics, which is supposed to fulfill the life of happiness or "eudaimonia".

## **Decalogue II**

A pregnant woman, Dorota was well decided to keep or abort the child in her womb depending on if her ill husband lives or not. She was bearing a child not of his husband but of another man. Telling this predicament to her doctor, the fate of two lives, the baby and the husband, is now placed on the doctor's hand. At this point, the doctor's values were tested but he decided to find a way to promote life because he had a terrible experience of losing all his family during the bombings of the World War. The doctor lied to Dorota that his husband will die so that she will keep the baby. In the end, both the husband and the baby lived.

## **Kant on Decalogue II**

Following Kantian perspective, the doctor is morally wrong. The doctor may be viewed to have committed a “white lie”. It may be a willful deceit but was done out of a duty. It nevertheless failed to promote honesty, which is a categorical imperative. The dilemma posted in the Decalogue can actually be compromised. The doctor need not lie to save the baby’s life. The doctor could have told the truth and yet find a way to save the baby’s life like adopting the baby. In any case, when he lied for the baby to live as a consequence, it is morally wrong for Kant. If he did it out of pity or because he have had painful experienced of losing a family, then it has no moral value because it was not done out of duty.

In another Kantian perspective, the doctor was morally right. As a doctor, he has the moral duty to promote life at all costs. In fact, whether a doctor or not, the preservation of life is a categorical imperative. Moreover, he did not actually lie about Dorota’s husband. He may know that his health is indeed improving but that does not ascertain that he will live. Death is one thing in life that is categorically uncertain so he was never in position to accurately predict if Dorota’s husband will be alright based on a mere healthy diagnosis.

### **Aristotle on Decalogue II**

Following Aristotelian perspective, the doctor’s action was morally right. By lying about the condition of Dorota’s husband, he was able to save two lives. Aristotelian ethics considers “white lies” as morally correct depending on the circumstances at hand. I also

permits that some things are better left unsaid than done depending on the circumstances at hand. In this case, the doctor sacrificed himself being honest in order to create a balance between two lives – one of the husband and the other of the baby. At his expense i.e. for telling a lie, he promoted the welfare of other people by directly saving lives of the baby and the husband, while obliquely saving the lives of Dorota, her paramour and her other relatives and friends who shall be affected by the death of any of the lives at stake. More over, the doctor promoted his own welfare by giving him the opportunity to save life, a choice and luxury he was deprived during the war when his whole family died of bombing. In which case, he saved himself from another agony.

## **Conclusion**

The ethics of Kant and Aristotle is based on reason. Decision on ethical dilemmas depends on how reasoning can address and successfully satisfy the set of guidelines that each theory provides. More people are inclined to decide on the basis of the utilitarian principle which is often congruent and harmonious with that of the Aristotelian ethical framework and opposed to Kant. However, the quality of happiness can not be objectively measured. While Kantian and Aristotelian ethics are based on reason, different reasoning skills and parameters for reasoning yield different reasons and conflicting decisions. Ethical dilemmas have subjective components such as emotional and spiritual aspects that ethical theories do not consider. These dimensions unfortunately are beyond the realms of reason. In the end, dilemmas remain as dilemmas

## **REFEFENCES**

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