

NO ONE CAN CHEAT IF EVERYONE BECOMES A CHEATER

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This paper explores the formulation of universal law in the realm of the major moral philosophical treaties. If the maxim of a person is to cheat, to make a false promise, that person should be prepared to live a society in which cheating would become a universal law. However, it would be interesting to investigate these moral principles to establish a universal law based on morality and virtues, having humanity as an absolute end. The essay will further contextualize certain cases of moral turpitude and instances having reference in popular epics.

Key Words: Utilitarianism, Imperative, Universal Law, Humanity, Virtue.

INTRODUCTION

It may be awful to talk about a society of cheaters of dishonest people. However, it may be interesting to investigate that if everyone in the society were to become cheater, would people having cheating as a trait, be unable to cheat. Thus, imagine, a society premised on no fraud will have to have society be modeled on a universal law or moral principle of fraudulence. If we analyze Immanuel Kant's universal law underpinnings to assess this behavior, the outcome would be interesting. A broad formulation pertaining to such a world may be as follows. Imagine a world in which, whenever a person needs money, they make a promise to repay that in the future, fully aware of their inability to pay back (i.e., a willingness to cheat). To

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understand the concept of universal law and the subsequent formulation of this law propounded by Immanuel Kant and Bentham's utilitarianism, as a human behavior for self-pleasure, would imperative to know.

Utilitarianism: Bentham's Argument: The promise to pay back with the prior knowledge of inability to do so is an explicit manifestation of Bentham's utilitarian idea of pleasure, bereft of any moral(s). Bentham said: "*a man's motive be ill-will; call it even malice, envy, cruelty, it is still a kind of pleasure that is his motive; the pleasure he takes at the thought of the pain he sees or expects to see, his adversary undergoes (a lender in the case being considered). Now even this wretched pleasure, taken by itself, is good: it may be faint, it may be short, it must be at any rate be impure: yet while it lasts, and before any bad consequences arrive, it is as good as any other if not more intense.*" Utilitarianism is based on the intuitive idea that any action is right, or it is not at least wrong, and insofar it is beneficial for those who are affected by that action. Bentham talks about the objectivity of considering any idea without the whims and prejudices as an instrument for pleasure. He gave the instrument of *felicific calculus* to assess the imperatives of any action, which means that consider any action or law's impact on each individual affected by that- some would be affected positively, and some would be affected negatively- add these up. If that is a net positive effect, the action/ law will be beneficial (in overall terms) for human lives. Bentham furthering his argument provides a semantic argument rather an assertion that What else could *right* and *wrong* means if not *productive of benefits* and *productive of harm*. Bentham believed that the use of right and wrong in any other way would not make any sense; he asserts that if not in this sense, it would be like, "*to deal in sounds instead of sense.*" In the realm of Bentham, the aggregation of

the good of all, if making a false promise, gives you the pleasure of collecting some ready cash, it is absolutely condoned. In utilitarianism, what matters, is the pleasure, not the morality of actions- maximization of the pleasure being the objective.

Immanuel Kant: Formulation of Universal Law: However, Kant differs from Bentham's views and argues that acting on the supreme principle of morality, one would not only be contributing to the character of the social world but also to the character of the self, you are industriously constructing. Hence, if the false promise of repaying becomes a universal law, no one will buy your promise as cheating, having become the universal law, nobody would be able to collect the cash. As Kant put it as follows:

"For the universality of a law that everyone when he believes himself to be in need, could promise whatever he pleases with the intention of not keeping it would make the promise and the end one might have in it itself impossible since no one would believe what was promised him but would laugh at all such expression as vain pretences." This argument most prominently signifies that cheaters (false promise makers) will not be able to get any money (consequently, lose the ability to cheat) if cheating would become a universal law. Furthermore, Kant says that "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law." In this case, if my maxim or my truism is to get money by making a false promise, then I need to be prepared to operate in a universe in which everyone will have the same maxim. This is a very crucial interpretation, in the sense that in a society, we are creating enormous externalities even by making our decisions in isolation with the perception that no one is watching me. In effect, if we are following a 'non' moral path, we are not polluting ourselves rather contributing to lowering the moral upshot of the society we live in

and thereby of the entire universe.

However, Kant emphasized that if you act on your maxim of cheating in the world in which your maxim is the ground rule for everyone, it will lose its efficacy, i.e., you will not be able to cheat in such a world. Kant argues that rightness is not a function of what we manage to achieve as an outcome of our actions or efforts. Rather it is the outcome of nature and character of the action itself. Hence, we do a wrong act out of our inclination, then to convince ourselves and to rationalize the act, a justifying story is weaved that it was not really that bad.

Moral Turpitude Cases in Practice: Intuitively, the reference to the most infamous cases of bank borrowing, fraudulent like Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi, would be intriguing. Imagine having an ecosystem in which there is a universal law whereby all businessmen are defaulters; in that case, banks would have laughed at their faces. These people would not have been able to commit fraud (cheating) by making a false promise. Epically as well, in the Ramayana, Ravana had to camouflage as *Saadhu* to abduct Sita, as the universal law was that *Saddhus* is the person of virtues. If the universal law would have been the opposite, Ravana would have not been able to commit the act. It must be reinforced that Kant is not claiming that making a false promise is ineffective in the actual world. It may be very effective as examples of bank frauds or tax evasions are quite rampant across the globe.

Immanuel Kant- Argument for Humanity as an End: Kant argues that the end of our all means should be humanity instead of using humans as a means to our end. He emphasized that any activity should be a shared activity. Even in the commercial exchanges, involved parties may have different ends, which may not be realized together, but still,

they may work together. Kant's idea about the shared activities is that people are treated as co-participants instead of treating them as tools or obstacles. It involves giving the opponents to consent freely to your way of treating them and joining together to promote each of one's ends through a shared or a common activity. For instance, two players in a game of chess may agree to play to win, as both of them would not be able to win, but may agree to play according to a set of rules. This would be a shared activity, both willfully consenting to be a means to an end.

Nonetheless, the 'end' of this shared activity would be humanity would be a question of deliberation. Playing a fair game as shared activity in the realms of the most famous and notorious game of dice played with well-defined. It obeyed rules between *Kauravas* and *Pandavas* in *Mahabharata*, the Kantian framework of the shared activity; however, the outcome was disastrous for humanity. Nonetheless, it is important to have a rule-based shared activity, but the intention and implications of action/law or game are of more paramount importance for humanity.

Perhaps, that is the reason, Kant while deriving the formula of humanity as an end contrasts between relative and absolute ends. Kant said that a relative end is a purpose you have in virtue of the inclination you happen to have. Your relative ends are ends that play a role in determining the hypothetical imperative that applies to you. But given that we are subject to a categorical imperative, Kant asserts that this means that not all ends are merely relative.

Hence, the absolute end is the purpose you set for yourself, independent of any inclinations you might happen to have. In the *Mahabharata*, Duryodhana was pursuing his relative end with the inclination (hypothetical imperative) of not only of satisfying his

desire of pleasure of defeating but without bothering about moral upshots and humanity as an end. Fundamental conflicts seem to be between individual good versus morally right.

Aristotle's Ultimate Good and Virtues of Life: Aristotle's theory, however, does not see morality as a limiting factor in what one can do to promote happiness or one's own interest. While dealing with the central question of the ultimate good, he talks about *eudaimonia*, a Greek term which literally means- which is loved by God, often translated as happiness or flourishing. During Aristotle's time, living a good life was not construed as something distinct from living a morally good life; for him, it was simply a matter of common understanding. He strongly suggests that what is important, not just knowing what is good, but internalizing this knowledge and actually putting it in practice. Aristotle was really annoyed with the teachers and students of ethics who talk the talk but didn't walk the walk. Aristotle was of the opinion that being good is a matter of having virtues, which are character traits like bravery (dealing with difficult or dangerous situations), temperance (dealing with sensuous desires), and generosity (dealing with righteous spending)- a man of some standing as Aristotle prefers to call a virtuous man.

Aristotle believes that a virtuous person will have a sense of pleasure and pain but not in a utilitarian sense of aggregate pleasure over pain. A person having temperance as a virtue will not take pleasure by overeating, rather will enjoy the good food with an appropriate portion of food for body requirements. Aristotle advocated that virtues are self-reinforcing and by acting virtuously we will be enhancing our pleasure by doing so. Hence it would become easy to act virtuously and harder to act viciously. Therefore, if we can habituate or reinforce to take morally informed pleasure in promoting the aggregate pleasure, then perhaps it would be easier to tolerate the

sacrifice of our own non-moral pleasure. A virtuous person may not derive any pleasure from getting money by cheating others; rather, he would be in the agony of acting viciously. MIT Professor Tamar Schapiro, while summing up these philosophical theories, says, "*is Aristotle's virtue theory a competitor or complement to the Utilitarianism and Kantian ethical theory? Suppose you are striving to be a good utilitarianist, what virtue you need to cultivate? Presumably, you would have to learn to take a morally informed pleasure. So, while promoting aggregate pleasure, even at the expense of your own non-moral pleasure. On the Kantian side, presumably, we can learn to take morally informed pleasure in acting fairly, in standing up for the principles that could be the principles for all.*"

Hence, applying this philosophical understanding, perhaps we can tentatively conclude that a society of the honest-the virtuous people (Aristotle's framework) working on their maxim of honesty as shared activities with humanity as an end could formulate honesty and promise fulfillment as a universal law (Kantian formula).

This sounds certainly better to visualize a society in which everybody is trustworthy and honest rather than a society of false promise makers and cheaters. In the realm of the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, promise-keeping is one of the greatest virtues, and it is an inherent attribute of humans. Humanity, as an end of all action, is one of the essential aspects of these epics. For instance, *Ramayana* is based on the upkeep of promise. King Dasaratha had to send his beloved son Rama to fourteen years of exile to upkeep the promise given to one of his queens Kaikeyi. Fulfillment of promise is one of the greatest virtues in this tradition. It is considered more valuable than life as presented in Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmans-* 'रघुकुल रीत सदा चली आई, प्रा। जाई पर वचन न जाई।' In *Mahabharata*, the philosophy of *Gita*

is more of a hypothetical categorical, not in the form of inclinations but as an inherent virtue of human beings. The Gita is more of a persuasive text, encouraging humans to be righteous for their welfare and for the welfare of mankind, rather than a regimented law book for its followers, unlike many other religious books. The Gita, one of the most revered books by its follower, categorizes three distinct yet amalgamated virtues(*gunas*) in human beings as Sativa (goodness, harmonious); Rajas (passion or sensuous gratification), and Tamas (darkness, destructive) (Bhagavat *Gita* XVII & XVIII Ch.).

Although all these three virtues are manifested in all human beings, the predominance of Sativa is absolutely desirable, Rajasic is acceptable with constraints; (perhaps comparable with a relative (Rajasic) and absolute (Sattvic) ends in the Kantian Idea of Humanity as an End), however Tamasic as a virtue, which primarily is a sensuous pleasure (utilitarianism) is deemed undesirable rather despicable. Sattvic attributes are categorical imperatives in the process of ethical perfection and should be habituated and reinforced to enjoy the pleasure of living a virtuous life. (Aristotelians Idea of Virtuous life). In chapter 13 of *Bhagavat Gita*, as a wise man is said to be virtuous by definition, it says: "*Humility, sincerity, patience, simplicity, reverence for one's teacher, purity, fairness or stability, self- control, renunciation all objects of sensuous gratification, absence of ego; perception of the evil of birth, death, old age disease, non-attachment of children, wife, home, evenness of mind in fulfillment and frustration; devotion to the service of the lord... are called knowledge and remains is ignorance*" (The *Bhagavat Gita*-13.7-11). This chapter of The *Bhagavat Gita* encompasses the board spectrum of the philosophical dimensions of the building of a virtuous universe which not only has humanity as an end rather in which the meaning of life is service of humanity by devoting oneself to the service of the lord (eudaimonia- Aristotle's Ultimate good).

CONCLUSION

We can safely conclude, based on this analysis of philosophical theories across cultures and time, that if we as human beings are able to control the intemperate desire of accumulation by whatever means, the possibility of creating a Universe of promise keeper and honesty is not impossible and cheating and cheaters will definitely exist, but their behavior cannot be categorical imperative or an absolute end of human beings. Hence, philosophical understanding would make humans more transparent and empower us and deter us from succumbing to the temptations and tendencies of rationalizing our vicious actions and behaviors.

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