

Philosophy 104, Business Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2007

Russell Marcus, Instructor

email: philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org

website: http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Business_Ethics/BEHome.htm

Lecture Notes, February 27

I. Quiz: Distinguish religious morality from secular morality

II. Plato and moral motivation

Last week, we looked at the problem of egoism and moral motivation: Why should I sacrifice my self-interest for that of others, when it seems to be morally required?

We noticed that the problem of egoism held even for the religious moralist, since to obey a moral law out of fear of eternal punishment, or desire for eternal reward, is just another form of egoism.

Glaucon, in the *Republic*, also worries that egoism can not provide moral motivation.

There are three kinds of actions I am motivated to perform.

First, there are things I just like to do.

I know why I should eat chocolate pudding (in moderation); I like it.

I need no pudding motivation beyond that which egoism provides.

Second, there are actions that I both like to do, and are good to do.

I know why I should ride my bicycle; I like it, and it is healthy.

If you do not like to exercise, consider loving some one who loves you.

Glaucon mentions having good vision, which is an accurate example, if unexciting.

I need no bicycle motivation, since again egoism provides sufficient motivation.

Third, there are things that I do not like to do, but I fear the consequences of not doing.

I know why I should pay my taxes; if I get caught, I will suffer more than if I had paid them.

Egoism does not provide sufficient motivation to pay taxes for most of us; we need the threat of punishment.

Thus, Socrates divides all goods into these three classes: things that are just pleasurable (chocolate pudding), things that are both pleasurable and rewarding (cycling), and things which we have to do in order to get or avoid something else (paying taxes).

If just, or good, actions were of the first or second kinds, then there would be no problem of moral motivation.

Socrates is trying to convince Glaucon (and the audience) that justice is of the second kind, like riding my bicycle.

Glaucon says that most people think that justice is of the third kind, like paying one's taxes.

He argues that justice is not something we want to do, but something we have to do.

Glaucon starts his argument by considering the example of the ring of Gyges.

The ring made Gyges invisible.

Gyges, with his power of invisibility, killed the King (of Lydia), married the Queen, and ruled the land.

Glaucon argues that the just man, if given the ring, would behave exactly like the unjust man.

In fact, the main goal of the just man is not to be just, but to appear just.

We want the rewards that come with a good reputation, but also the spoils that come from maximizing our self-interest relative to the interests of others.

In order to determine whether justice itself is desirable, Glaucon compares a just man to an unjust man. Since we do not want to confuse being just with having a reputation for being just, we should compare a just man who has a reputation for being unjust with an unjust man who has a reputation for being just. Glaucon adds that the truly just man would be unconcerned with his reputation, and even hindered by it if it were too good.

If the just man were rewarded for his goodness, then we might have trouble determining if his real motive was justice, or the rewards.

(We will return to this theme when we read Kant.)

Similarly, the truly unjust man will never be caught doing bad things, and will have a good reputation.

When we compare these two men, it is clear which one we would choose to be.

It is clear that justice is like paying your taxes, good for its consequences but not valuable in itself.

III. Socrates's account of moral motivation

Glaucon has argued that egoism can not provide moral motivation, since it is clearly in our interests to be unjust, while having a reputation for being just, rather than being just, and having a poor reputation.

Socrates, of course, rejects Glaucon's argument.

His response is a bit complicated and metaphysical.

He divides the soul into three parts: the rational, the spirited, and the appetitive parts.

The just man is one whose three parts are balanced appropriately.

The unjust man is ruled by appetites, instead of controlled by reason.

This way, injustice is a kind of disease among the parts of the soul, and no one wants to be diseased.

So, we prefer to be just; see the analogy on p 59.

Glaucon, the interlocutor here, concedes to Socrates's argument.

There is certainly something to be said for Socrates's description of our inner lives.

The unjust man will constantly be at war with himself.

When one lies, or cheats, or steals, one makes enemies, and has to worry about being caught and revenge.

The just man can live at peace with himself.

If we really were confident of not being caught, then we would have no reason to worry.

But, if we steal enough things to make a difference in our lives, people will ask questions.

The more wealthy we are, the more prominent and public we become.

Perhaps Glaucon's story is really unrealistic after all.

Consider whether the unjust people at Enron were served by their injustice.

Plato has provided an argument that it is better for us to be just than unjust, since the unjust man is unhappy, and the just man can live at peace with himself and others.

IV. Egoism and moral motivation: a summary

We considered the problem of egoism because it seemed that the religious moralist had an easier solution than the secular moralist.

Now, we have seen three secular answers to the problem.

Nielsen argues that the secular moralist can find moral motivation in the abilities of humans to suffer and feel happiness, and in our desire to live in a world in which people are moral.

Hobbes argues that morality is just adherence to contracts, which are enforced by the leviathan; we

should obey the law because we will be punished if we do not.
Socrates argues that we should be moral because it is in our interests.

All three of these explanations are, at root, unsatisfying.
For, when there is just one cookie, and we both want it, is it in my interest to cede the cookie?
The real goal in discussing moral motivation has been to separate morality from religion.
As we saw, both secular and religious moralities have problems with moral motivation.
So, we shall put the question of moral motivation aside, and consider a few other reasons why we will pursue secular morality instead of religious morality.