

Introduction to Philosophy Essay Questions Units 7 – 9
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Abstract

This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements needed for completing *Introduction to Philosophy*, “A Possible World Machine” through the International Society for Philosopher’s (ISPP) Pathways to Philosophy program. This paper attempts to further address the first question regarding being moral as presented by Pathway to Philosophy as means of partially satisfying the requirements concerning association with the ISPP. However, our address is an extension of the original question. It should be noted that this paper is written according to American Psychological Association (APA) sixth edition standards.

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Why Be Moral At All?

Despite two previous ill-gotten attempts at the moral question presented by Pathways to Philosophy (2014), “why be moral”, wherefore the latter of which having been previously accepted, this paper is presented as an address to the question regarding why we should be moral *at all* (G. Klempner, personal communication, November 14, 2014). Since special emphasis is placed on ‘at all’, the focus of this paper is not focused so much on ‘why be moral’, but why at all should we even consider morality in our decision making processes in the first place. It is obviously a simple, yet not so obviously, a surprisingly confounding question. The problem with this question is that it refers to the term *all*, and thus, is absolute in its perspective. If we ask absolutely, why be moral, we are in a way suggesting that there is no such thing as morality at all. In a way then, the question seems to implicate a hidden fallacy in an otherwise undeniable assertion. The question would need to be reframed in such a way that was not absolute in its orientation in order to better ground morals in a state of absolute relativity as opposed to simply being absolute. For example, being *qua* being with respect to being moral, requires a reference point whereby we may be morally inclined for relativity sake. If for example we ask, *why give some object back* (i.e., such as a coat), which we have found, we are also and at the same time, asking ourselves *why be moral and actually give the object back at all?* The problem being that it may be just as moral to keep the object as it would be to give it back.

On one hand, we want to define our own sense of morality according to the golden rule wherein wanting to give something because we are governing our sense of morality according to the intrinsic nature of the principle in question, and in the form of a ethic, that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us; on the other, we may find ourselves warring with our own self while wanting to govern ourselves according to an alternative moral code otherwise operating by the principle, finders/keepers. The difference between these two antithetical positions is dependent on a number of factors such as practicality and adherence to either moral absolutism or situationalism, and even natural laws as judged according to conscience.

First, let us assume that we find a coat with a name tag. If the name on the tag is someone we know, we are more likely to make a reasonable effort to give the coat back rather than take the time to locate someone we do not know. If we are operating according to situational ethics, we may or may not give the coat back to the person identified by the tag depending on whether or not we like that person. Situational ethics would suggest that we give the coat back if they were nice to us, and keep it if they were mean. If they were neither nice nor mean, we may become increasingly considerate, or alternatively, inconsiderate, of whether or not it is practical, or more accurately, convenient, to make an effort to return the coat; all the while, our conscience is telling us to be morally lawful as it is natural, and unnatural for that matter, not to listen to what we are being told.

To further elaborate on the notion of convenience underlying the situational aspect of certain ongoing ethical considerations in question, we might consider whether we stop by the person’s place, assuming that they are even home because we would find ourselves either leaving the coat, a note to come get the coat, or hauling it around with us. If we leave the coat, someone else might take it. If we leave a note, we might find ourselves wondering whether they went on vacation or it fell off the door, and never got it. Do we even have tape to stick the note to the door! Would we really have to carry the cursed coat around with us all day? By now, we’re probably saying to ourselves, I might as well just tear off the tag and keep the dam thing! But, what if someone finds out?!? Good heavens, what a moral pickle we have become.

What if the person was mean to us? Where the moral relativist would likely wrap morality in three sheets tossing it to the wind while keeping the coat, someone governing oneself according to moral absolutism

would likely make a reasonable effort to return the coat, because not only would oneself want someone who did not like them to return their coat to them as they are prospectively doing for another, but because it is innately right to do so. The question here being seemingly referential to what constitutes a reasonable effort. The problem being, what is reasonable to one, is not so reasonable to another.

Final Thoughts

If we equate *why be moral at all* with *why give the coat back at all* for example sake, we are left deliberating a few determinable factors as a means of establishing reason to be at all moral. We need to know who the coat belongs to. It should not matter whether or not we like the person for liking is to logic as not liking is to reason. If we do not know who the coat belongs to, we are not necessarily obligated to ask for they should have put their name in it. If we do know who the coat belongs to, we need to make sound enough effort to return the coat, not only because it is right to do so, but we do not want to not be able to at least say we tried. Where one effort is ordered to moral absolutism, the other is morally relative. Just because we find something, does not necessarily mean it is ours for we know not the manner in which we what we found came to be. If someone willingly discarded the item, it would be ours due to a deliberate decision by the owner to not want; however, if they lost the item, it remains theirs even though it is not in their possession. In the end, while deciding to be moral at all, we need to consider the prospect of morality from both perspectives, which are relative as well as absolute. After all, to do nothing at all, would be madness.

Reference

Pathways to Philosophy. (n.d.). Introduction to philosophy, 'The Possible World Machine', Essay Questions 7-9. *International Society for Philosophers*. Retrieved from http://www.philosophypathways.com/download/pathways/A_essays_7-9.pdf