



INTERNATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OLYMPIAD

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1. *"It may be confidently asserted that no man chooses evil, because it is evil; he only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks. And the desire of rectifying these mistakes, is the noble ambition of an enlightened understanding, the impulse of feelings that Philosophy invigorates."*

I want to speak about pleasure.

Pleasure, that is, the desire condemned to be reduced to futility in terms of its definition, the ambition condemned to be mistaken with instinct; the vice condemned to provoke an argument for guilt in moral philosophical judgement. If one assumes all means are an attempt on pleasure as an end, that the human motivation is in itself hedonistic, one may conclude, that both good and evil are mere tools of what could lead man to happiness. The desire to achieve happiness would thus encourage man to firmly commit any morally relevant action in an attempt to approach his pleasures.

To state that *"it may be confidently asserted that no man chooses evil, because it is evil; he only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks."*, as Mary Wollstonecraft does in *"A Vindication of the Rights of Man (...)"* means, to argue, that man regards goodness and happiness as equal measures and that the maximization of his happiness is so detrimental for him, that he could commit evil to achieve it. Secondly, this extraction of the quote implies that it is impossible to consciously want evil committed, only to want goodness as happiness and to fail to recognize the underlying evil of the chosen action.

In the following, I want to discuss both the assumption of good and evil as absolute values as well as defend the pursuit of pleasure as a morally relevant motivation, regardless of its resulting action.

I.

Raimond Gaita's work *"Good and Evil – an absolute conception"* is a metaethical approach, that criticizes both consequentialism and Kantian deontology in terms of their determining factors for moral judgement. While one measures the ethical value of an action focusing on the implicit results for its victims and the other demands the rational estimation of an actions categorial permission or prohibition, both fail to recognize the importance of the immediate action itself and the goodness and evilness that are expressed within.

The compassion shown within an action committed uncovers the value the morally responsible attributes to its moral subject, insofar that the action itself becomes proof of its underlying character. The infinite value of another human's integrity is a result of the belief in their capacity to become the object of someone's love, thus to be deserving of the compassion of a stranger knowing of their infinite value and expressing this in their moral actions.

Gaita judges a true utilitarian to be essentially corrupt, proven by a way of thinking that implies it is better to know of five deaths in exchange for ten saved lives than vice versa, while being incapable to voice – disregarding the equation of the circumstances presented – that it be morally good to murder five human beings, each one after another, because this statement itself withholds an evil cleverly placed in to a parenthesis by the utilitarian argument. In contrary, the deontological thinking *a priori* disregards the irrationally empathetic assumption of a moral subject being deserving of love and as a result: of goodness. The assessment of every individual's dignity, as Immanuel Kant presents it, doesn't suffice in this case, as a slave owner who brutally engages in the rape of a slave girl doesn't question nor her humanity nor her dignity. He is conscious of her capacities, even abuses them through labour, he does not reduce her to a status lower than humanity itself as he doesn't feel he commits sodomy through the rape of the girl; his depreciation of her doesn't affect the assumption of her species, potential or dignity, it is only a devaluation of *kind*. While the woman may be a Christian wanting to preserve her virginity, she doesn't appear to the slave owner as a *Christian*, while he knows of her bodily and psychological pain in the process, he doesn't perceive her body as *worthily* of love and tenderness, as receptive or as an object of her moral self-assessment.

The definition of evilness committed and evilness suffered becomes necessary to prove that a moral action holds value beyond its decision making or consequence, that the act is proof of the value attributed to the moral subject, of the underlying compassion.

While this approach is powerful, it is equally idealistic. If good and evil are absolutes committed through love, one must believe that affection desires goodness and – if not mislead – succeeds at its realization, as Wollstonecraft proclaims. With that I firmly disagree.

II.

For Friedrich Nietzsche *"Every action committed out of love exists beyond good and evil."*¹. Love is never directed towards the estimated value of another human, the love for higher goods, pain, pleasure, and the pursuit of power are beyond the manipulative and misleading assertions of goodness and evilness – those categories merely resulting of the existential fear to fall victim to self-proclaimed injustice. What could love be, unless, the radical enthusiastic acceptance of life through conscious disapproval of what is "good and evil", instead, an appreciation of the broader terms "good" and "bad", perhaps meaning, "powerful" and "weak"? An appreciation of the persona one could be, in dedication to their fate, in ignorance of the seemingly empty categorization of what is supposed to maximize goodness and evilness in the world?

If love to oneself, one's potential and one's desires (rather than the object of said desires) is the righteous motivation for what is ethical, that means man has to free himself from the confusion of goodness with happiness, the restricting belief that what brings happiness to the world, what shows the empathy that Gaita demands, is essentially right. It would thereby become irrelevant whether *"man chooses evil, because it is evil"* or not. In ignorance of these absolutes, man would have to free himself from the penalty of judgement of what is good, allowing himself to act upon his "will to power", the expressive proof of the love to one's one fulfilment, the fate of both

¹ Beyond Good and Evil – Friedrich Nietzsche

happiness and suffering presented in the process of becoming a higher version of oneself. In terms of this argument, I would like to redefine happiness neutrally; as self-realization and that self-realization as pleasure again, as the pure product of one's "will to power". Pleasure must mean more than the experience of a positive feeling; it is a hedonistic urge but simultaneously the ambition for a higher good. The "pleasure" I hereby want to defend, can be *suffered*, critically outthought, made omnipresent. And it can become visible in actions both good and evil as those terms fail to come close to the motivation of morality – love – but not the love Gaita suggests, and rather what Nietzsche proclaims: Love to oneself, one's all-determining will to live and experience; *amor fati*.

III.

In both religious dogma and moral philosophical argumentation, the pursuit of pleasure and happiness have been considered a product of vice and through this an object of regret. Those who opt for happiness without attributing it to goodness, who are "mistaken" to believe happiness could fall together with the commitment of evil would require what Wollstonecraft suggests in the second part of the quote: *"the noble ambition of an enlightened understanding, the impulse of feelings that Philosophy invigorates"*. In result, the ethical would be the *"desire of rectifying (...) mistakes"*, the experience of guilt in consequence of one's fallacy that motivates the clarity of how to navigate one's instinct in order to act philosophically. To that Nietzsche would coldly add:

"I am ashamed." whispers Zarathustra in his most silent of hours.

"You have yet to become child and without shame." the most silent of hours replies.²

If moral philosophy requires shame of one's pursuit of happiness – regardless of the good and evil presented in its realization – the premise is essentially unethical and inhibitory.

IV.

So there remains one question: What purpose can and shall moral philosophy serve, what remains incomplete in the process of moral reflection and reaction if we prohibit it to invade the desire for pleasure, pleasure as self-realization? One cannot declare Wollstonecraft's argument that philosophy is *"noble"* in its power to rectify committed moral mistakes, shallow or insufficient, while simultaneously suggesting that ethical decision-making serves a purpose, whether that purpose be goodness or selflove. An amoralistic approach is both contradictory and reductionist on this matter. The moral conduct does, must, serve a purpose, unless one doesn't fear any explanation for the motivations of their actions to collapse into inconsistency and incomprehensibility.

² Thus spoke Zarathustra – Friedrich Nietzsche

According to Albert Camus *“The moral conduct as Socrates presented it and as Christianity recommends it, is in itself a sign of decadence. It seeks to replace a human being of flesh and blood with a mere reflection of a human. It condemns the world of passion and outcries in the name of a harmonious, entirely imaginary world.”*³ He doesn’t however state the moral conduct to be wrong, only to be illusory in effect of its target, as it eliminates the human reality of *“passion”* and *“outcries”*. Similarly as I don’t believe that Mary Wollstonecraft’s statement about the function of philosophy to be wrong, however to have a mislead focus.

I argue that the ethical is what gives the natural human compassion for both his fate and those whose well-being and integrity he values for the sake of his pursuit of pleasure, a name, a purpose and a direction. Whether one agrees or disapproves of my thesis, the primary function of moral philosophy should be not to eliminate, resent or shame the desire for happiness, but to encourage it by leading it on, defining the ways in which to achieve it and dissecting the character underlying the complimentary action. Neither do I believe good and evil to suffice as determining factors in moral judgement, nor do I believe they’re definition can’t serve the purpose of illustrating the empathetic value one attributes to his subject through his actions, as Gaita claims.

Thereby Mary Wollstonecraft’s quote comes short in reasoning why man would never choose an evil as a means to his happiness unless mistaken. The assessment of philosophy’s *“noble ambition”* to redirect one’s *“impulse of feelings”* however, remains both relevant and detrimental to define what is ethical, if we allow the claim to be abstracted from Good and Evil.

Morality uses tools of empathy and compassion in the name of the pursuit of pleasure. That intention I wholeheartedly defend as *pure*.

³ The Rebel – Albert Camus