Good essay about how should one deal with desires, needs, bodily limitations and ...

ASSIGN BUSTER

Philosophy

How should one deal with desires, needs, bodily limitations and mortality during the living of one's life? To what extent can our minds know and control or improve our bodies?

The question of how one should deal with desires and needs, on the one hand, and bodily limitations and mortality, on the other, has been one of the most significant, essential issues throughout the history of philosophy, in particular, and history of mankind, in general. It would be unrealistic to assume that it is possible to answer this question within this paper, however it is possible to compare various points of view on this issue.

While performing a comparative analysis of various philisophical systems and their respective perception of this issue, it should be kept in mind that there are certain logical and organizational flows that ought to be omitted. First of all, although it would be very tempting to turn this research into a compendium of quotes with brief comments, it may not help to assess the problem in general and can turn its whole concept into a primitive, two-dimensional scheme. Apart from that, in my understanding it would be reasonable to avoid cliches from textbooks and articles, as every contemplation of philosophical nature involves a considerable element of impartial and independent analysis of ideas. Finally, no philosophical concept should be taken into account apart from the historical context.

As far as it is possible to judge, the idea of human's imperfection and cognitive dissonance between desires and respective limitations has been present in every philosophical system. It is also reasonable to assume that

this concept of perpetual antagonism has been the cornerstone of philosophy and also religion. The difference between various schools and branches of philosophy lies in the field of interpreting such discrepancy. In this regard five major ways may be determined. Let's analyze each of these positions from the point of view of representative philosophical systems.

- Adjustment of means

The most suitable example for the first concept, adjustment of means, may be probably found in ancient Chinese philosophy, especially in T'aoism. Setting the goal of defining and pursuing the concept of " dao" (the way, the path) of things (Lao Tsu, Ch. 1) , the system, which later grew into a religious concept rather than purely philosophical one, provided a range of means that are aimed at getting closer to the final goal. It was T'aoism that developed the system of dynamic meditative practices currently known as kong-fu and qi-gong. Apart from this publicly known fact, it is also acknowledged that for the purpose of optimizing the odds of reaching the " dao" followers of this concept applied various practical pre-scientific concepts and literally were the first alchemists in the world, long before Arabs and Europeans. In other words, purely philosophical ideas of divergence between desires and abilities were being substantivated in physical forms. Although the effect was not entirely reached (for instance, the chemical experiments with the pills of eternal life made from mercury contributed to various changes of ruling dynasties in Ancient China as well as provided an efficient mechanism of natural selection), it may be considered as one of the first practical attempts of modifying the means of overcoming the stated controversy.

- Adjustment of goals

However, it is also reasonable to assume that if it is not quite possible to reach the harmony and balance between wishes and abilities, the former can also me modified. The understanding of this concept is the cornerstone of another philosophical learning – the Buddhist one. The train of thought here is simple and somewhat logical – if individual gets unhappy because (s)he cannot get what (s)he desires due to various reasons, it may be so that if the individual may get rid of this unpleasant dissonance simply because of stopping to desire. Although this idea is relatively easy to understand, it of course required years or even decades of proper training in order to get implemented. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this philosophical school successfully linked the concept of enlightment (which takes the form of abscence of desires and, respectively, abscence of suffering) with the issue of death. Only the one who reached the highest degree of understanding and practicing of Buddhism may get out of the Samsara, the eternal cycle of re-birth and respective suffering (Trungpa, p. 136-137).

- Adjustment of attitude

However, not all philosophical systems were based on the search for alternative transcedent methods of overcoming the conflict of flesh and spirit. Western Ancient philosophical tradition was based on the primate of Logos and Gnosis as its cornerstones. This position left little space for mystification (a few exceptions such as Hermetism only justify this rule, as philosophy in this case was more of a frame for religious and manipulative practices). The understanding of the fact of imperfection of human existence, the eternal conflict between physical obstacles and spiritual

desires have been accepted by the Classical philosophers. However this fact alone was not the distinctive feature of various philosophical schools of Ancient Greece and Rome. It was all about the attitude. Stoicists (Zeno, Seneca), for instance, accepted the existing order of things with dignity and persistence, cynicists (partially Socrates, Diogenes) preferred to assess the most outrageous and lowest degrees of human behavior as the most natural ones, while the epicureanists (Epicurus, Hermachus) accepted the existing anthagonism and did not tend to overanalyze it at the expense of the internal harmony (Lucretius). The logical and secular approach to the conflict of body and soul, life and death was developed and later applied throughout the New Time, but before that there came another interesting stage of assessment of this issue, which is worth mentioning.

- Acceptance

Medieval European philosophy was developing within the field of Christian theology and was unseparable from it. Therefore it included the major religious concepts, and the overall idea of it may be defined as acceptance of the existing controversy between humal wishes and desires and the weak and sinful nature of human beings. On the other hand, it provided a clear, although complex, concept of good and evil, as well as the idea of divine retribution and after-death. It may be said that such philosophical system, which nowadays may be considered partially outdated and even obsolete, was not only the most prominent synthesis of logical philosophic approaches and religious dogmates, but also the most successful attempt of unification and trans-national implementation of system of values. Such position, as well as specific ideas about sin, atonement and need for a strong " shepard"

influenced the formation of political, social, cultural institutions which are still in existence. Besides that, it created an incredibly strong, long-lasting and efficient model of control and manipulation.

- Romantization

With the technical and cultural evolution of the Western society, however, such concept of acceptance could no longer satisfy the society. With the idea of Deus ex Machina starts the news era of perception of human abilities. This can be defined, with some certainty, as the period of romantization. From Descartes to Nietzsche one can witness the evolution of the concept of a mighty individual, whose will is capable of transforming the reality around him (Nietzsche, Maxim 8). The distinctive feature of such attitude is the faith in primate of human mind and spirit over calamities of life (Descartes, Meditation II). Although this philosophical system coexisted, and still coexists, with widely spread religious beliefs, the idea of deity was gradually fainting, providing the concept of a human as the center of the system of values. Starting from the Age of Enlightment in Western Europe in the 18th century, this concept grew stronger and is now the basis of the most advanced and liberal systems of values.

References:

- Lao Tsu. Tao Te Ching. Chinese Classics. Hong Kong, 1982.

- Trungpa, Chogyam. The Truth of Suffering and the Path of Liberation. Shambhala, 2009.

- Lucretius. On the Nature of Things: De rerum natura. Anthony M. Esolen, transl. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr., 1995.

- Descartes, Renee. Meditations on First Philosophy. John Cottingham, transl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. Die Götzen-Dämmerung: Twilight of the Idols, 1895. Retrieved from the Web: http://www. handprint. com/SC/NIE/GotDamer. html, 19 November 2013.