

Effect of ethical obligations on human creativity



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Through ethical obligation is there a limit to human creativity?

What is the history of ethical obligation?

The accepted definition of ethical obligation is “ something that someone is required or compelled to do based on a predetermined set of standards of what is right and wrong.” In terms of this dissertational argument, the focus will run through Biblical and Greek Ethics which will then merge together to show an overview on the impact of both these areas on western civilisation. Some would argue the beginnings of ethical history can be traced to Homer’s Iliad, written in the mid 8th Century BCE, during the Trojan War, others believe that it can be traced to The Code of Hammurabi, which is a well-preserved Babylonian rule of law of ancient Mesopotamia, which dates back to roughly 1754 BCE written by the sixth Babylonian king, Hammurabi.

[1]Within this enactment there are more than three hundred laws all covering the topics of homicide, assault, divorce and debt. Analysts, philosophers and historians all see that “ the Code of Hammurabi includes many harsh punishments, sometimes demanding the removal of the guilty party’s tongue, hands, breasts, eye or ear. But the code is one of the earliest examples of an accused person being considered innocent until proven guilty.”[2]Which serves as a foundation to the law of retaliation as well as a basis to the western civilisation’s jurisprudence.

The Code of Hammurabi, gives a strong comparison to the 10 commandments situated within the monotheistic practices of Christianity and Judaism. The 10 commandments are written in the book of Exodus where they were “ written with the finger of God”.[3]The book of Exodus is

the second book of the Bible and is also the succeeding piece of Genesis within the Torah (The five books of Moses).[4]The laws were written on the fundamental basics of what is right and wrong in the eyes of God, and that all of his people should conform to these laws. These include “ You shall have no other gods before Me”, “ you shall not commit murder” or “ you shall not commit adultery”.[5]All of these present similarities to The Code of Hammurabi, however the biblical laws present focus on one concept which is that of God and are kept in “ the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25: 21, Deuteronomy 10: 2, 5).”[6]This artefact is extremely important as it has survived today and has helped formed the path for global ethics due to the expansion of religion, more specifically the expansion of Christianity during the Roman Empire and in the 5th -13th centuries[7].

In terms of Greek ethics, Homer portrays through the Iliad the themes of war and peace, accentuating different emotions of happiness, anger, fear and sadness. “ The first thing that *The Iliad* underscores is that violence seems to be in our genes.”[8]The concept of violence being instinctive is a phrase that Homer uses to portray the human race as being far from perfection and the art of war and conflict seems to bind onto the biological composition of man, leaving us with a juxtaposition between the emotive feelings of kindness and love against hatred and anger where both aspects balance the psychological tension within the mind. An imbalance within the tolerance of violence would lead any human mentally towards the overwhelming “ gene” meaning that a prior foreshadowing of anger due to predetermined thoughts of violence would have the element of truth, this is strongly portrayed as “ Achilles commits human sacrifice within the Iliad itself and mutilates the body of

Hector.”[9]Homer appropriately uses violence as a starting point in his Iliad due to the fact that the conflict around him (being the Trojan War) has only traumatised the world with violence which is what he wants the audience to see through his narration, and that violence is an issue and is not the solution to problems.

Plato analyses violence in the act of revenge where the state identifies violence as only a disciplinary caution where punishment is determined by the ethical justification of the delinquency of the crime. This is reinforced by his statement interpreting the Iliad, “ In a society without state power, the act of revenge which the offended party prosecutes on the offender is the only disciplinary force, which should be endorsed by the ethical concepts of the society.”[10]Furthermore, K. Yamamoto with his analysis of the Iliad regards the “ Homeric society to be assumed as a society without state power, where men live with a value system which regards revenge as an act of justice. This value system is defined by the social condition where there is no judicial system with authorized power to punish an offender except for the revenge prosecuted by the offended party.”[11]Here, people are ethically obliged to understand situations and circumstances in making a judgement. However, there are some exceptions as the main understanding is that if someone wrongs you, you have the authority to wrong them to become equal in all political sectors. Moreover, K. Yamamoto summarises the overall message that Homer wanted known into the subdivisions of “ oath”, “ honour”, “ guest”, “ blood”, “ food” and “ revenge” and all these must be acquired in order to achieve a substantial life in those times.

Before the Greek era of political, provocative and reasoned thinking with the likes of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, there was the era of Hellenic Polytheism, which is the term used to group the worship of the pantheon of ancient Greeks.[12] Unlike Christianity where there is the focus on one deity, The Greeks had several Gods, each with their own unique domains and as well as their own pleases and preferences. Greeks would do certain activities in order to please the Gods with examples of animal sacrifices, sporting events such as the Olympics and building and honouring sanctuaries.

[13] Greek mythological stories had many hidden teachings that could be uncovered under the elegant story telling which enrobed it for example, Pandora's box. The word " Pandora" in terms of etymological history derives from the words " pan" meaning " all" and d ō ron meaning " gift" overall combining to make " all giving".[14] This understanding of the etymology serves the basis of the entire mythological story. Pandora (named by Hermes) was the first human on the Earth, who was given life by Hephaestus the God of fire and was given the gifts of deep emotion, multilingual knowledge, craftsmanship and an eye for detail and finally the attainment of curiosity bestowed upon by Zeus (Lord of Olympus). She was given everything hence the meaning of her name " the one who bares all gifts", on top of this she was also given a box and was given the instruction to not open it. The Greek poet Hesiod stated, when Pandora opened the box, she released all the hardships and unfortunate events that the Gods had obtained and kept contained within the box. However, when she forced the box to close, the trait that was kept within, was the concept of hope. Hesiod analyses that " Zeus wanted to let people suffer in order to understand that they should not disobey their gods. Pandora was the right person to do it, <https://assignbuster.com/effect-of-ethical-obligations-on-human-creativity/>

because she was curious enough, but not malicious.”[15]This example of Greek ethics portrayed the message that everyone should follow the orders of those of higher power, in this case the God’s or else there will be an unexpected consequence that will follow.

Following from the belief of Hellenic Polytheism, the era also gave birth to that of the Stoics and Hellenists. The mind-set of a stoic is that the overall end is to provide an action of self-conduct which is influenced by the tranquillity of the mind and the measure of moral worth within the individual. [16]Then for a Hellenist they are Christian converts among the Jews who had returned to Judea after having lived abroad in the Greek world. There had been rough relationship between the Hebrews and the Hellenists due to the fact that some people wanted to conserve traditional customs where others would start to accept the customs of the Greeks. The Hellenists were essentially a crossover of both cultures and many didn’t agree with the culmination of both and this therefore sparked disagreements.[17]However, this era was past the golden age of Athenian philosophy encompassing the likes of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle had five key works that have withstood the test of time and each had a fundamental teaching. These five key works were titled Nicomachean Ethics, Politics, Metaphysics, Poetics, De Anima (On the soul). Nicomachean Ethics has the basis of “ eudaimonia” being that the priority of life should be happiness and the way you live your life. Furthermore, it gives way to the virtues of how to achieve happiness and that one should never turn to negative actions.[18]Politics as stated by Aristotle is a human’s “ natural habitat’ and his works explore how people could understand how royalty and democracy as well as other political

characteristics could become other factors and Aristotle believed that different species of life have certain characteristics that make them that particular species.[19]Moreover Metaphysics, meaning “ after physics” focusses on the nature of things that can be said to be. Continually it is known as “ the first cause and principle” and is the fundamental basics of philosophy and in recent times it has developed to become the study of what transcends physics asking questions such as “ Does a world exist outside the mind?” and “ Is there an existence of a God”[20]. The next key area was poetics. Aristotle’s poetics addresses the different types of poetry and how to split a poem into its different parts and tragedy was used to define men as being noble and dying for their own actions for better or for what was right. Finally, the last of the five was De Anima which was developed through scientific thought, logic and biology. It attempts to understand the soul and to discuss the souls of different kinds of living things.

Bridging the gap between Greek and Biblical law and ethical understanding was St Thomas Aquinas of Terra di Lavoro, kingdom of Sicily (Italy) who developed his own teachings concluded from Aristotelian premises and specifically through the key area of metaphysics and the existence of God as well as providence which is the belief that the quality in divinity on which mankind bases the understanding of benevolent intervention between human activities.[21]Moreover, Aquinas came up with five ways to prove the existence of God. These five ways were Motion, Causation, Contingency, Goodness and Design. For example, the first way could be explained as if there is something moving, it was put into motion by something else but you cannot trace back to where this force came from therefore the force that

moved the item had to be God.[22]An important area of work for St Thomas Aquinas was on natural and moral law. He identified the rational nature of human beings and stated that “ the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts”[23]from this it led to the understanding that humans should understand to act like rational beings since they are rational creatures.

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