

Morality in "a farewell to arms"

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



The concept of morality refers to the dimension of human existence whereby man confronts or finds himself, an ideal vision of man, or an ideal state and goal of his existence which he finds himself oriented toward. The ideal vision thus constitutes for him an exigency, a demand to action in accord with the ideal vision and goal. By the same token, this ideal vision of man constitutes a fundamental norm in relation to which his life and actions are judged to be either right or wrong, good or bad.

Right and wrong literally mean being straight or not, in line with, in conformity or not, with the norm. On the other hand, good and bad are often used as equivalents of right and wrong. However, in more precise language, right and wrong refer specifically to that which is morally binding or obligatory. Thus, the right action is that which we ought to do or ought to have done, whereas the wrong action is that which we ought to refrain from or ought to have refrained from doing. (Williams)

In a shorter and briefer evaluation of the concept of morality, morality stands for what is established as standard for right and wrong. It goes for what the society has as norm or custom. An action can be permissible though it is not moral. However in this regard, rightness and wrongness are out of issue. Practicability is said to be the motivation force for such action which is primarily due to its character as necessary. Yet, necessity is strictly beyond the sphere of morality.

Morality in " A Farewell to Arms" or " Farewell to Manzanar"

The story boldly exposed the transformation of the character of Lt. Fredric Henry while he engaged to different characters. First transformation occurs

<https://assignbuster.com/morality-in-a-farewell-to-arms/>

after he met Catherine. Before, he was initially described as immature and womanizer. The nature of his work asked him to leave his personal interests over his goal as soldier - that which is to obey the army and fight for his country. In this initial scene, Henry was not really aware of what he was doing.

He hanged out with his comrades. He drank alcoholic beverages. He engaged himself to many women. But such seemed to be normal for a soldier like him. Being a soldier, he was ordered to risk his life in order to do his job. As compensation, he wanted to relax by having night-outs and drinking sessions with his co-soldiers. However, when he knew Catherine, he suddenly became serious in his life. He was now more considerate in all that he did. He stopped going to bars. He stopped hanging out with his comrades. He instead focused himself on his relationship with Catherine. For a while, he wanted to be free from his work as a soldier.

Nevertheless no matter how he was serious with the girl, he just cannot put away his being a soldier. Catherine was pregnant. He wanted to be at her side. Yet he knew that he had to go back to the front and function as a soldier. He was in a dilemma. He knew that if he chose the former, he would neglect his duty as a soldier to his country. And if he chose the latter he would neglect his obligation to Catherine and to their baby as father. But like what was stated earlier, he knew that his work requires sacrifice of his personal interests - that which is more important is the interest of his country and countrymen. Later on, he virtuously considered the latter.

Upon knowing that there was this conspiracy to bring down the army by some of his co-soldiers, he escaped from the army. In this scene, Henry can be seen as a soldier that upon knowing what was really happening, he had chosen to leave the army instead of reporting the incident to his superiors - maybe because he was somewhat worried of himself. But then as a servant of his country, his duty is to protect and fight for his country no matter what happen. In this aspect, he acted against his duty.

When he fled from the army, he happened to meet again with Catherine. Realizing that he had a responsibility toward her and their baby, he convinced her to go to Switzerland and make new life. The girl agreed and together they ran away. It is to be noted that before the two met and became in love with each other, they had already duties to their countries.

Henry was a soldier and Catherine was a nurse. When they escaped, they turned down these supposed jobs in pursuit of their own interests. Honestly, I cannot literally say that they had committed a moral crime of being selfish. Selfishness can be right in certain situations. But still, they left their posts as servants of their country hence somehow they can be criticized for doing such.

To analyze Henry's transformation, his character started at the end of the continuum, far from being moral. But after he met Catherine, he became aware of the rightness and wrongness of his actions. Conversely, in the end of the story his moral ascendancy was exposed to conflicting duties - duty to his country as a soldier and duty to Catherine and his baby as father.

Personally, I think that Henry failed to exercise his practical reason for

choosing his own interest over his country's interest. And this can be supported by the ending when Catherine and his child died. It suggested that he had picked the wrong decision therefore he suffered its ill-consequences.

Using Kantian Ethics, Utilitarianism and Virtue Ethics

Moral Theories are important in the evaluation of human actions. They serve as the chief framework and criteria for moral judgment.(Timmons)

Furthermore, morality is said to be one of the most contested concepts. Its truthfulness and applicability are always put into question. It is true that morality is more specific than the concept of ethics because ethics refers to the study of human actions whereas morality pertains to a particular set of standards in which moral judgment is being based.(Williams)

Now, in evaluation of morality, there are different aspects that moral theories tend to look at.(Harris) Kantianism or the Kantianism, one of the Deontological theories, implies that human actions are judged with reference to duty or obligation.(Baron) On the contrary, Utilitarianism states that moral judgment can be done by appealing to the consequences of human actions. (Mill) Nevertheless, Virtue Ethics does not focus its evaluation neither on the duty or consequence of an action but rather on the character or the intention of the acting agent.(Hursthouse)

It is noteworthy to use the abovementioned moral theories in analyzing the transformation of Lt. Henry's character throughout the story.

Kantian ethics would most likely criticize Henry for not fulfilling his duties to his country and to his baby. As mentioned earlier, Henry first left Catherine

even if he was already aware of the latter's pregnancy. When he escaped from the army, he reconciled with Catherine and planned to move to Switzerland. Obviously, as it was manifested in the novel, Henry neglected his duty as soldier. For Kantianism, such undertaking is morally wrong.

In relation to the Utilitarian principle, greatest good for the greatest number, Henry also failed to act morally. (Mill) He undervalued his job as soldier and instead pursued his personal interest. Though his action would benefit him, Catherine and the baby; what was deserted was his task of fighting and protecting his country and his fellow countrymen. Obviously, the latter was greater in number as compared to the former and possessed the most intrinsic good. Utilitarianism would say that Henry failed to act morally.

Finally, Virtue ethics suggests that the assessment of Henry's decisions and actions should be based on his character and intention. (Hursthouse; Williams) Giving the fact that Henry had this intention of escaping and abandoning the army for he valued more his life (though there is nothing wrong for doing such), virtue ethics would say that Henry was not virtuous for not being courageous in facing the worse situation that he supposedly had. Moreover, he was not virtuous for he did not make a good judgment in making decisions or in solving the dilemma that he had. As a result, he acted against what is morally right in the light of the Virtue ethics.

Conclusion

To sum up, the novel: A Farewell to Arms can be described as a story of struggle. (Hemingway) This struggle was all about freeing oneself from the

sphere of war, from the sphere of morality. Morality suggests what one ought to do and not to do.(Williams) It talks about standards and code of conducts. On the other hand, morality fades in the sphere of warfare and in the sphere of love. One has the privilege to either stick to what he think is right rather than do what society tells him to do so. At the end of the day, what gives personhappinessis what really counts.

References/ Works Cited:

Baron, Marcia W. Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology New ed ed: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Harris, C. E. Applying Moral Theories 5th ed: Wadsworth Publishing, 2006.

Hemingway, Ernest. A Farewell to Arms. Reprint ed: Scribner, 1995.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. On Virtue Ethics. New ed ed: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Mill, John Stuart. Utilitarianism. IndyPublish, 2005.

Timmons, Mark. Moral Theory Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. , 2002.

Williams, Bernard. Morality: An Introduction to Ethics (Canto). Reissue ed: Cambridge University Press, 1993.