

Utilitarianism and libertarianism research papers example

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Episode 2: Utilitarianism

The utilitarianism theory is referred to as a normative theory because of its characteristics and positive advocacies in the society, for example, its championship for a utilitarian society that is free from control of the government and one that causes more happiness (West, 214). The proponents of the utilitarianism theory believe that human beings are rational and are able to judge between good ideas and bad ones. Human beings have their individual rights that should be respected and not be infringed at any cost. One of the human rights supported by utilitarianism and one that is deeply discussed in one of the lectures of Professor Michael Sandel is the right to property (Smart, 1973).

In the second episode of his lecture, Prof. Sanders discusses utilitarianism using several cases aimed at finding the logic behind this school of thought. Utilitarianism is based on the idea that a decision made should result into the maximization of utility, whereby, the term utility refers to the amount of happiness that is experienced from the decision as compared to the pain and suffering it brings about (Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, Meyer, 2014). This is the highest principle accorded to utilitarianism. In his lecture, Prof. Sandel also discusses how most of the things in the utilitarian society have been given money value, and he gives an example of how man rates paid against the value of money. From an experiment that is conducted by Mills, the results show that the more the pain, the higher it is in terms of monetary value (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014).

Despite the arguments for utilitarianism, there are major objections to this school of thought as presented in the second episode of Prof. Snadel's

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lectures. One of the major objections to utilitarianism is the fact that it does not respect individual rights. Based on the argument for utilitarianism of maximization of pleasure and common good, it is realized that this philosophy does not always hold the waters. This is because some of the decisions made in the utilitarian community do not maximize happiness (Mill, 1864). Prof. Sandel demonstrates this using the case of throwing Christians to Lions, a common practice among the utilitarian Romans. Prof. Sandel claims that, despite the fact that throwing Christians to Lions causes happiness among the crowd that watches, it has a major impact of instilling fear among the same crowd in the event that they become the victims themselves (Institute for Humane Studies, 2013).

Using two different movies as an experiment to determine what actually causes happiness to man, Prof. Sanders entertains his student with a Shakespeare movie, The Hamlet and Simpsons, in order to analyse the ideas of James Mill, however, the responses he gets somehow contradicts the conclusions of Mills (Bentham, 2009). This is because the responses from students show that some things that cause happiness may not be necessarily be preferred, for example, a great number of students enjoyed watching Simpsons, but would prefer the Hamlet based on its quality (Kay, 2014).

Libertarianism and Taxation according to Prof. Sandel

In the third episode lecture, Professor Sandel introduces the notion of Libertarian theory with regards to government's idea of taxation, by discussing two popular celebrities in a humorous manner, the founder of

Microsoft, Bill Gates and Basketball Legend Michael Jordan (Dunn, 1995). The Libertarian notion to possession is that human beings have a right to own property, but only if the ownership is arrived at in a legitimate manner (Advocates for Self-Government, 2013). Therefore, the bottom line of the theorists is that people should work in order to acquire their possession, for example, if an individual combine's labor with naturally occurring objects that are not owned by anybody, he has the ultimate right to the properties earned (Descartes, 2013). With regards to this, Prof. Sandel discusses the idea of governmental taxation by comparing it to forced labor that the rich are subjected to. The section below is going to present an analysis of libertarianism and the idea of taxation, with regards to Michael Jordan and Bill Gates.

One of the major problems in this scenario is the decision to tax Jordan's earnings, an idea which is viewed as stealing from him. Subjecting Jordan to taxation so that aid can be given to the poor is akin to forced labor because the decision is not voluntary. Prof. Sandel echoes the ideas of Mr. Nozick by stating that the idea of taxation goes beyond money, and it is very similar to forced labor because it portrays that the state has a right to collect portions of its members. He states that the idea of taxation by the state is an involuntary assertion of the right to property by the state (Locke, & McPherson, 1980). Taking away an individuals earning is similar to taking away hours of his life from him, therefore, according to Libertarian school of thought, taxation infringes the right of citizens from fully owning their labor. Despite the above claims, there are individuals who believe in equal distribution of wealth. Therefore, they have several objections to the ideas of

the Libertarianism as discussed below. The opposers of Libertarianism claim that taxation is not similar to forced labor because in taxation, one has the choice of working less so that he does not pay huge taxes, while in forced labor one has no choice (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2014).

Secondly, the opposers claim that the poor in the society are in dire need of the money and, therefore, taxing Bill Gates, and Jordan is justifiable, and should be viewed as a form of charity. Thirdly, the opposers claim that Jordan and Bill Gates are not being taxed without their consent because, the US is a democratic state and they (Gates and Jordan) play a major role in the making of laws, and particularly those regarding taxation. On the other hand, Liberationists claim that Michael Jordan and Bill Gates do not own any portion of their earnings to the state despite being involved in a team of workers who contribute towards their success (Rothbard, 2006). However, reasoning on the basis that human beings belong to themselves and not the state gives them the right to refute the idea of taxation (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2014).

Episode 4

In the fourth episode, Prof. Sandel discusses the various human rights that man possess as a gift from nature, , and which should not be taken away from them with regards to the ideas of the British philosopher John Locke (American History, 2013). John Locke is one of the British Philosophers who shared their ideas of humanity with the world. As philosopher, he shared common ideas with proposers of libertarianism, a school of thought that believed in freedoms and the rights of members of the society. With regards

to political leadership and responsibility, the ideas of John Locke were in contrary to what other philosophers, for example, Thomas Hobbes held onto (Deleuze, 1991). From the episode, viewers are able to learn that according to John Locke, human beings live in a society whereby they elect leaders to whom they surrender some of their rights. He believes that by the virtue of choice that man decides to live in a particular society means that they have to abide by the laws and regulations of the society involved (Descartes, 2007). However, according to him, members of the society surrender only a number of their rights to the leader who they have elected, but do not give him absolute power to the leader (Morris, 1999).

This is as opposed to what his fellow British philosopher, Hobbes stands for. Hobbes believes that human beings live in a state of anarchy whereby the people of a given society elect a leader who they give absolute power over them; as a result, these people become subjects to the leader under what Hobbes refers to as a form of unwritten contract (Morris, 1999). In this situation, the subjects surrender all their individual rights to the one chosen leader but they only retain their right to life. Hobbes developed this school of thought as a result to the destructions that were caused by the civil war of England, an event which convinced Hobbs that human beings normally act on behalf of their self-interest, and regardless of the interests of other human beings, therefore, in order to survive in the world, one needs to be strong enough (Oregon State University, 2014).

This shows that John Locke believes that human beings possess certain rights that cannot be taken away from them, for example, right to life, security, liberty and right to property (Woolton, & Locke, 1993). These rights

are given to man by the state of nature, and not even an elected government should interfere with them. Therefore, following Locke's ideas, if an individual combines labor with naturally occurring objects that are not owned by anybody, he has the ultimate right to the properties earned, and therefore, he should not be subjected to taxation. In this chapter, Prof. Sandel discusses the idea of governmental taxation differently from the previous episodes where he compared it to forced labor. This is because according to John Locke, taxation is a law that should be followed in the society. Locke states that the moment man becomes a member of the society, he becomes subject to the law, and since taxation is one of the laws. Every member of the society is expected to pay taxes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Philosophers over the past centuries have tried to explain the various aspects of life, and as a result, there have emerged different schools of thought, whereby some philosophers share common ideas while others hold different ideas over given topics. Different schools of thoughts have their own ways of defining what a society is and how it should be governed. Despite the differences in these schools of thoughts, all of them have their strengths and weaknesses and their application would bring a different result among the population.

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