What makes human persons good or evil? essay

Design, Fashion

There was a time when political theorists tried to plumb the mystery of human nature in hopes of framing what they thought was the most appropriate structure which a State must adopt so that it could address basic relational issues. Of paramount importance to this end are the political frameworks of John Locke and Thomas Hobbe. Locke on the one hand believes that a State exists because it is congruent with human being's nature to nurture their fellow. By contrast, Hobbes contends that a State exists so as to curtail human tendencies to become a " wolf against his fellow", all in the name of survival (Marias 251). Herein it is necessary to cite that the crux of the matter lies not on which political theory is more philosophically tenable than the other.

Instead, the basic question about human nature is a more important issue than the solutions proffered by the aforementioned philosophers. For behind these political theories lays a fundamental anthropological question: what makes human persons good or evil? One can approach the question by using two different philosophical paradigms: ontological and ethical viewpoints, i. e. taking human nature as such, and evaluating human moral standing by considering the actions that one chooses to take.

First, it is certainly wise to cite that there are those who think that human existence as such is already indicative of humanity's fundamental goodness or positivity, regardless of one's historical circumstances, status, or state of living. In other words, the fact that human beings exists is already a testament of the goodness that defines a person's very being. This argument is reminiscent of Aristotle's transcendental philosophy. For his part, Aristotle contends that everything that exists is true, good and beautiful; and since

human persons are no less existing entities, then they too must already possess the inherent qualities of truth, goodness and beauty (Moore & Bruder 69). If one therefore employs the ontological argument to respond to the question " what makes human persons good or evil", the answer would be plain and simple: human persons are good insofar as they exist, and they become evil insofar as their circumstances color the manner by which their intrinsic goodness is are concretely lived. Christian theology agrees with Aristotle's line of argumentation, in that many Christian thinkers believe that being created in the image and likeness of God constitutes as chief reason why human nature is good. But it further contends that a human person as such is not entirely good precisely because of his or her innate susceptibility to error, mistake or sinfulness.

Augustine runs among those most vocal about a human person's seemingly intrinsic tendency to commit sin – read: to end up becoming evil instead of being good – on account of " original sin" (Bruder & Moore 88). Thus, as far as Christian theology is concerned, what makes a person good or evil has something to do with one's being both (1) created fundamentally good and (2) capacitated to choose to deviate from such intrinsic goodness. This, in essence, is what Thomas Aquinas argues by saying, "(Man) has goodness to the degree he has being but insofar as he is deficient in goodness (for only God is complete in goodness) he is said to be evil, as a blind man has goodness insofar as he lives but it is evil that he lacks sight" (qtd. in McInerny 567). In view of the foregoing, and secondly therefore, one can evaluate the goodness or evilness of a person under the lenses of ethics, especially when the aspect of human choices comes into the fore. Ethics is

basically concerned with the discipline that " deals with good or bad" (Merriam-Webster n. p.

). According to its principles, there are human actions which may be evaluated either as good or bad, depending on whether or not some moral laws which are in effect have been violated, or the consequences of such actions proves to be beneficial or disadvantageous. If certain actions are therefore deemed to be either good or bad, then it logically follows that a person's actions determine his or her goodness or evilness.

This logic follows the age-old adage " esse sequitur agree" (literally, being follows from actions). According to this premise, a human person has the capacity to determine the quality of his life on account of the choices that he makes. If one opts to act upon something that is intrinsically evil – say, killing a person – then that person becomes entwined with the evilness that is consequential of such a horrendous act.

If one therefore asks, " what makes human persons good or evil," the answer of someone coming from an ethical point of view is plain and simple: human actions! For in the ultimate analysis, " man is what he makes himself to be"; for inasmuch as the path that one chooses to take and the activities that one chooses to engage determine the quality of one's life here on earth, then there are good reasons to suppose that human actions act as the final arbiter which determines one's goodness or evilness with both clarity and soundness. To conclude, it makes sense to therefore say that both human facticity and human actions summarily determine a person's goodness or evilness, in varied but related fashion. On the one hand, ontological

arguments seem to point to the very fact of human existence as the primordial determinant of human goodness. For by the fact that there is existence (instead of nothingness), human persons possess an inherent positivity and inclination towards goodness.

Christian theology, while acceding to the merits of such a claim, contends nevertheless that humanity's innate preponderance to error and sinfulness makes human persons not entirely good, while definitely not totally evil. On the other hand, ethical principles of right and wrong are often used as benchmarks to qualify the state of human existence, specifically when the choices that human persons make are taken into full account.