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The question is certainly not new, for we find it raised and answered by Plato and Aristotle. The dialogues offer *sophia*, wisdom, or the intuitive grasp of the Forms as the final goal of man. As the final goal, wisdom is also then the ultimate standard according to which human striving, or *Eros*, is measured. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* we read of another final goal, *eudaimonia*, according to which human excellence or *arete* is to be measured. In both cases, questions and insights concerned with morality are part of a total system. Ethical views rest on a particular metaphysical base which has been expressed in a unique conceptual framework and argued with a distinctive epistemology. While these two philosophers are different, a noticeable common element is the kind of answer each gives, or would give if we could phrase the question for them in our terms. There is one great reason for being moral: we attain our final human goal only if we are moral. Virtue benefits the possessor of virtue, and nothing more reasonable can be conceived. Morality and self-interest, each would say, coincide.

Why could this wonderfully-elegant kind of answer not abide eternally? Metaphysical theories change or even entirely disappear. Epistemological views multiply and differ from each other significantly. System-building is out of fashion, and ethical theories may now free-float. Mankind may not be sure that there is any goal to human existence. "Modern ethical theory is impoverished," according to one view. "It has either lost or rejected 'man' as a functional concept." [1] The very word 'virtue' has smaller extension than it did for the ancients. Linguistic analysis, during its fifteen minutes of fame, taught us that our questions are partly semantic muddles. They are right: the answers have changed but so too has the way in which the very question is phrased. That we can recognize the sameness of the question is as wondrous as its timelessness is. Answers then are hard to come by, for all these reasons—harder, if one tries to achieve any consensus. I do not pretend to answer the question. I hope instead to offer some bit of clarity to the state of the question. Thomas Hobbes is an important point of departure. From the influence that he exerted on later thinkers, one can understand more of the question.

How the person asking the question is asking it, how he means it, is everything. I am not asking a legal question. If I were, the answer would be easy: "Of course there are reasons," I would say. "I do not wish to be punished." Neither am I asking a religious question, for here too the answer would be easy. "Of course there are reasons," I would say. "The priest, or minister, or rabbi, or imam said that I must do thus and so, if I wish to be pleasing to God, or Jehovah, or Jahweh, or Allah." The legal and religious answers may have their own enigmas and muddles and puzzles but we are not now interested in them. If one is not scrutinizing the law of the community or if one is not a religious person, the question nevertheless remains. At the outset, we continue to hope that the question is a genuine one, or, that it will have an answer and that this answer will be meaningful.

The similarity between this ethical question and its legal and religious counterparts is instructive. In narrowing down the turf, it suggests some boundaries therein for the discussion. First of all, the ethical phrasing of the question, as with the legal and religious versions, must hold that persons are free. Enacting laws and punishing violations thereof, whether here or hereafter, makes sense only if persons are free. The principle that "ought implies can" makes sense. Freedom is then a necessary condition of ethical behavior.

Obviously, more than freedom is required for ethical behavior. It is possible for a free person to be immoral or even amoral. Choosing freely is no guarantee of choosing well, whatever 'well' and 'good' may turn out to be. The content of prescriptions freely adopted as one's own is important, as equally important as the free adopting of them. One's prescriptions or principles are not only regulative but are such that their content matters. We hope to answer our question, but, whatever the answer may turn out to be, it will be such that it is premised on human freedom and provides or encourages some means of making distinctions between choosing well (moral choices) and choosing badly (immoral choices.)

Are there reasons to be moral? One hopes so. Since the philosophical emergence of ethics in ancient Athens, this inquiry has been a commitment to the resolution of moral controversy, both personal and

collective, by means that are rational. While it may be possible to resolve controversies by methods that are non-rational or even irrational, the humanistic commitment has been to rational means. Whatever the limits and the messiness of attempting a rational resolution to moral reasoning, to moral decision-making and to moral controversy, reasons and reasoning have been essential to ethics. The question ought then to be answerable affirmatively. Since reasons are necessary to all ethical theory, should not reasons be there "in the beginning", when one is reflecting on whether or not to be moral at all? Should such reasons not be present when one is justifying being moral?

It was in 1651, with the publication of *Leviathan*, that the earlier, easy optimism, both religious and philosophical, about how to answer the question was dashed. Hobbes wrote thus:

> The right of nature...is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life, and consequently of doing anything...he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto...'Good' and 'evil' are names that signify our appetites and aversions...[2]

All persons have equal rights to all goods and all are approximately equal in their abilities to achieve what they wish. Not surprisingly then, the life of man is "war of all against all." This condition is the state of nature, a grim but hypothetical condition which is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short," and to no one's advantage. The solution is to give over the administration of certain individual rights to the State, thus bringing the political State into existence. In return for the State's protection, the individuals place themselves under the duty to obey. This duty to obey is a self-imposed means of removing the disadvantages of the pre-political condition. The State, or its sovereign, has power sufficient to see that no individual can expect to benefit except by obeying the laws of the State. The pre-political state of nature is not factual, for all human societies are political in some way. Hobbes is not explaining how the State began nor is he writing history. What, then, does his hypothesis do?

I suggest that this social contract, as elaborately drawn in *Leviathan*, makes sense as an explanation of human motivation. Political control by the State does not explain human motivation to obey, because the State is the creature of this motivation. Neither do social bonds explain motivation, since a war of all against all is purportedly natural to us. Hobbes has removed or stripped away anything that might cloud our vision of our motives. These are self-interest and/or self-preservation. Humans inexorably act for self-interested reasons.

Self-interest must be pursued, or, the pursuit of one's self-interest is unavoidable. The political control of all individuals by the State does nothing to change human self-interest but assumes that it is the case. Consequently the sovereign sees to it that the self-interest of all his subjects is re-directed. This re-direction is a shifting of context so that self-interest is rendered relatively less destructive. This tells us that self-interest is not monolithic or monochromatic but enjoys degrees of rationality. Some self-interested actions have more reasons sustaining them or perhaps better reasons than other self-interested actions have. Some self-interested actions find broader social acceptance than others do. Let us put aside the question of whether the reasonability rests on the formal value or the content value of the reasons for another time.

It would be foolhardy, then, to dichotomize morality from self-interest. All actions represent some degree or other of self-interest. Those actions to which we wish to attach the label 'moral' are in some way self-interested actions. Reasons purported to be 'moral' reasons are reasons of self-interest disguised, or, less obviously so because, perhaps, of their social acceptance. We cannot say that our actions are either self-interested or they are moral; the disjunction is not an exclusivist one. Moral actions are self-interested because they cannot be otherwise.

This is not an answer to the question so much as a shifting of the ground on which it stands. Are there any non-self-interested actions? If we draw a dichotomy between self-interested and non-self-interested actions, calling the latter 'moral', we would be left trying to explain moral reasons in terms of moral reasons. Such circularity is not helpful here. Any justification of being moral would be thereby weakened. We can allow the designation 'non-self-interested' no independent status but only a relational one. Accordingly an action may be described as non-self-interested if it is less self-interested than another with which it is being contrasted. Kurt Baier's phrasing is helpful on this point: "Our very purpose in 'playing the reasoning game' is to maximize satisfactions and minimize frustrations."[3] This is a question of

ranking or degrees, the continuum on which we locate the 'more' and the 'less'. It is a continuum of rationality, or the multiple kinds of reasons according to which we choose to prioritize our interests. Each person creates or adopts his own valuation of interests to be safeguarded or protected or achieved. Whether these interests be personal or collective, long-term or short, each person, as Hobbes expresses it, is at liberty "...to use his own power...for the preservation of his own nature...." (cited above)

The question as posed by Hobbes, then, requires that self-interest be a necessary condition of being moral.

This self-interest should not be confused with the self-interest intended by Plato and Aristotle. The important reason for distinguishing the two perspectives, besides the obvious metaphysical and contextual differences, is that Hobbesian morality is not related to the end of man but to his advantage. The term 'self-interest' does not refer to a final goal for man, for there is none. Self-interest, in this seventeenth-century English context, is prudential and political. In some places in *Leviathan*, the contribution of an action to self-interest is merely sufficient for rational action. ('Self-interested' implies 'rational'.) For instance, in a case of self-defense:

> If any man pretend somewhat to tend necessarily to his preservation, which yet he himself doth not confidently believe so, he may offend against the law of nature ...Not every Fear justifies the Action it produceth, but the fear onely (sic) of corporeal hurt, which we call *Bodily Fear*, and from which a man cannot see how to be delivered but by the action.[4]

In other texts the contribution of an action to self-interest is necessary for rational action. ('rational' implies 'self-interested') In the state of nature 'right' and 'profit' are the same. According to the laws of nature, "...a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life..."[5]One line of inquiry, post-Hobbes, has considered, explicated and supported this Hobbesian argument. The latter can be thus outlined: If an action is moral, then it is self-interested; if an action is self-interested, then it is rational; therefore if an action is moral, it is rational.

Several representative figures should be noticed as having contributed to the elaboration of Hobbes's argument. Utilitarianism is one attempt at establishing ethics on self-interested grounds. Bentham's work places pain and pleasure in the center of human motivation.

> constantly proper end of action...on the part of every individual, considered as a trustee for the community...(sc. 'is')...the greatest happiness of that same community, in so far as depends upon the interest which forms the bond of union between its members.[6]

In his major work, we read:

> With respect to goodness and badness, as it is with everything else that is not itself either pain or pleasure, so it is with motives. If they are good or bad, it is only on account of their effects: good, on account of their tendency to produce pleasure, or avert pain: bad, on account of their tendency to produce pain, or avert pleasure.[7]

It is always the individual's true interest to act in a manner which he judges conducive to the collective happiness. If an action is productive of well-being to the group of which one is a member, the well-being is enjoyed by this member too. Similarly, Mill must conclude that actions that maximize general happiness are for that reason obligatory and that actions are good only if they maximize happiness. The self-interest is indirect, according to the Utilitarians, but it is clearly the norm of rationality because persons are political.

Robert Shaver, in his 1999 history of rational egoism, highlights Hobbes and Henry Sidgwick as "the foremost champions of rational egoism." "It is," he writes

> ...hardly going too far to say that common sense assumes that 'interested' actions, tending to promote the agent's happiness, are prima facie reasonable: and that the *onus probandi* lies with those who maintain that disinterested conduct, as such, is reasonable.[8]

While Shaver's critique finds flaws in Sidgwick's reasoning, the latter's intentions place him in the Hobbes camp as an astute defender thereof.

In the twentieth century Kurt Baier picks up the same questions and similarly connects morality and self-interest. His contribution, though, rests on the insight, undeveloped in Hobbes that morality and self-interest do coincide, though not completely. While the egoist evaluates his action in terms of an aim, the moral person evaluates in terms of principles. "Morality involves doing things on principle." These ruling principles, though, cannot be idiosyncratic but should be "completely universal and open." Moral rules are meant for everybody. They "must be for the good of everyone alike."[9]

It may happen that following one's moral rules is not to one's advantage, but doing so, when others are acting similarly, will prove to be more to one's interest. The overall effect of acting according to moral principles is more advantageous to everyone than if everyone acts according to his private self-interest. The nature of moral principles is such that a private or lesser advantage is superseded by a collective or greater advantage.

Picking up on Baier's point, David Gauthier offers game theory as a model for understanding the paradox that morality, even when not coinciding completely with self-interest, nonetheless contributes to it.

> ...no man can ever gain if he is moral. Not only does he not gain by being moral if others are prudent, but he also does not gain by being moral if others are moral. For although he now receives the advantage of others' adherence to moral principles, he reaps the disadvantage of his own adherence...
>
> ...If all men are moral, all will do better than if all are prudent (sc. self-interested). But any one man will always do better if he is prudent than if he is moral.[10]

The second line of post-Hobbes inquiry has been premised on the rejection of self-interest as the basis of morality. In 1729 Francis Hutcheson based moral motivation on instincts or affections quite separate from self-interest.

> Having removed these false springs of virtuous action, let us next establish the true one, namely some determination of our nature to study the good of others, or some instinct, antecedent to all reason from interest, which influences us to the love of others.[11]

Hume, in his 1751 *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* like Hutcheson, argued that moral affections are not derived from self-interest. Nevertheless self-interest must enter in to support these primary affections. Our altruistic sentiments are effective only if they are supported by our self-interest. "...what theory of morals can ever serve any useful purpose, unless it can show, by a particular detail, that all the duties which it recommends are also the true interest of each individual?"[12]

From an intuitionist perspective, H.A. Prichard argues that duty and interest are not connected. A person has two types of desires or motives, the prudential and the moral, and there is no relation between them.

> For we really mean by our purpose in doing some action that the <u>desire</u> leads us to do the action...his desire to do what is right, if strong enough, will lead him to do the action in spite of any aversion from doing it which he may feel on account of its disadvantages.[13]

Kai Nielsen presents still another basis for morality, the will. "In considering such questions, we reach a point in reasoning at which we must simply decide what sort of person we shall strive to become."[14] One may even reject the very task of seeking a rational justification *of* ethics, assigning a place for reasoning *within* ethics instead. The justification of the whole moral enterprise may not even be a philosophical question at all.[15]

Having surveyed this long conversation and identified some of its interesting participants, what should we say about the state of the question? Briefly put: some philosophers connect reasoning directly to the moral enterprise while some do not. To the ancients, and possibly to all pre-moderns, reasons to be moral are clear, in that morality is a character-building of oneself. Man has an ultimate goal, and morality is the rational striving for this personal excellence. Such striving for one's final goal is undoubtedly reasonable. Not to strive, unreasonable. For Hobbes too there are reasons to be moral, but man has no final goal. Accordingly morality is not related to the end of man but to some lesser advantage. This change to a non-teleological context changes everything. It is to the individual's interest and thus to his advantage to

accommodate himself to social existence. Social existence is not in itself an end. Rather it is a means of maximizing the self-interest of the individual, since the only reason to modify self-interest in the short run is to maximize it in the long run. What has been affected in this modern, non-teleological context is the centrality of self-interest. Morality is a means or sufficient condition of achieving self-interest; self-interest is, then, a necessary condition of morality. What the content of this self-interest may be is not especially clear. One can only say that self-interest is the opposite of "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Presumably, this is Hobbes's peace. To ask for reasons for being moral is to ask for reasons to avoid the unpleasantness of social existence.

Latter-day versions, i.e. Utilitarianism and Rational Egoism, are less abrasive. Self-interest is served by the maximizing of happiness in one's community. (How parochial or how global the meaning of 'community' is a question for another day.) A certain amount of altruism 'pays'. With or without Bentham's hedonic calculus, the agent anticipates acquiring benefits M, N, O, and P by sacrificing benefits A, B, and C. Shaver provides a working definition of rational egoism that seeks to distinguish it from Utilitarianism, viz. "...it is necessary and sufficient, for an action to be rational, that it contribute to the well-being of the agent."[16] Thus understood rational egoism is a theory of action rather than an ethical theory. Neither contradictory of, nor identical to, Utilitarianism, it makes room for sacrifice. There is not much room, though, since it tries to understand the rationality of sacrifice and fails in the effort.

This Hobbesian tradition, identified by its definition of rationality in terms of self-interest understood non-teleologically, is opposed by others who assign a different role to rationality. Perhaps morality arises from a moral sense, moral sentiments, or moral instincts which are more basic in human beings than reason. (e.g. Hume, Hutcheson, Prichard). This seems a question for psychology, i.e. whether reason or instinct has priority. Reasoning cannot justify the moral enterprise *in toto* but serves only within ethical reasoning (e.g. Toulmin). Reasoning is deliberative and calculative, assessing appropriate means only. The justification of morality is voluntaristic, in that one *decides* to be moral (e.g. Nielsen).

How should we understand human reason? Which standards for rational justification are to be used? Do humans ever, really, sacrifice their self-interest? These now seem to be integral elements of our question.

ENDNOTES

[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue, A Study in Moral Theory.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981. P.56.

[2] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan.* Michael Oakeshott, ed. NY: Collier Books, 1962. Ch.14, p.103; Ch.15, p.123.

[3] Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, Cornell University Press, 1958.

[4] *Leviathan*, Ch.27.

[5] *Leviathan*, Ch.15.

[6] Jeremy Bentham, *Memoirs*, quoted/in Robert Shaver, *Rational Egoism, A Selective and Critical History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. P.150

[7] *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, included in *Ethics, Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers.* Eighth edition. Oliver A. Johnson, ed. NY: Harcourt-Brace, 1999.

[8] Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, quoted in Shaver, p.1

[9] Baier, pp.505-508

[10] David Gauthier, *Morality and Rational Self Interest.* Central Issues in Philosophy Series, Baruch A. Brody, Series Editor. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970. Pp.174-5.

[11] *An Enquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil,* quoted in Gauthier, p.102

[12] *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* Section IX, Part II, p.234. Found in *The Essential David Hume. Robert Paul Wolff,* editor. NY: Mentor Book, 1969.

[13] *Duty and Interest,* quoted in Gauthier, pp.128-9

[14] *Ethics Without God,* London: Pemberton Books, 1973

[15] This is a suggestion by Stephen Toulmin, for instance, in *The Place of Reason in Ethics.* (1950). Alasdair MacIntyre also, in *After Virtue, A Study in Moral Theory.* (1981)

[16] Shaver, p.2