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ITETHIC

Book: Contemporary Moral Problems

Title: Chapter 1: Ethical Theories (John Arthur: Religion, Morality and Conscience)

Internet Reference:

<http://www.amazon.com/Contemporary-Moral-Problems-James-White/dp/0534517242>

Learning Expectations:

Define Religion

Define Morality

Define Conscience

Determine the relationship between Religion, Morality and Conscience

Quote:

“Whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is more appropriate to say that such things cannot be done than that God cannot do them.”

Book Review

This reading tackles on three arguments, Religion, Morality and Conscience. John Arthur explains the dependence and independence of Religion to Morality and vice versa. He also explains the important role of Conscience in these two doctrines. He imposes the first claim on the relationship between as: “Religion is necessary to provide moral motivation”. In my opinion, this is wrong. For me, religion is something that curtails the liberty of a man to do what he wants to do, thus, may be immoral in some way. The second claim focuses on moral guidance and knowledge rather than on people’s motives. But Arthur stated that we must consult religious revelation for help. But this claim fails too, as no one can justify which of the many religions is true and supreme. The Divine Command Theory tells us that “God has the same sort of relation to moral law as the legislature has to statutes it enacts: without God’s commands there would be no moral rule; just as without a legislature there would be no statutes”. F.C. Copleston and Bertrand Russell debated on this issue, and according to Copleston, human stimuli on the moral law depend on his education and environment and that man relies to his feelings

and attitudes to determine morality. I do agree that morality is social because morality is present when we interact with anyone. And I believe that a man's conscience is what really justifies Morality, it does not necessarily require Religion per se. Conscience is a very powerful factor for me in making decisions in life.

What I have learned:

This part taught me that Conscience is what really defines Morality.

Integrity Questions:

1. Is Religion necessary for Morality?
2. Is Morality necessary for Religion?
3. What Religion is the most plausible of all?
4. Can Conscience be controlled?

Review Questions:

1. According to Arthur, how are morality and religion different?

- "The practices of morality and religion are thus importantly different. One involves our attitudes toward various forms of behavior (lying and killing, for example), typically expressed using the notions of rules, rights, and obligations. The other, religion, typically involves prayer, worship, beliefs about the supernatural, institutional forms, and authoritative texts."

2. Why isn't religion necessary for moral motivation?

- "Religious motives are far from the only ones people have. For most of us, a decision to do the right thing (if that is our decision) is made for a variety of reasons: 'What if I get caught? What if somebody sees me –what will he or she think? How will I feel afterwards? Will I regret it?' Or maybe the thought of cheating doesn't arise....To say that we need religion to act morally is mistaken; indeed. It seems to me that many of us, when it really gets down to it, don't give much of a thought to religion when making moral decisions. All those other reasons are the ones we tend to consider, or else we just don't consider cheating and stealing at all."

3. Why isn't religion necessary as a source of moral knowledge?

- "Much people may want to do the right thing, according to this view, we cannot ever know for certain what is right without the guidance of religious teaching. Human understanding is simply inadequate to this difficult and controversial task; morality involves immensely complex problems."

4. What is the divine command theory? Why does Arthur reject this theory?

- The divine command theory means that God has the same sort of relation to moral law as the legislature has to statutes it enacts: without God's commands there would be no moral rules, just as without a legislature there would be no statutes. Arthur rejects this theory because he said that: "To adopt the divine command theory therefore commits its advocate to the seemingly absurd position that even the greatest atrocities might be not only acceptable but morally required if God were to command them."

5. According to Arthur, how are morality and religion connected?

- "Even if we agree that God loves justice or kindness because of their nature, not arbitrarily, there still remains a sense in which God could change morality even having rejected the divine command theory. That's because if we assume, plausibly, I think, that morality depends in part on how we reason, what we desire and need, and the circumstances in which we find ourselves, then morality will still be under God's control since God could have constructed us or our environment very differently."

6. Dewey says that morality is social. What does this mean, according to Arthur?

- "Morality therefore is inherently social, in a variety of ways. It depends on socially learned language, is learned from interactions with others, and governs our interactions in society. But it also demands, as Dewey put it, that we know 'with' others, envisioning for ourselves what their points of view would require along with our own. Conscience demands we occupy the position of others."

Discussion Questions:

1. Has Arthur refuted the divine command theory? If not, how can it be defended?

- Yes he did.

2. If morality is social, as Dewey says, then how can we have any obligations to nonhuman animals?

- Animals are living things too. Animals have their own reason for existence and it is just right to treat them good as we treat fellow humans.

3. What does Dewey mean by moral education? Does a college ethics class count as moral education?

- Dewey is saying that moral education acts as a tool to promote and govern morality. Yes, because it will open up the minds of college students to be their own judge to morality.

