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Philosophy 228E
24 February 2017

Morality: Hobbes vs. Kant

Hobbes' first argument:

1. In the state of nature, there is no common power.
2. Where there is no common power, there is no law.
3. Where there is no law, there is no injustice.
4. Therefore, in the state of nature, there is no injustice.

Hobbes' second argument:

1. In the state of nature all humans are equal.
2. Equality means we will pursue whatever power we can.
3. If we pursue what power we can, we will pursue our own self interests.
4. Self-interest will engage competition, diffidence, and glory.
5. Competition, diffidence, and glory are causes of war.
6. The state of nature equals the state of war.

In essence, Hobbes is arguing that the state of nature is the state of war. That is, the state of nature has no central power to govern or make laws. And in this state of nature, or war, all humans have equality, and with that equality we can determine moral actions by pursuing power, which is in our own self-interest.

Kant has a different view of morality than Hobbes does and would dispute the claim that grounding morality is within our own self-interest. What Kant implies is that what is

unconditionally good is moral. Kant believes that for something to be unconditionally good, it must have no 'ends', or no use-value. Anything that achieves an end is *conditionally* good. Hobbes argument that that state of nature is the state of war means that morality is defined by people's self interest, and that everybody's ultimate self-interest will lead to competition, diffidence, and glory. Competition, diffidence, and glory are all either the ends or the means to actions. If this is the case, then these three factors are all considered to have use-value. Anything that has use-value is only conditionally good, and not unconditionally good. Competition, diffidence, and glory as self-interests are conditionally good. Kant believes morality is unconditionally good. In which case Kant would argue that anything conditionally good is not moral, and if self-interest is conditionally good, then it is impossible for morality to be decided by self-interest. Even if there were no common power, the deciding factor of morality must be its unconditional or conditional goodness. According to Hobbes, the way to decide upon morality is through self-interest, because the state of nature will always be the state of war. Kant cannot agree with this claim because any self-interest in the state of war has use-values, and therefore is only conditionally moral.

I believe that neither of these arguments are superior. Both of the arguments' flaws are based on that any real-life applications of these rules will contradict themselves. Firstly, I found like to address Hobbes' argument. If humans do pursue their own self-interest, they will inevitably step on the rights of others in order to make themselves happier or to put themselves in a better position. Second, his argument begins to contradict itself in this way: if the state of nature is the state of war, then self-interest is the way to ground morality. However, war will ultimately bring about a violent death, or else, the threat of one. If that is true, it is in humans

best interest to not engage in war. But if the state of nature is the state of war, it does not leave many possibilities. A society could adopt a sovereign power or government, which in turn would make laws to protect its citizens. By doing this, their society suddenly becomes bounded to laws, made by others, and they are no longer in a state of nature. Therefore, there is no way for self-interest to be the way to decide what is moral and what is not. Kant's argument seems to hold up better, but soon his argument will begin to contradict itself as well. If an action is unconditionally good, then it is done for its own sake or is a duty. What is a duty is something that must be done, and therefore can be expressed as a universal law. Anything that is a universal law is considered something that ought to be done or ought not to be done. Thus, everybody wills it. But what makes something good? The goodness of something is in the Categorical Imperatives, i.e. perfect and imperfect duties. However, your perfect duty becomes inconsistent with the universalized maxim, or the conditional actions. This happens because when everybody wills something, completely and universally, they all conform to the same idea or principle and ultimately, the action of conforming to this universal law begins to contradict itself, because the consequences no longer have any potential gain. Your second duty, the imperfect duty, is never treating someone as a mere means. However, situations can and will arise where your perfect and imperfect duty are contradictions of each other. Therefore, morality cannot be decided upon by the will. Each of these thinkers arguments make logical sense on the outside; regardless of whether you personally believe in these conditions of morality. But both have deep flaws of contradictions once they are applied to real-life situations.