Ethical Autobiography – Part 2

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**An Ethical Explanation**

How does one even begin to describe his own moral outlook? With some new language and studies we gain a vocabulary more suited for this task, but still it is difficult. With deep reflection and meditation we are able to see fuller the picture of our life, but still it is difficult. Why is it so difficult to describe one’s own moral outlook? I think the only answer is because it is itself never fully defined. This ethical autobiography looks closely at the governing convictions I can see working in my life today; how they formed and how they have changed. Also, this autobiography describes the ethical outlook I have today, how it changes and how it will continue to change.

**Convictions**

There are beliefs that I consider essential to how I view the world, my own convictions. But these are not easy to describe. For deeply rooted within my being is the logical argument, the need for reason to be applicable. This driving force is what keeps and changes convictions that I hold as well as making it hard to hold beliefs as strongly as convictions. In order to better describe my own convictions I have broken them down into three categories: Religious, Interpersonal, and Self.

Starting the conversation with religious convictions seems appropriate since a majority of the time convictions are in some way associated with religion or lack thereof. My own religious convictions stem from an interesting and mixed background. My mother and father were divorced when I was two years old, neither were religious in the begging and neither had a strongly religious family background. My mother has and still is undecided as to what she will believe. When asked she says she will just ask for forgiveness on the way to her grave and live her life now however she wants. My stepmother is a polar opposite. She was raised in a strongly religious Christian home and still holds onto a very strict set of Christian beliefs. My father on the other hand is somewhere in the middle, with me. He has always been very open-minded and is not comfortable with the close-mindedness of many Christians.

Now that the scene has been set I can begin describing what I believe. Growing up most of my life with my stepmothers influence Christianity and Christian beliefs are always playing a role in my thought process. The older I have gotten however the more open my mind has grown and the more I have applied reason to argue for or against something in a religious context. My views have grown to be much more universalized in a sense that I no longer know where I fit in exactly. For example, I have been debating with my father and friends the possibility for a theory such as the big bang to be true along-side creationism. For one I do not believe that creation happened in a story book fashion as is told by every major religion, Christianity included. But I do feel that that was an explanation for something that was and is far too complicated for us to understand. At the time that the Old Testament was written no one knew science as we do today. And today we will not know science as we will in the future. But we can all understand a simple story of creation happening in stages. Why does a biblically referenced day have to be 24 hours as we now define it? Could it not simply mean a stage in the entire creation process? Even biblically we can argue based on the passage regarding God and time. From 2 Peter 3:8—“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day”. It was not till recently I discovered I was not alone in holding this belief. Even the Pope stated the foolishness of literal translation in the story of creation. Argument aside, my religious convictions exist but only as to the extent as I can back them up with logic or reason. At those points I find a way to make sure that the bible is correct but just miss-understood.

Also, included in the religious convictions argument is required a talk about beliefs on current topics. Gay rights, abortion, and other such “hot” topics are almost always argued about with religious conviction. It is not my belief to argue this way. I do not agree with the gay/lesbian group in that they are living correctly but I also do not think it is my place to judge or control them or their actions, just as I would not like them trying to control mine. I have had and do have gay, lesbian friends as while my stepmother is always uncomfortable with this idea my father is my more influential person here. For example, his friend, now named Jen was originally named Jon when I first met her. Yet my dad did not judge when his coworker went through a sex change and they maintained a friendship. It was this example in my life that showed me that while I cannot believe some ones actions are correct it does not give me the right to change them and choose actions that are different for them. That is their choice.

It is my interpersonal convictions that help me decide on religious matters such as gay rights. I believe strongly that it is not my place to interfere with or judge the actions of others on these topics. I feel that everyone deserves a certain degree of respect and respect is something which I hold as a primary conviction. Growing up I was always an advocate for those who were being bullied. I always used to say that I was simply bullying the bullies as a joke but as I grew older I realized that it was not the same. I naturally grow upset when I feel someone is being disrespected and I desire to step in. But I do not do so in a way which is disrespectful beyond what is required to cool down a situation. When asked to participate in the one word project I chose my one word to be respect. There are many things about my life that I could use to explain this but in short I can say there were three things that really nailed this idea in my head: Watching my mother growing up, disrespect was common and I did not like the environment; My father always used to talk about respect and how not to disrespect people; My time in JROTC showed me from a leaders point of view how important respect really was.

I mentioned in the beginning of this section that there was a strong force keeping me from holding on to many convictions. This I call my Self Convictions. I believe in progressing myself, my knowledge and my intellect. I cannot do that if I am held down by ridiculous convictions and am unable to reason my way into a new set of beliefs. Wisdom is an important part of governing anything, myself included. I feel that in order to be wise you have to question and be willing to see another’s point of view. The easiest way I can do that is to keep logic and reason as a governing conviction which supersedes the others and keeps the control I need for my life.

**Outlook**

In regards to my convictions my moral outlook can be defined in a few ways. Kantian beliefs in ultimate right and wrong exist, but so do situationalist ideas. I weigh every situation in regards to the most logical way to proceed. But even my own logic has a Kantian twist to it. It is a hard thing to describe and is something that is ever changing. My own outlook continues to change with each new situation I encounter as my measures used to gauge the environment change.

When I started at university I was much more authoritarian than I am today. My religious convictions have gone down and been replaced by logical arguments. Often these conditions agree which is why the transition occurred. In this manner I required more than an authoritarian outlook in order to maintain the belief. Contextually I can see how I may have changed through my time here as well. When I entered university as a freshman I was more inclined to be pressured into a situation I was not comfortable with, I was more inclined to change my own opinions without adequate support. My time at university has shown me that while I believe in questioning everything I also believe that in order to change I must have a complete and valid argument to go with.

My own moral outlook is something that is hard to explain. It is a blend of all of the moral types we have learned and maybe some we have not. Authoritarian beliefs which stem from religion exist in me. Kantian beliefs in a unity between all people’s rights and wrong exist in me. Egoistic beliefs regarding interactions and self-benefiting groups exist in me. Altruistic beliefs in helping those that cannot help themselves exist in me. Consequentialist beliefs about weighing outcome of actions against the benefits of the action exist in me. Aristotelian virtue theory is definitely alive inside of me. And yet I am none of these categories as well.

In looking deeply at myself I have discovered one fact that I did not know before. I am not yet sure who I am. I am still changing and shaping my beliefs more rapidly than I first thought. At the beginning of Pacific Seminar 3 I described a somewhat Kantian somewhat egoistical me. Yet I feel now that is not enough, not nearly enough. I am a critical thinker who imbeds logic and reason into his every moral category. Logic and reason does not mean lack of religious influence and in fact in many ways require it. But what it does mean is that my every action is weighted as some point in my conscious or subconscious before it is committed. What is being weighed however are the many moral philosophies with which I try to find some cohesion and from weighing many types of outlooks pick case by case which outlook I will follow. This points me down a path where my moral outlook is changing but is still the same. My outlook is to question and to weigh arguments of all kinds; and from that make an attempt at informed decisions.