

## **Basic Frameworks of Moral Justification and Hierarchy of Human Needs**

All of the three basic frameworks of moral justification -- Lockean libertarianism, Millian utilitarianism and Kantian hypothetical contract view -- deal with the relationship between individuals and the society, more specifically, between individual rights and social welfare. Libertarianism, which focuses on individual rights, views an individual as a separate circle, with boundaries which distant it from others; the whole society is filled with these circles (Railton 1/18). Utilitarianism, which focuses on social welfare, emphasizes society as a whole, with contribution from each individual. A good analogy for this model will be the movement of water drops. When two water drops meet each other, they merge into one big drop; and as more water drops are added in, the water volume grows as a whole. As for the hypothetical contract view, the one that I think most plausible combines individual rights with social welfare together. In such a society, individual rights and social welfare are balanced based on different stages of human needs, according to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs. My entire argument will start with pointing out disadvantages of the other two frameworks based on this hierarchy and comparing them to the hypothetical contract view, that I prefer. Then, I will modify some aspects of this view followed by the greatest difficulty that I find.

First of all, I will introduce the Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which is usually depicted as a pyramid with five levels of needs. From the very lowest bottom to the top, it consisted of physiological need, the need for safety, the need for love and belongings, the need for esteem and the need for actualization. The four lower levels are usually in the group of deficiency needs, while the top level is called the growth need. Maslow

argued that the higher needs can only be met when the lower needs are mainly or completely satisfied, just as climbing the ladder (Wikipedia Encyclopedia). I will discuss utilitarianism, libertarianism and the hypothetical contract view, respectively, based on the first four levels of human needs, the deficiency needs, with the same sequence that Maslow offered.

There are two types of utilitarianism, radical egalitarian and non-egalitarian. The non-egalitarian utilitarianism will result in the abundance of social welfare and meet the most basic human need of the Maslow's hierarchy, the physiological need. This type of utilitarianism requires a certain degree of welfare redistribution in order to maximize the overall social utility, based on the diminishing marginal utility theory. In another words, the size of the social welfare pie will grow bigger through reallocating resources from the better well-off to the less well-off. However, this view does not assume each member of the society will get equal size of the social welfare pie. In fact, when this non-egalitarian utilitarianism becomes radical egalitarianism, it might remove human incentives and each individual will expect others to contribute more to the whole society. The Great Leap Forward movement, carried out by communism China about 40 years ago, is a good example of people losing working incentives, when almost everyone was assigned the same amount of salary no matter how much work they did.

After the first stage of human needs, the physiological need is met, utilitarianism cannot climb up the hierarchy to meet the second stage of human needs, the need for safety, which is a 'negative' need, just as natural rights is negative rights. In another word, it is not a need to claim anything, but instead, it is a need to create a boundary and prevent others' interference. The need for safety includes private property and personal

freedom. That is to say, the need for private property is the need to secure the safety for property and the need for personal freedom is the need to assure the non-interference in personal choices. The need for safety requires the recognition and realization of individual rights and the higher priority being given to these rights over social welfare. These are fundamental doctrines of libertarianism, which give the opposite priorities when compared to utilitarianism does.

However, just as Maslow's hierarchy shows, the need for safety can only be achieved after the physiological need is satisfied. Take freedom and personal choice, for example. People will not consider the option to go to college while they are still starving. Not to mention the private property. How can people imagine private property when they do not even have a place to live? Then why cannot libertarianism meet the physiological needs while utilitarianism can? This is mainly because libertarianism over emphasizes individual rights and under weights the inseparable relationship of individuals with the whole society. As Aristotle points out in his Politics, the ultimate happiness rests in the city, not in the household or village, the small units of the city. This is because city is the only form with self-sufficiency compared to the other two sub-units of a city (Aristotle Politics). Put his model of household and city in the modern context, the household refers to the individual while the city refers to the society. The relationship between the individual and the society is the relationship between the part and the whole which is like the arms and the body. When the body is dead, the arms can not longer function. Utilitarianism recognizes this intimate relationship between the individual and the society while libertarianism does not.

Just as utilitarianism has its limitation over the hierarchy of human needs, neither can libertarianism climb to the third stage of the hierarchy, the need for love and belongings. This is also because of the rigid boundaries that libertarianism creates between individuals which eventually lead to individualism and emotional poverty. In the social analysis, Habits of the Heart, Robert Bellah writes,

“[w]e (Americans) strongly assert the value of our self-reliance and autonomy. We deeply feel the emptiness of a life without sustaining social commitments. Yet we are hesitant to articulate our sense that we need one another as much as we need to stand alone, for fear that if we did, we would lose our independence altogether” (Bellah 151).

As he points out, individualism, caused by radical libertarianism, will ultimately lead people to emotional emptiness and loneliness, because people are afraid of losing their independence. The data from Robert Putman’s analysis, Bowling Alone, shows that the number of Americans’ civil participation, political participation and church participation all dropped dramatically from the post World War II period to the early 1990s. Bellah attributes these declines to the spread of individualism within the American society. Thus, libertarianism has already failed in the climbing process to the third level of human needs.

The first reason why I think the hypothetical contract view is most plausible is because it balances individual rights with social welfare according to different stages of human needs. The second of Rawls’s two principles of justice, which are parts of the hypothetical contract view, argue that everyone should be provided with equal opportunity to start off in the society, but without removing human incentive, since it does not assume radical equality among people just as non-egalitarian utilitarianism (Sterba 54). Through requiring a veil of ignorance depending on “general circumstances what rules we’d choose in an original position of equality” (Railton 6), the hypothetical

contract is formed according to the real social needs at that specific social circumstance. For example, in a state of lower social abundance, social welfare might have priority over individual rights(Railton 6); while in a state of social abundance, individual rights should not be sacrificed for the greater social welfare (Railton 1/25).

Moreover, the hypothetical contract view creates a harmonic and interdependent relationship between the individual and the society, which enables people to pursue the third stages of the hierarchy of needs, the need for belonging and love. This is because this view makes the individual rights and social welfare compatible with each other and permits personal boundary, but bridged with common interests and human relationship. A good analogy is the relationship between two hands. Most of the time, they have their own sphere or space by resting at the two sides of the body. However, when carrying a heavy object, two hands will hold together for greater strength. In the case of the individual and the society, everyone is the individual being with his or her own sphere, but they can also be interdependent to build a better society. During this process, they will feel belonging and love.

Next, I want to modify the scope for the veil of ignorance. Recognizing the different stages of human needs in different societies and different values towards the same level of needs, I think the veil of ignorance should be regional rather than universal. An example of different stages of human needs can be seen through Europe and some African countries. To most western Europeans, freedom might be the essential requirement of life, while to many Africans still living under the poverty line, freedom might not be as important as their daily physiological needs. Hence, under the veil of ignorance, the priority should be given to social welfare over individual freedom in those

societies. Next, I want to discuss different values towards the same level of needs from people of different cultural or religious background. Take different values towards the need for safety, for example. The majority Americans might value the freedom to live as part of the need for safety, but some extreme religious cults might value religious piousness as the need for safety. One of the extreme examples is that killing other people is regarded as immoral to many Americans. However, to some religious people, killing or conquering people who do not believe in the same religion or pagans is regarded as righteous warfare guided by God. For the case of some Muslim cults, it is called *jihad*, the sixth Pillar of Islam (Kynsh). By honoring God through warfare, they can be brought closer to God and thus, feel safety secured by God. Therefore, the original position behind the veil of ignorance should be considered by the people who are living under those specific social circumstances, including aspects of the welfare level, religious and cultural background.

The greatest difficulty I find with this the hypothetical contract view is the following: even within the same social conditions, humans might also have levels of needs. Some people might still be at the first stage of needs, physiological needs, while someone else might already have reached the fourth stage, the need for self-esteem. According to Rawl's two principles of justice, the social redistribution should provide "the highest level of equal rights, opportunity to the least well-off groups" (Course Pack 6). Then how do we assure that everyone is willing to climb up the hierarchy of needs? What if some people just want to stay at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs? For example, "the welfare queen" in the U.S. completely lives on government subsidy for their children and not values self-fulfillment, self-reliance even if they have the capability

of well-being. Some justification for these behaviors could be that being exposed to such a critical condition as struggling for survival, these people are not able to perceive other higher levels of human needs yet. In this case, how long should the whole society wait for those people to catch up? Or should the society set a deadline for them in order to push them to climb up the hierarchy ladder.

I have analyzed the advantages of the hypothetical contract view based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and have come to the conclusion that this view itself can promote people to the third level of the hierarchy for needs. This is mainly because it combines individual rights and social welfare, which are not compatible in the first two models. Nevertheless, this view cannot help people to achieve the fourth level of needs, the need for esteem, mainly because no compulsory rules in this social contract to push everyone to climb up the hierarchy ladder. Also, I have realized that the scope for the veil of ignorance should be limited, rather than universal. However, my entire argument is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which is not universally accepted. His model is mainly based on the biological needs or creature nature (common among the entire animal kingdom), rather than morality (a unique feature of human beings). Therefore, my entire argument regarding these three basic frameworks of moral justification is not based on morality, instead it based on some evolutionary history for human needs. In other words, it is biological rather than moralistic. This might not seem plausible to some people.

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