



Journal of Arts & Humanities

Volume 09, Issue 02, 2020: 127-132

Article Received: 18-01-2020

Accepted: 27-02-2020

Available Online: 04-03-2020

ISSN: 2167-9045 (Print), 2167-9053 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18533/journal.v9i2.1847>

Bad Action Being Moral Due to Necessary Evil

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ABSTRACT

In the course of the life of a human being, he or she engages in the myriad of actions. Some of which are voluntary in nature. Among them some are evaluated to be moral and the others immoral. Generally we use moral action and just action synonymously. And we also use immoral action and unjust action synonymously. Normally we connect good action with morality and bad action with immorality as if they are necessarily connected. In this paper I want to challenge the necessary connection between the good action with morality and the bad action with immorality. In order to do that I am arguing that bad actions can also be moral. And it can happen due to necessary evil.

Keywords: Action, moral, immoral, necessary evil.

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1. Introduction

In the attempt to evaluate an action, we find; good and bad actions along with moral and immoral actions. Normally, a good action is evaluated to be moral and a bad action is evaluated to be immoral. Thus we suppose that good and moral actions and bad and immoral actions are necessarily connected. But there can emerge such a difficult situation where the bad action can be considered as moral. And this may occur because of the action being necessary evil. In such a case it makes the good action immoral. And as a result, it problematizes the supposed necessary connection between the good and the moral actions, along with the bad and the immoral actions.

2. Bad action being moral due to necessary evil

Good actions can generally referred to be something that is fixed. Here Plato would say this is because “the idea of good is eternal” (Stace, 1920, p. 197) But rather concentrating on the platonic ideas, if we concentrate in the more mundane world we would still find that good actions can generally referred to be something that is fixed. This is because, normally there are some norms in our society which are considered as good. And we tend to uphold them to be unshaken. For example; firstly, telling

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the truth is good, secondly, obeying the law is good, thirdly, non-violence is good, and finally, not taking the life of another human being is good. Good actions can generally referred to be something that is fixed. So we generally refer good actions as something to be fixed.

Bad actions can generally referred to be something that is fixed as well. This is also because, normally there are some norms in our society which is considered as bad. And we think of them as unshaken as well. For example; firstly, lying is bad, secondly, breaking the law is bad, thirdly, violence is bad, and finally, killing another human being is bad. So we generally refer bad actions as something to be fixed.

Normally good action is considered as moral action. As it happens to be our tendency to relate good with moral. And that's why when we say that telling the truth is good, we also mean that it is moral. Besides this as obeying the law is good is also meant to be moral. This is because it is the "general moral requirements to support and comply with valid laws." (Simon, 2002. p.23) Furthermore, non-violence is good is also referred as moral. Similarly, not taking the life of another human being is good can be said to be moral. So normally good action is considered as moral action.

Similarly bad action is normally considered as immoral. And so lying is bad is also viewed as immoral. As we know that "Aristotle thinks lying can never be permissible." (King, 2008, p.147) Besides this as breaking the law is bad so it is also deemed to be immoral. Furthermore, violence being bad is also considered as immoral. Furthermore, killing another human being is bad so it is also held as immoral. Thus Voltaire says "it is forbidden to kill." (Voltaire, 1924, p. 127) So bad action is normally considered as immoral.

We should use moral action and just action synonymously. And the reason behind it is the interrelation between morality and justice. Because when we think that some action is moral we may also think of it to be something that follows justice. In other words the action is justified. Therefore, moral action and just action should be used synonymously.

As morality and just action can be used synonymously so normally good action is considered as moral action or just action. For example, when we say that telling the truth is good, we also mean that it is moral and it justified to tell the truth. Obeying the law is good is also meant to be moral and therefore justified. Non-violence is good is also referred to be moral, also being considered as the just thing to do. Not taking the life of another human being is good can be said to be moral and it is also a just action. So normally good action is considered as moral action or just action.

We should also use immoral action and unjust action synonymously. Here the interrelation of immorality and injustice comes into play. This is because when we think that an action is immoral we may also mean that it is unjust, thus not following justice. So the action is unjustified. Therefore, immoral action and unjust action should be used synonymously.

As immorality and unjust action can be used synonymously so normally bad action is considered as immoral action or unjust action. For example; lying is bad which is viewed as immoral is also considered as an action which is unjustified. Breaking the law is bad having deemed to be immoral is also referred as unjustified. Violence is bad that is considered as immoral is also held as unjustified. Killing another human being is bad which is held as immoral is also referred to be unjustified. So normally bad action is considered as immoral action or unjust action.

There can also be situations where doing the good action should be unjustified. For example, in a situation where telling the truth may lead to the harm of an innocent is unjustified, a situation in which obeying the law may give rise to unnecessary discrimination is unjustified, the situation where being non-violent may damage ones right is unjustified, and finally the situation in which not taking the life of a human being may destroy an innocent's life is unjustified. So there can also be situations where doing the good action should be considered as unjustified.

A good action can be immoral. This is because as injustice and immorality are synonymously used so if a good action is unjust then it must be immoral as well. As a result, at times, telling the truth, obeying the law, being non-violent, not taking a human being's life can become immoral.

Good and morality are not necessarily connected. This is because we have seen that normally what is considered as moral following from the good may become immoral. Though it can still follow the good. For example, normally telling the truth is good and evaluated as moral. But there can be

situations where though telling the truth is good but nevertheless immoral. So there is no necessary connection between good and morality.

There can also be situations where doing the bad action should be justified. For example, in the situation where lying might lead to the security of the innocent is justified. As King says one should "deceive only if you can change behavior in a way worth more than the trust you would lose." (King, 2008, p. 147) Besides this the situation in which breaking the law may prevent unnecessary discrimination is justified. As Simmons holds that "we should not presume that we have an obligation to obey the commands or laws of the state, but judge them on a case by case basis". (Simon, 2002. p.16) It can also be added that "a citizen should appeal to public reason, and not support coercive laws solely." (Simon, 2002. p.23) Furthermore, in a situation where violence may ensure the right of a person is justified. As "the members of a human society are bound together by a network of rights and duties." (O'Hear, 2006. p.63) It is "the state's role to provide a fair framework in which the fundamental rights of individuals are to be protected." (Simon, 2002. p. 14) So the state should "ensure that no one interferes with the moral rights of its citizens." (Simon, 2002. p.79) And if it fails to do that and on top of that if it becomes the one that destroys the citizen's rights. Then one has a duty to safeguard ones right along with the right of others. And if violence is inflicted by the state then Marx yields that sometimes "violence can only be defeated by organized counter-violence." (Simon, 2002. p.148) Here Dworkin would say "civil disobedience is justified." (Kress and Anderson, 1989, pp. 337–351) Finally, a situation in which taking the life of a person may provide the safety of innocents is justified. We need to understand that in this day and age "authority is not an ideal but an existing social practice, one that we confront rather directly on a daily basis." (Bird, 2006. p.166) Besides "we have to think about the actual claims made by states on their citizens and whether these claims can possibly be vindicated." (Bird, 2006. p.167) and if the best possible outcome yield the taking of life of the authority for the safety of the innocent then we should do so. So there can also be situations where doing the bad action should be justified.

A bad action can be moral. As justice is synonymously used with morality. So if at times a bad action is the just thing to do then it must be moral as well. Therefore, considering the situation, lying to someone, disobeying the law, demonstrating violence, taking the life of a human being can become the moral thing to do. So a bad action can be moral.

Bad and immorality are not necessarily connected. This is because we have seen that normally what is considered as immoral following from the bad may become moral. Though it is still following the bad. For example, normally lying is bad and evaluated as immoral. But there can be situations where though telling a lie is bad but it is still moral. So there is no necessary connection between bad and immoral.

Moral action and immoral action can be tentative depending on the situation. As we have seen the good actions that are normally considered as moral can become immoral. As the good actions which are normally considered to be moral, such as telling the truth, obeying the law, being non-violent, not taking a human being's life, can become immoral due to situation. On the other hand, the actions that are normally considered as bad and immoral, such as lying to someone, disobeying the law, demonstrating violence, taking the life of another human being can become moral depending on the situation. Therefore, moral action and immoral action can be tentative considering the situation.

Here for the importance of clarity we need to qualify the term bad. We can qualify the term bad into evil and necessary evil. Where bad actions are evil when they are unjustified. For example, in normal situation mere lying, disobeying the law, killing, violence, and so on. But there can be situations where doing the bad actions are justified. For example, lying to protect an innocent, breaking the law to mitigate unnecessary injustice, killing to save an innocent person, violence to ensure rights, and so on. And all of these are the examples of necessary evil, where performing these evil actions are necessary. Nevertheless both the evil and the necessary evil actions are bad. And this is the qualification of the term bad.

When the bad actions are mere evil action then they are unjust or say immoral. This is because we are using injustice is related to immorality. So for example, in normal situation mere lying, disobeying the law, killing, violence, and so on. So the bad actions will be immoral or unjust when they are mere evil action.

The situation where the bad action is evil, it makes its opposite the good action moral or just for the very situation. So in the case of normal situation such as mere lying, disobeying the law, killing, violence, and so on are evil. In that particular situation their opposites which are truthfulness, obedience to the law, not taking a human life, non-violence, and so on which are good action becomes moral or just. So in the situation where the bad action is evil, it makes its opposite the good action moral or just.

When the bad action is necessary evil then it is moral or just. Here we are considering morality related to justice. So for example, in the situation where one tells lie to safeguard an innocent person, disobeys the law to ensure the prevention of unnecessary discrimination, kills a human being to save an innocent person. Then these bad actions are rendered as necessary evil which are moral or just. So the bad actions can be moral or just if they are necessary evil.

In these situations the bad action which is necessary evil is making its opposite the good action immoral or unjust for the very situation. So for example, in the situation where one tells lie to safeguard an innocent person, disobeys the law to ensure the prevention of unnecessary discrimination, kills a human being to save an innocent person are necessary evil thus moral or just. So in the same situation their opposite, telling the truth, obeying the law, not taking a human life, non-violence, and so on all these good actions become immoral or unjust. So the situation where there is necessary evil, it makes its opposite, the good action immoral or unjust.

To make a bad action, necessary evil we need: appropriate situation, the understanding of the difficult situation, intension of the greater good, more probable beneficial consequence, voluntarily choosing to do what is needed, and to say all of it in only one word- worthiness. These are the elements that we need to consider a bad action as necessary evil.

At first the situation needs to be appropriate. In a normal situation the question of necessary evil will not arise. For example, in a normal situation one must not disobey the law. But in a situation where disobeying the law is appropriate may give rise to necessary evil. And here we may state the situation as a difficult one. So firstly, the situation needs to be appropriate.

Besides this, the difficult situation should be understood. And to understand the difficult situation, we need to understand the potentiality of the difficult situation. The potentiality of the difficult situation is its possibilities. It can be possible to do this or that. And for that we need to analyze the difficult situation and compare it with previous situations and difficult situations of the past and possible hypothetical situations or difficult situations that may arise in the future. Thus the difficult situation should be understood.

To have an action which is necessary evil we need to fulfill the criteria of having the intention for the greater good. This is because necessary evil though moral and just is nevertheless a bad action. And still it will be moral and just because among many things, it is intended for the greater good. So here the person "ought to do what best serves the overall interest of others." (Simon, 2002, p. 185) For example, lying, breaking the law, violence, taking life are done intending towards the greater good which is safety of a person, preventing unnecessary discrimination, safeguarding the rights, and saving an innocent person's life, respectively. Here one's intension should not be narrow minded, but for the greater good.

The consequence should be more probable to be positive or beneficial than otherwise. It is true that these types of things involve risk. And we cannot be certain of the upcoming outcome. As Heidegger would say "each action of man involves risk." (Thilly, 1934, p. 299) And it is risky as Sartre would say "by choosing for myself I am choosing for humanity." (Sartre, 2007, p. 20) But as we can have probability. So we should aim at what might be more probable to be positive or beneficial than to be negative or damaging. Because if it is more damaging than beneficial then the greater good will not be sustained. For example, if the probable outcome of the violence is more damaging, destructive, and chaotic for the country than the benefit then it is pointless to do so. But if the probable outcome is more beneficial than damaging, destructive, chaotic then it can be considered to be done. To say it in a different way, if the risk is not taken then there is a high probability that there will be more damage than benefit. For example, if the risk is not taken then there will be a massacre. So it is more prudent to take the risk. Thus it fulfills a criteria of being necessary evil.

The necessary evil action must try to voluntarily utilize the potentials of the difficult situation in order to be moral or just. This is because only voluntary action can be evaluated as moral or immoral.

And as difficult situations yields its potentiality. So the actions that are necessary evil, to be considered as moral, must be voluntary action which must try to utilize the potentials of the difficult situation. It is true that the difficult situation may not be a normal one, it can be referred as a difficult situation but nevertheless it is a difficult situation from which voluntary action can emerge. So the ones who are lying, disobeying the law, indulging in violence, and taking lives in these particular difficult situations are doing bad, thus necessary evil actions which must be voluntarily actions to be moral or just, trying to utilize the potentials of the difficult situation. So the necessary evil action must try to voluntarily utilize the potentials of the difficult situation in order to be moral or just.

The necessary evil action will be moral or just even if the actual outcome becomes negative or non-beneficial. This is because as it has been said that we should choose the necessary evil action in consideration to the more probable beneficial outcome. Because of that even if in actuality the consequence become disastrous. And so much so that it would be more negative than not doing the necessary evil in the first place. But still the necessary evil action should be held as moral. The reason being, consequence is always tentative. Thus it is not in our control. But we only have control over our action and the motive behind it. And though our motive and action is influenced by the intended positive outcome of the consequence, nevertheless our motive intention is chosen by us and by this it is in our control. So we should judge our actions by the things which is in our control. For example, even if in such difficult situations, lying to save an innocent results in the destruction of the masses, but still here the bad action is moral or just as it is necessary evil, considering the difficult situation, intending towards the more probable positive outcome, not to mention as we have chosen to do so. Therefore the necessary evil action will be moral or just even if the actual outcome becomes negative or non-beneficial.

An action can be bad but still moral or just as it is necessary evil, due to its worthiness. We can include the previously mentioned criteria such as appropriate situation and understanding of the difficult situation, intension of the greater good, more probable beneficial consequence, voluntarily choosing to do what is needed, under the term worthiness. Here one thing needs to be mentioned that though all these criteria are included within the term worthiness, but the term itself is not limited to these criteria as there can be other criteria included within the term as well. Therefore, due to worthiness, an action can be bad but still moral or just as it is necessary evil.

Considering Good-bad and moral-immoral, it is important to hold one side as fixed, and another relative. If we hold good and bad to be one side and moral and immoral to be another, then to important are as follows: if they are both fixed then the system will be too rigid. Then the good must always be necessarily moral, and the bad must always be necessarily immoral. So in every situation lying will be bad thus immoral, and telling the truth good as immoral. And then our life will be too hard to imagine. Similarly, if both the good, the bad and the moral, the immoral are relative then there will be chaos. This is because people will have no solid grounds to do anything, and so it will lead to the permission of doing anything. So in the same situation a person will hold murder as moral and another immoral. In the same situation a person will hold lying as good and another bad. So we need one side to be rigid and another side to be flexible. And by this this for balance can be ensured. So it is important to hold one side as fixed, and another relative.

The reason to hold good and bad as fixed rather than moral and immoral is mostly a practical one. Because normally when people talk they usually say that this is good and this is bad, more than saying this is moral and this is immoral. So they are normally influenced by the terms good and bad. But if moral and immoral would be rendered as fixed and good and bad as relative then there would be problem. The problem is that as people normally use good and bad terminologies so they would be more likely to do whatever they want. Because if good bad is relative so they will find more or less anything relative and frequently use the concept of necessary evil to rationalize their distorted wishes. This is also because in this case they will not pay head to moral or immoral which are fixed as they don't frequently use these terms. For example, if killing would be fixed as immoral they would do it anyway regardless of the situation, rationalizing it by the concept of necessary evil, only because the good and the bad are relative. So for the practical reason good and bad need to be fixed and the other, moral and immoral need to be relative.

There can be events by which some of the fixed good and bad can be replaced by some other good and bad. For example, if one society would hold sacrificing human to be good and not sacrificing human to be bad. This may be replaced by holding that sacrificing human is bad and not sacrificing human is good. And then this new good and bad will be held as fixed. Though this replacement of good and bad may not happen frequently, but there is definitely scope for it. Therefore, there can be events by which some of the fixed good and bad can be replaced by some other good and bad.

3. Conclusion

To sum up, some actions are considered to be good and some to be bad. Normally good actions are considered to be moral or just actions, and bad actions are considered to be immoral or unjust actions. And they are held as necessary relation. But there can emerge difficult situations where a bad action can be moral or just. This is due to bad action being necessary evil. In order to be necessary evil we need appropriate situation: the situation needs to be suitable, the understanding of the difficult situation: the person has to be in the state of mind to understand the situation, intension of the greater good: the person needs to have a greater outlook for the matter in hand, more probable beneficial consequence: the action will probably lead to additional positive outcomes, voluntarily choosing to do what is needed: the person must perform the act in a free manner, and summing it up in one word-worthiness: the action must be worthy to be performed. And so in the difficult situation bad action can be moral or just due to being necessary evil. Because of that, the supposed necessary connection between good and moral and bad and immoral actions is problematized.

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