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Anthony Kenny's Ethics from his book, What I Believe

What I Believe says

Utilitarianism, the view that what is ethical must promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number can be refuted by this fundamental objection:

Utilitarianism does not help you decide what to do because if you do something to maximise happiness other peoples choices will get in the way.

If choice is an illusion then no matter what we do it's the best for we cannot do any different PAGE 79

My Comments

Interesting. Utilitarianism is not refuted by the fact that stuff will get in the way. What you cannot control is not your problem. The argument is the chief one against Utilitarianism but it does not work.

The suggestion about choice being unreal worries that whether you kill or you help then it is for the best because it had to happen. But an apple falling on your head is not the best even though it had to happen.

What I Believe says

Kant thought that only duty should be the basis of morality because even happiness can corrupt you. You might do all you can get away with to stay happy. Good is what is good in itself alone. You must will only the good to be good. Kant said that if you like doing good and you action fits what duty requires of you, you did not do it because it was your duty and so it has no moral value nor does it deserve a reward. Doing your duty when it hurts is virtue. PAGE 82

My Comments

Jesus taught something similar when he said there should be no praise for the man who loves those who love him but there should be praise for the man who loves his enemies. So you deserve no thanks for loving your mother but you do deserve thanks for loving the paedophile next door who hates your guts. The Catholic doctrine that Jesus especially loves his mother because she is his mum so that she is now Queen of Heaven and head of the angels and saints is totally divorced from the Jesus outlook.

What I Believe says

Aristotle taught that moral actions are not just about doing right but having the right passions too. His doctrine is the doctrine of the golden mean, taking the middle way between two vices. For example, generosity becomes a vice if somebody is giving things out left right and centre without any restraint. Too little generosity is miserliness. Aristotle taught that the only actions that were always wrong were actions that no matter how little of them there were it was too much. For example adultery or murder. PAGE 86

Vegetarians go too far and so break the rule of the golden mean PAGE 88

My Comments

This is really rule morality. Somebody invents the rules and you are expected to stick to them.

If you have money that you don't need and don't use it to help others that is miserliness. If you give it all away that is over-generous and wrong. Somewhere between the two is fine. But how far between the two? What about the starving millions? Surely giving it all away for them would be good even if it did mean you would starve to death?

If it is okay to give all away and hurt yourself then why isn't it okay to hurt others a bit too?

This assertion about the vegetarians is total madness. It shows that Aristotle's philosophy is indeed about rules and control and is nonsensical. What about people who abstain from sex such as nuns? The vegetarians enjoy delicious food and the nuns are deprived of sexy fun. Yet Catholicism which is heavily influenced by Aristotle, would exult in the life of a nun and commend it.

What I Believe says

Pope Sixtus V in 1588 brought out a bull of excommunication called Effraenatam that effected a punishment of excommunication for all forms of contraception and abortion and only the Pope could release one from this penalty PAGE 92, 93

My Comments

Interesting. It proves that the absurd ban on contraception is as much Catholic doctrine as the divinity of Jesus Christ. Sixtus V also meant those who tried to use the safe time so the modern Catholic practice of Natural Family Planning is banned too.

What I Believe says

The Catholic Church in the main in the past didn't hold that personal life began at conception and indeed denied it PAGE 95

My Comments

Yes though it still irrationally disapproved of early abortion as the killing of what will become a human being.

What I Believe says

An embryo or newborn baby cannot think or reason but we still protect them so it is potentiality rather than the actuality that we go by to confer human rights on them PAGE 98

My Comments

Nonsense. The consciousness is equal to ours – it is just the abilities that are different. To argue that potentiality is what we should go by, is to degrade the child.

What I Believe says

The embryo cannot turn into twins around the 14th day after conception so at that point it becomes an individual human being or beings if it twins. At that point, it is homicide to kill the embryo(s) in abortion PAGE 99

My Comments

Interesting. At least it permits the morning-after-pill.

What I Believe says

Stem cells research is permissible before day 14 and so IVF is okay PAGE 100

My Comments

Interesting.

What I Believe says

If capital punishment is allowable it should only be allowed for murder for nothing is as important as human life and people should not be put to death for say theft.

Some say a life should be taken for a life.

Some are against this because they feel mistakes have been made and innocent people have been executed.

The compromise is to hold that the death penalty should be applied when the person is convicted for a second murder.

PAGE 101

My Comments

Good. The first point shows how evil Christianity is for holding that the Bible is the word of God despite its God's explicit advocacy for capital punishment for "crimes" such as praying to other gods and women who lie about being virgins on their wedding night.

Let us assume the gospels are true. Jesus knew his death was coming and didn't try to evade arrest. He believed he could save the world from sin by his death and it was to be welcomed. This death was a declaration that faith is a good reason to die. It violates any real code of decency.

What I Believe says

Principle of Double effect says that though it is immoral to kill deliberately it is okay to unintentionally give a person who is dying medication that will end her or his life sooner provided the medication is for the alleviation of pain. We use the principle in daily life. For example, to put a guest beside somebody she dislikes is bad and unfriendly unless it is unavoidable because of convention or another reason PAGE 102

My Comments

But if life is more important than happiness then giving the medication is wrong. Better to keep the sufferer alive as long as possible. Since alleviating the suffering is not the greatest good those who give the medication cannot say they had no choice and didn't intend to kill. If the Principle is correct, the case given in relation to medication that can kill is against it. It is not an example of it at all.

What I Believe says

Euthanasia leads to slippery slopes. It can lead doctors to kill patients who are not sick but who don't want to live any more. Or it can lead to doctors making the decision that a patient would be better dead and killing them. PAGE 103, 104

My Comments

Presumably it is people suffering from severe depression that are meant. They could want doctors to kill them. But the law could take care of that. And doctors will not have the right to decide if a patient should be killed. The whole point of euthanasia is for giving the patient the right to consent to death and be put to sleep. If a law is made that a patient can only be put to sleep if she is dying and suffering terribly and with her consent that is not a slippery slope. Is making a law that a patient can be given painkillers that will shorten her life a slippery slope? You say it isn't though nurses could do this not to stop pain but to kill. They could lie about the amount of pain a patient had. Pro-euthanasia laws do not make slippery slopes. Any law can be abused.

What I Believe says

Socrates taught that our lives belong to God and not to us so we shouldn't commit suicide. The Stoics taught that only the wise person and such was extremely rare he might have the right to commit suicide to end grave suffering or for the sake of his dear ones PAGE 104

My Comments

This assumes that though God gave us life he didn't give us our lives as our possession. Even if God gave us life, it doesn't follow that we can't do what we want with it.

Trees in the forest belong to God. Does that mean we shouldn't cut them even just for fun? Of course not!

What I Believe says

Reject the notion that sexual activity is private in the sense that there are no consequences for anybody but the parties involved. Reject the position that a persons sexual preferences matter more than the rights of spouses, children or colleagues. This is not permissiveness but is giving sex privileges nothing else would get PAGE 141, 142

My Comments

This seems to be directed at the view that having adulterous sex is nobody else's business not even the wife or husband who is being cheated on. Nobody goes that far. Indeed consensual sexual activity is nobody else's business.

What I Believe says

Chastity is not about keeping up the link between procreation and sex but about keeping up the link between sex and love. Love is the deepest and most profound of the human values and sex the most intense pleasure that the two should go together so that there isn't one without the other. Promiscuity is immoral because it divorces sex from love. It is more important that two partners even if they are the same sex love each other than that they are of the same sex PAGE 143

My Comments

Love being so good and sex being so good doesn't mean they both should go together. The love of parents for their children is better than the love between man and woman though the latter is often more enjoyable.

You love your son or daughter more than you could ever love your wife and you can abandon your wife if she does something really bad. You cannot abandon your child. Does the supreme love due to your child mean you should have sex with your child? This reasoning says yes. To avoid this reasoning it is necessary to say that sex and love can go together but not necessarily.

How does what Kenny says relate to marriage? Marriage often leads to husbands and wives not being in love anymore and yet marriage claims to give them the right to have sex. To marry sex and love you have to reach some bizarre conclusions.

What I Believe says

Homosexuality should not be encouraged and homosexual marriage forbidden – though civil partnerships are fine - for it is a disability for it stops one having a relationship with the opposite sex and enjoying that and having children. Yet homosexuality being a handicap does not entitle one to condemn homosexual activity as bad PAGE 144, 145, 146

My Comments

Not everybody enjoys a relationship with the opposite sex. Romance only works when the persons are right for each other and they have no way of making themselves want and love the right person. One as at the mercy of nature in those things. Having children is only a concern for those who want children. A heterosexual man who only fancies older women with receding hair and who are at least 15 stone and who look a certain way isn't suffering from a handicap so neither are homosexuals.

To say homosexuality is a handicap just because it prevents people having relationships with the opposite sex and children is as unfair as saying being ambitious in ones career is a handicap for it stops you settling down! It's ridiculous. It's only a handicap for the person who wants it to be. It is not a handicap for most gay people.

If homosexual activity is not to be condemned then it should be if homosexuality is a handicap. The activity doesn't have to be engaged in.

Being hard of hearing is a handicap. The activity associated with being hard of hearing would be trying to hear better not giving into the handicap. So it follows that if homosexuals are handicapped then they should be refraining from same-sex relations for that is like a person with a hearing problem trying to become deafer and welcoming the handicap. If the sexuality is a handicap so is the acting out of the sexuality.

If it is a handicap to have a compulsion to have a horn growing out of your head, how can anybody say it is not bad for you to make a horn grow?

What I Believe says

Hunger strikers and ascetics starve themselves and ruin their health but are happy PAGE 153

My Comments

Being happy would be more than just feeling happy. It would be the state of being well. These men were far from well. The doctrine of Christianity that we are not well until we are home in Heaven our true home tells us not to be happy or too happy in this world of exile.