Abstract

The morals that humans hold differ from person to person. Some follow the morals behind the Ten Commandments, which are also named the universal code, and others choose not to abide by them. This is why the issue of what is wrong comes up daily. Should everyone follow the universal code? One may turn to religion after asking this because it claims to be the truth. Examining the issues of murder, stealing, and respect in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian faiths, one realizes that all have the same morals. One might then wonder if everyone is born with the same morals that religions teach. When conducting experiments looking for the reactions of children to immoral things based on the code, it is found that they have the same ethics even at six months. The question on the reason of changed morality after birth arises. Observing the right temporo-parietal junction in the brain while seeing the effects of magnets, it is shown that chemicals affect morals. Also, looking around the world at the cultures of clans in Papa New Guinea where killing is a norm, it is apparent that culture and experiences affect ethics too. All in all, it is determined by comparing morals of young children to adults and the universal code that everyone was born with morals of the universal code and no one should allow the world’s experiences or cultures destroy the innocent beliefs once held. These results are important for how humans choose to live.

Introduction

Because of the poem “The Sick Rose” written by William Blake, there has been much controversy about the theme of the poem. This poem can show the different opinions people have. When one asks why everyone does not have the same perception of the poem, one can infer that it is because of the different experiences that people undergo. This is the same with the Ten Commandments, a close equivalent to the universal code. What is the poet trying to convey through the poem? Since Blake is deceased and cannot answer these questions for anyone, the reader will have to make educated guesses. The poem is as follows:

“O Rose, thou art sick!

The invisible worm

That flies in the night,

In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed

Of crimson joy:

And his dark secret love

Does thy life destroy.” [[1]](#endnote-1)

Some readers believe that Blake is using the rose to symbolize a person and the worm for a lover. The lover, they say, is trying to be with the other, the flower, intimately. Other readers passionately debate whether or not the poem is about evils in the world destroying a person’s innocence. Furthermore, people also that the rose symbolizes life and the worm stands for death. They readers need to realize one thing: No one will be certain of Blake’s purpose because he is dead.[[2]](#endnote-2)

This type of concept brings many to the question of understanding the universal code because people have different views on morals, just like readers have different views on the themes of writing. The universal code is the set of morals in which most people in the world follow based on empathy. If one were to do something hurtful to another, it will most likely be against the universal code. This is because if one puts themselves in another’s shoes, one would not want to be hurt. People’s morals are based on the Golden Rule. “Do to others as you would do unto yourself” is the quote which is the basis of the universal code and it helps people know what ethics they should follow.

Even with the code present in the world, there are other sets of guidelines. One of the most famous set of laws known to humanity is the Ten Commandments. The universal code is behind them. Must everyone follow the morals behind the Ten Commandments?

The answer may be that everyone must follow the universal code for the fact that the morals of innocent children are the same as the universal code. It is obvious that having innocent morals is what people should strive for because that is how they were made. With this in mind, one can see that not everyone’s morals are the same as children and wonder why. The lives in which people live with the different experiences they have contributes to the change of morals throughout people’s lives.

The Ten Commandments

According to the Bible, the first humans, Adam and Eve, committed the first sin and everyone who was born thereafter inherited original sin. After many years of seeing the destruction of His people because of this, God sincerely felt badly for the position His people were in and He wanted to do something to restore humankind. He gave Moses the covenant of the Ten Commandments and told him to share them with everyone. This is because He wanted his people to know how to live their lives and how to decipher the difference between right and wrong.

“Keeping the Ten Commandments meant more than just obeying the law. Keeping the commandments was synonymous with keeping the covenant with God. Practicing a life of obedience to the law demonstrated loyalty and dedication to God and faith in His promise to send a Savior who would redeem mankind from their sin. Thus, salvation was obtained through faith, not in the works of the law – though the works of the law are what God required as a demonstration of faith and commitment to God's covenant. Disobedience to the law symbolized a breaking of the covenant with God and brought with it severe consequences. Sin alienates mankind from God.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

These set of morals can be found in the Bible both in the book of Exodus and in the book of Deuteronomy. They are as follows:

“I. You shall have no other gods before me. II. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. III. Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. IV. Honor your father and your mother. V. You shall not kill. VI. Neither shall you commit adultery. VII. Neither shall you steal. VIII. Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor. IX. Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. X. You shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or anything that is your neighbor's.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

Practicing Jews, Christians, and Muslims carefully revere them and consider them important. Different religions and sects look at them differently, but all of those religions have the same whole purpose: to achieve salvation through the acts and the faith of the Commandments. The morals by which most people in the world are taught to follow are termed the universal code. The Ten Commandments carry the same idea of the universal code but with God incorporated in it.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Since religions usually claim to know the truth and the best way of life, the ethics taught by them are important in analyzing the research question. Three of the thousands of religions in practice today are Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. These are specifically chosen for discussion because of the fact that they claim a majority of the world’s population. Also, Christianity is indeed one of the religions that follow the Ten Commandments word for word. It is of use when considering that the connection in which these religions hold is essentially the desire to “do good”. In order to compare these religions equally, the issues of murder, theft, and respecting others are discussed of each religion. With identifying each position that the religions hold, one can then see correlations to the ethics and belief systems behind each.

Religions: Buddhism

One of the faiths that holds its’ morals dearly is Buddhism, found mostly in China. Buddhists do not believe in the Ten Commandments, for they do not believe in God. They do, though, have a set of guidelines. These are recommendations instead of commandments. In order to reach Nirvana, which is defined as escaping suffering, Buddhists follow the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Four Noble Truths are simply facts that show the believer what to expect and what to know. Thomas Knierim, a graduate of the University of Wuppertal and the Technical University in Kaiserslautem, says that they are as follows: “1. Life means suffering. 2. The origin of suffering is attachment. 3. The cessation of suffering is attainable. 4. There is a path to the cessation of suffering.” One can end his suffering by reaching enlightenment.[[6]](#endnote-6) [[7]](#endnote-7)

Siddhartha Gautama explains the path as a way to stop suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path has three main categories: Wisdom, Ethical Conduct, and Mental Development. In the Ethical Conduct category, the concept of respect is discussed. It says that no one should denote others. By refraining from disrespect, a follower is more likely to reach enlightenment. Also in this category, it states that one should not steal, nor kill others or themselves. People should not make others suffer when they are striving for peace themselves. Buddhists try and be serene.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Religions: Hinduism

Hinduism is another religion that teaches its’ followers to be tranquil. It is practiced mostly in India. It existed before recorded history and has no human founder. Their sacred texts are the four Vedas: the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. They get their beliefs from these. [[9]](#endnote-9)

Hinduism has many denominations including these main four: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. Because of the many denominations, some Hindu’s believe in one God, monotheism, and some believe in multiple gods, polytheism. Although they share in differences, they do share some similarities. They all believe in rebirth, like Buddhists. They believe that people will die and then be born again into another person or thing based on their past life. When they are a good enough being, they are done being reincarnated. [[10]](#endnote-10)

The morals that which Hindus follow are known as dharma. A major moral in the Hindu religion is that no Hindu should act violently because of the concept of karma. Karma is having dire things happen to oneself because of previous bad action. Consequently, according to this, if someone kills another, something bad will surely happen to him. The same goes with stealing. Hindus goals are to achieve peace. Swami Satchidananda has once said, "Someone who believes in violence and continues causing injury to others can never be peaceful himself." Also because of karma, they do not steal. Hindus want to be reborn into something greater.[[11]](#endnote-11) [[12]](#endnote-12) [[13]](#endnote-13)

Hindus respect every living creature, even animals, equally. This is because they believe that they all have souls. They may have even been an animal in the past through their rebirth. Because of this, Hindus try and respect everyone. If they did not, they would both be hypocritical and have karma.[[14]](#endnote-14)

Religions: Christianity

Christianity is one of the religions that literally follows the Ten Commandments. Christians believe in one God, the creator of everything. They read and study the Bible, where the Ten Commandments are found, getting their morals from it. They deem that when one lives a good life doing gracious actions and following Jesus, the savior that God sent for us, he will go to Heaven when he passes away. In Heaven there is no sin. Going to Heaven is the goal of Christians.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Christians believe that God, an all-powerful being, made all people and the world because He loves them and that no one should destroy His creations or hinder them. This is why Christians are not supposed to kill others. They should not destroy God’s children. This is backed up in the fifth Commandment. Also, according to the fourth Commandment, Christians should respect others, especially their elders, because they are all of God’s children. The seventh Commandment says that no one should steal. As stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the faith “…requires respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right to private property.” [[16]](#endnote-16)

Relations

The similarities between these religions are very clear. Each one of these major belief systems teaches that people should not to kill, steal, or disrespect people, in line with the Ten Commandments. With the knowledge of widely followed morals throughout religions, a person needs to ascertain when morality starts to bloom in a person in order to discern if he is born with the same moral conduct but is changed by worldly possessions.

Children

In addition to finding the commonalities that religious morals show, one needs to find the origin of morality to see the difference. In order to find this, he should look near the beginning of life which is a child. If the child knows morals when he or she is very young, he can make a conclusion about when morality starts becoming part of life and what makes a person’s morals.

A study of morality on adolescents was done on babies who were looking at a specific object while the experimenter was recording how long he or she was looking at it. The experimenters assumed that when a baby looks at something for longer, he or she thinks it is interesting or surprising. While watching magic tricks that seem to defy physical laws, the time was being recorded as to how long the baby looks at it. The purpose was to see if babies know basic laws of the universe. Whether someone removes the supports from beneath a block and it floats in midair, unsupported or an object disappears and then reappears in another location, it was found that babies linger longer on the scene.[[17]](#endnote-17)

If a child in preschool is told not to eat in class by his teacher, he will not eat in class because his teacher says he should not. If she changes her mind and tells the child that he can now eat in class, he will happily agree and start eating. On the other hand, if the teacher tells a preschooler to push a child out of his seat, the boy will refuse and say that the teacher should not say that. He knows it is wrong to do.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The procedure of a test on children’s ethics was done at the Infant Cognition Center at Yale University. Paul Bloom, an editor for *New York Times* newspaper, explained it in the following quotation from one of his articles: “[A] yellow square would help the circle up the hill; a red triangle would push it down. After showing the babies the scene, the experimenter placed the helper and the hinderer on a tray and brought them to the child.” After the puppet show, the experimenters gave the “good” and “bad” shapes to the babies and saw which one was picked up, the one they wanted and liked. The reaction was overwhelming. Babies as young as 6 months were repeatedly choosing the helpful shape.

In another morality experiment done by psychologists Felix Warneken and Michael Tomasello, an adult was shown struggling with something. She was either struggling to get a cabinet door open but she had her arms full, or she was trying to reach for something that she couldn’t get to. Often, the babies tried to help the adult without any motivation or award. This shows that they respond to action, probably on a gut level.[[19]](#endnote-19)

It is obvious that from a very early age, babies have a sense of morality. This shows that morality has been a part of everyone from the beginning of their lives. The morality of babies compared to the universal code is equivalent. Both call for nonviolence, respect, and not stealing. This supports the idea that all people should follow the universal code. Therefore, when one looks at children’s morals, he asks himself why some people as they grow up move away from the morals that they had when they were a child. Additionally, should everyone still have to follow the universal code even though they change as people?

Of course, not every believer of religions adhere to the guidelines of their religion fully. They either have a different view on the rules or they stumble. This is evident with sin and karma. This is also a reason that one may wonder why people do not follow the same guidelines as their religion teaches. Once one has looked at the morals of a baby, he should then look at those of adults to assess why their morals change and see if they should still follow the morals even with the change. With the many reasons why morals change throughout a life, the first place to look at is the human adult brain because it has been found that people make choices because of sections in their brains.

The Brain

The sections dealing with morals have been found by numerous experiments. With this finding, it has also been found that chemicals outside of our body affect our ethics by affecting our brain. There have been many experiments conducted to assure this to be true like the experiment with magnets done by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

A magnetic field was exposed to people and a magnet was placed above certain parts of the human brain of people. By letting the magnets disturb the part of the brain called the right temporo-parietal junction behind the right ear through transcranial magnetic stimulation, the experimenters saw very interesting effects. David Derbyshire, editor of articles for *Mail Online*, explains the test: “[A] scenario described two girls visiting a chemical plant where one girl asks her friend to put sugar in her coffee. The friend uses powder from a jar marked 'toxic' - but as the powder turns out to be sugar, the girl is unharmed.” Because of the disruption of the experimentees brains through the magnets, they tended to think nothing wrong of this scenario. They thought that there was a happy ending, so it was perfectly fine of what the friend did, knowingly. David again says: “Throughout the experiment, irresponsible or deliberate actions that might have resulted in harm were seen as morally acceptable if the story had a 'happy ending'”. The magnet experiment shows that the mind of someone can be altered based on the chemicals and objects around them. [[20]](#endnote-20)

One thing is certain: A person can be affected by the chemicals around them. This can affect a person’s morality. Throughout a person’s life, he is further exposed to chemicals, disabling his ability to see the morals that he was born with. This is a factor contributing to the change in morality that humans go through while they get older.

Connections: Papa New Guinea

Another factor that contributes to this variation in ethics are the cultures that a person is part of and experiences. Jared Diamond, an environmental researcher who visited Papa New Guinea, investigated a unique culture where killing was a norm. While he was visiting, he talked to a native of the Handa clan, Daniel, driving from one point to another and got most of his knowledge on this topic from him. Daniel set out to kill someone for revenge for murdering his uncle.

In order to see the effect of this culture on Daniel, the author analyzes the government that he lives under and the differences between the clan’s rulers and the rest of the world’s. He explained that the clans in Papa New Guinea do not have a state government. The Handa clan and the United States authorities are different in their mindsets.

The main differentiation in the mindsets is the emotions following violence. In the majority of the rest of the world, societies grow up learning to love others. However as soon as war strikes, Americans learn to hate the enemy because of the war that is against them. Since Americans grow up to love others, the soldiers generally feel badly that they kill them. It is apparent when American soldiers come back to their home from fighting and are damaged for life. Diamond explains this concept in his essay:

“Traditional New Guineans, by contrast, have from childhood onward often seen warriors going out and coming back from fighting; they have seen the bodies of relatives killed by the enemy, listened to stories of killing, heard fighting talked about as the highest ideal, and witnessed successful warriors talking proudly about their killings and being praised for them. If New Guineans end up feeling unconflicted about killing the enemy, it’s because they have had no contrary message to unlearn.”

Jared informs the reader that both the American civilization and the Handa clan are the same in that they hate, but nearly all Americans feel badly when they hate and kill because they grew up with love. Americans are just taught to hate at certain and specific times. The tribes in Papa New Guinea grow up with seeing killing all throughout their lives so they are not traumatized when they do go out and murder. When they kill the enemy, they rejoice. Diamond also states:

“Then, too, for Americans old enough to recall our hatred of Japan after Pearl Harbor, Daniel’s intense hatred of the Ombals may not seem so remote. After Pearl Harbor, hundreds of thousands of American men volunteered to kill and did kill hundreds of thousands of Japanese, often in face-to-face combat, by brutal methods that included bayonets and flamethrowers. Soldiers who killed Japanese in particularly large numbers or with notable bravery were publicly decorated with medals, and those who died in combat were posthumously remembered as heroes. Meanwhile, even among Americans who had never seen a live Japanese soldier or the dead body of an American relative killed by the Japanese, intense hatred and fear of Japanese became widespread.”

People of the world grow up unlike each other and this is why people have colliding views. American ways of life are different than the Handa clan; therefore they have different definitions and views of concepts and morals. Hate is a norm for the Handa clan in Papa New Guinea and that is what Daniel grew up with. Therefore, his morals got altered from when he was younger. Also close with culture, a person’s morals change because of the environment he lives in and are in a great portion of his life. [[21]](#endnote-21)

Connections: China

The environment of China is much different than that of the United States of America or of Somalia. Studying its atmosphere compared to ours can show the affect that environments have on morality. The populace of China makes most of Wal-Marts’ products. United States companies go to China to get the people to make goods. This is because their pay is lower than United States’ pay; therefore, the companies do not have to pay the Chinese as much as if they would have to pay the US.

The working conditions there are not too bad according to the Chinese but if it were in the United States, the conditions would be viewed as horrible. This is because Chinese people have different lifestyles than Americans and they have different perspectives. The people in China are grateful for any type of money because they are poor. They will go through unsafe working conditions in order to get the pay. In the US, citizens will not stand that. The Chinese ethics are different than the US’s, so there are different definitions because the populations are diverse people coming from different ways and walks of life. Also, China is communist so the government treats the people differently. They are controlled with their internet preferences and their television viewings. The effect of this shows that how they are taught and the authority they are brought up under influences their morals. [[22]](#endnote-22)

This connection shows that because of geographic locations having different atmosphere’s as other locations, people’s lifestyles and cultures are different. They do not view ethics, let alone working conditions, the same. Because of this, one cannot have all of the same values as someone else who lives in a country with different ways of life and the opposite government. This reason why people’s morals change throughout life is important because they cannot keep on as they were when they were a child with the universal code because of the environment they live in.

Connections: Art

With the many definitions of morals, a preference of art has a different definition than good morality. Good morality is a set of ethics that a person has but “good” based on preference can show a parallel to good morality. “Good” based on preference is the same in the way that there are many versions of it, or likings, like there are many versions of morals.

Because of the different experiences and cultures people grow up in, they form different ideas of what they believe is good. A connection with art can be used to explain the plethora of preferences in the world. With this plethora, it is shown that the various factors in fact do change a person’s morality.

How can art truly be good when everyone has different preferences and tastes? Paul Graham is and essayist and graduate of Cornell and Harvard getting an AB and a PhD from those schools, respectively. He also studied painting at RISD and the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence. This passage is a highlight of an essay that he wrote:

“If there were good art, then people who liked it would have better taste than people who didn't… you also have to discard the idea of art being good, and artists being good at making it… When you're trying to make things, taste becomes a practical matter. You have to decide what to do next. Would it make the painting better if I changed that part? … I think the key to this puzzle is to remember that art has an audience. Art has a purpose, which is to interest its audience. Good art (like good anything) is art that achieves its purpose particularly well. The meaning of "interest" can vary. Some works of art are meant to shock, and others to please; some are meant to jump out at you, and others to sit quietly in the background. But all art has to work on an audience, and—here's the critical point—members of the audience share things in common.”

The art connection shows that people have different preferences. Some people like bright colors, some like calm colors, and some people like dark colors, and so forth. This is just like people in the world and the morals that they hold. People have different points of view on them from each other. It backs up the fact that everyone has different opinions.

Art holds certain characteristics for a main reason being to please the audience. That is its purpose of being made. This is the same with humans. Humans have a purpose in life too. All humans were made with a certain set of morals that they ought to keep because of the fact that they were made with them, just as the art keeps its purpose because it was made with it.

It also shows that the definition of “good” is based on preferences and opinions because of the lives people live. In contrast, “good” to babies is based on instinct and not experiences. This illustrates that the morals that people are born with indeed are the morals that they should be following because of the plain fact that they were born with them and should not allow the things in this world to change them.[[23]](#endnote-23)

Connections: SAT/ACT Scores

This is an example of the possibility of different definitions of “good” that people have because of their lives. It uses the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT) test as representations. When a high school student takes his SAT or ACT test for college admission, a reasonable question that he wants answered is: “Is my score good?” The student wants to know if his score is worthy enough for acceptance into the college or university. The answer that most colleges give people in high school who seek the answer is that there is no “good” or “bad” SAT/ACT score. The “goodness” of the score depends on the criteria of the college to which the student is applying and what the college specializes in. Also, the answer depends on the students’ standards and abilities prior to taking the test.

If someone earned an SAT score of 1600 and the college that he desires to be accepted to only accepts students with a score of 1700 or greater, then this is a bad SAT score based on the college. Think about this scenario: A student is applying to a college with an intended major in Spanish, therefore he takes an SAT Subject Test, a test focused on only one subject, in Spanish. He receives a 310 and realizes that the lowest possible SAT Subject Test score that anyone can receive is a 200 with the highest being an 800. Would this be a bad SAT score? The answer is yes. This is because the major to which the student is applying for has a focus on Spanish and the score is low. The college will not want the student in a major of Spanish if he does not know how to speak it or understand it.[[24]](#endnote-24) [[25]](#endnote-25)

In yet another scenario, a valedictorian of his high school takes the ACT. He receives the lowest possible score of the ACT and wonders if that is a good score for him. The answer is that it is not a good score because based on his previous achievements; he has done well, attaining the highest GPA in his class. His standards are high so the ACT score therefore must be high for the score to suit him.

These scores relating to different individuals and their accomplishments can represent different people who have walked on different paths of life than one another. The outcome of the SAT scores is different for each person, because each has walked a different path either choosing to not do homework or for the valedictorian, choosing to study.

When a person ends up following a certain path in life, such as the path of a valedictorian, he chooses a certain set of actions in order to receive a suitable testing score. However, when a different person chooses a different life path, such as the path leading towards a lower testing score, another set of acts is chosen. This parallels to life.

When people have certain actions in life, it morphs their morals to be a certain kind. However when another person has entirely different actions during his life than the other person, the result will be that the morals are different. This shows that people’s morals change from when they are born because of the paths they travel on.

Conclusion

When the morality of babies is assessed after evaluating what the morals of the universal code are, one can see that they are identical. Because of this, one can infer that everyone is born with the same set of morals for a reason. Unfortunately, because of the experiences in people’s lives, their morality changes and the universal code is no longer always what they follow.

With the review of the many factors in the world that change a child’s morality, including chemicals, experiences, standards of living, culture, and environment, an observer sees that the world affects the morals of a person although it should not. People should not allow the world to change what they were born to believe. Everyone should indeed follow the morals behind the Ten Commandments, because this is what they were born to believe.

Going back to the poem “The Sick Rose,” one can see a link. Just like the poem, life can have many purposes and interpretations because a person’s background makes up who he is and with it, what his ethics and morals are. Although this is true, people should still remember the morals that they were born with and should therefore follow. Because of the plethora of styles and experiences in the world, the true morals are hidden. Even though this is true, the meaning of life matches with the morals that the innocent have: the morals that the Ten Commandments hold.

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