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### Living With Moral Schizophrenia

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Living with Moral Schizophrenia

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Michael Stocker wrote a very influential paper in ethics titled “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” in which he points out a dilemma that all modern ethical theories fall victim to. The dilemma is created by a divide between one’s justifications for action according to their chosen moral theory such as duties and obligations, and the motivations or desires behind the action. Stocker claims that in order to live a good life, one’s justifications and motives must be in harmony (Stocker, p.66). Yet all of the modern ethical theories appear to lead an agent into a life of divide or schizophrenia.

This schizophrenia is brought about mainly by the good of genuine personal relationships. All ethical theories would agree that having genuine personal relationships is a highly valued good in life that people should pursue. In order to have a genuine relationship like friendship, one would have to be motivated or have a desire to act for their friend in themselves and not for any other reason or justification. Only in this way can there be true love or care within a relationship. This ultimately creates a divide with one’s ethical theory because the theories justify doing things for friends because it is morally right or a duty to do so. However, when acting solely based on the justification, the friendship becomes compromised and is no longer genuine (Stocker, p.68-69). This creates a divide within one’s moral psychology and therefore leads to the dilemma of an agent following a modern ethical theory. Either they can live in a way that avoids moral schizophrenia but at the cost of important goods like friendship or they can have a life with goods such as friendship but at the cost of living with moral schizophrenia or a divided moral psychology.

Stocker’s argument can be better understood when using a specific ethical theory as an exemplar of the problem. I will be sporadically using consequentialism as the exemplary ethical theory in the form of utilitarianism or hedonism. The most effective way of discussing this topic

of moral schizophrenia and disharmony is through Stocker's classic hospital example: Imagine you are in the hospital recovering from a long illness and you are very restless and bored. Your friend Smith comes by to visit you. This leads you to believe that Smith is a real friend because he puts in so much time and effort to come see you in the hospital. However, as you start thanking Smith, he reveals to you that he didn't come visit because he cares about you specifically as a friend. He came to visit because he believed it was his duty to do so as a fellow Christian or Communist and there was no one easier to cheer up. Or his reason could be that this was his best available opportunity to maximize the good if he is a utilitarian (Stocker, p.74).

Overall, Smith's justification for going to the hospital is one that undermines the authenticity or genuineness of the friendship you thought you had with him. If he was a true genuine friend, he would have come to the hospital simply because he cared for you and not because it was his duty. In this case, Smith would be an example of an agent who has harmony between his justifications and motives, yet he is unable to gain the good of genuine personal relationships. In order for Smith to achieve this good, he would have to abandon the harmony and live with a divided moral psychology or schizophrenia. Stocker claims that this dilemma is truly troublesome and that living with moral schizophrenia would be highly taxing and cause one to lead a life with "malady" (Stocker, p. 66). Using Scott Woodcock's critique of Stocker's argument and Philip Pettit's views on consequentialism and moral psychology, I will argue that one can live a life with moral schizophrenia and it isn't as troublesome or as much of a malady as Stocker makes it seem.

Firstly, it is important to reiterate that the problem with Smith in the example given above was that he did not value you for your own sake. Your only value was that you could be used as an instrument to reach a further objective. In fact, this is the core of genuine personal

relationships that make them such a special good. Love, friendship, affection, etc. can only be achieved by acting for the sake of the relevant persons involved. So yes, Stocker does point out a true challenge for one who is trying to live according to an ethical theory but is still pursuing these goods because they must be achieved indirectly to the way they are normally justified (Woodstock, p.9). However, this is only a challenge and not a complete condemnation of living a life with a divided moral psychology.

Woodstock introduces an interesting alternative to the Smith example in presenting someone who supposedly suffers from moral schizophrenia. So, imagine you are still in the hospital and your other friend Smithers comes to visit. Unlike Smith, he came to visit because he genuinely cares about you for your own sake and not because his ethical theory makes it an obligation to do so. It appears that his motives are somewhat independent from his moral justifications for acting and therefore he suffers from moral schizophrenia (Woodstock, p.10). The question arises then of how much Smithers is suffering psychologically for living this way?

It is important to note that someone like Smithers would be a representative agent of any modern ethical theory as he is successfully living out what the theory considers right and good while achieving special goods such as friendship. Therefore, modern ethical theories are capable of endorsing someone who has this moral schizophrenia, but the issue is how acceptable of a life would that be? Stocker argues that any sort of split between justifications and motives leads to a dreadful life. Even if one was able to fake their way through personal relationships they would still suffer from moral schizophrenia since fundamentally their goal would ultimately be to fulfill the justification of their moral theory independently of their motives. Stocker writes that someone like Smithers would have to live a bifurcated life, one in which he has a personality, which holds his ethical theory's justifications for actions, that is hidden from his own self

(Stocker, p.70). This type of life appears to be taxing and insufferable because one's psychology would be unable to handle the two different sources of input between motives and justifications in the decision making process. This is because modern ethical theories create a hierarchy between justification for action and motives in which the agent is stuck between the theory's overriding criterion of right action and their own personal motives for good like friendship in a world with conflicting ethical values (Woodstock, p.15). Thus, once again forcing agents into a life of schizophrenia.

The only alternative to this kind of life would be to approach the world and everyday life decisions with a unified moral psychology. However, Woodstock points out that in doing so, the agent would not have clear guidance on how to act in difficult and ambiguous cases in which he has to decide between the priority of his commitments. Although this life would not be morally schizophrenic, the agent would live under the pressure of his conflicting commitments and with anxiety of making decisions that set appropriate limits on his genuine friendships. This would also take a psychological toll that appears to be no worse than what Stocker poses moral schizophrenia would (Woodstock, p.17).

It would appear therefore that if one wished to live in accordance to a modern ethical theory such as consequentialism, their best choice would have to live a life with moral schizophrenia. The only other alternative would be to have a unified moral psychology which ends up being at least just as taxing, if not more due to the fact its unnatural, in comparison to the morally schizophrenic life which actually is not that insufferable. The main challenge within living a life with moral schizophrenia is that the agent has to deal with the fact that in any ethical theory, there will at least be some cases in which the friendship has to be put second to moral obligations. The agent not only has to recognize when he ought to set aside his commitment to

his personal relationships without jeopardizing their authenticity. He also has to deal with the fact more often than not, when he has an opportunity to make such a decision, the theory will prioritize the benefit of helping others in dire need of aid rather than attending to those relationships. The agent would be constantly tempted to abandon his commitments to the relationships even though the ethical theory recognizes their necessity and good in a healthy human life. Woodstock calls this the paradox of friendship (Woodstock, p.20-21).

In order to avoid falling into always following the recommendations of the ethical theory and to be able to put some priority on friendships and other relationships to achieve the genuine good, one would have to temporarily suppress the part of their moral psychology which provides the ethical justifications of actions. This can be either consciously or subconsciously done yet it requires a delicate balance to be done correctly. One would have to be able to suppress their critical ethical thinking about the justifications of actions in order to have authentic relationships and know when and for how long to do so while still being on the path of following their chosen ethical theory. This means that an agent would have to “consult this ethical theory to determine whether he is in circumstances urgent enough to stop suppressing his moment-to-moment ability to consult his ethical theory” (Woodstock, p.24). However, if the theory is being currently suppressed, how would he be able to consult it to decide if the situation is urgent enough to stop the suppression?

Stocker, in his paper sarcastically says that agents would have to be equipped with a “mental alarm clock” to periodically wake them up from their intuitive moral thinking so that they could then reflect and evaluate their actions based on their ethical justifications. This is the life that Stocker labels as schizophrenic and unsatisfactory (Stocker, p. 70). However, this is exactly the solution that I believe solves the conflict of having differing motivational intuitions

and ethical justifications that make it difficult for an agent following an ethical theory to have genuine relationships. Philip Pettit endorses this type of solution while discussing how one is to live with their natural instincts and still follow consequentialism. He calls it virtual consequentialism or a virtual presence. The ethical theory would be virtually present when the agent is making decisions in the sense that as they live without explicit or implicit reference to their ethical theory's calculation of actions, there would be various triggers in place which when activated would cause the agent to reflect on their behavior and actions in accordance to the ethical theory (Pettit, p. 15).

In the assumption that an agent would naturally have a general sense of how their actions impact the world, as to its effect and goodness, the triggers would be associated with certain thresholds of aspiration. "The agent will continue in unreflective, spontaneous mode – punctuated, no doubt, by periods of self-examination – so long as those thresholds are being attained or surpassed. But as soon as his or her behavior fails to satisfy those constraints, the red lights will go on and the agent will reconsider performance in a more reflective", ethical theory-based manner (Pettit, p.15). This might not be as easy as it sounds but it is definitely achievable. It might require a heightened sense of practical wisdom or sensitivity to know when it is time to reflect, but like most things it comes with practice.

I believe it is important to note that realistically, it would be impossible for a person to be able to always chose the well-being of others over those who they have personal relationships with. I think it is even a bit of a stretch to think that people are truly tempted to abandon their commitment to their relationships to follow the duties of an ethical theory. A lot of this discussion appears to be with the assumption that humans would actually listen to and always correctly follow the ethical theory they have chosen. But humans are flawed, and we tend to let

our emotions take control of our thoughts and therefore our desires. In day to day life, there isn't many instances in which people sit and deliberate between the best choice before performing an action. People tend to act on intuition and instinct. We are far from being perfect moral agents who can give full authority to the ethical justifications for actions over our instinctual desires, especially when it comes to those with whom we are engaged in genuine personal relationships.

Therefore, this divide in moral psychology, this moral schizophrenia is something that actually comes rather naturally to someone who is attempting to follow an ethical theory. From a psychological standpoint, a child is unable to understand and start following ethical theories, but they are able to start forming meaningful relationships at a young age. This is due to the fact that we are quite vulnerable as children and need to rely on these meaningful genuine relationships to survive. In fact, even in a larger sense, human beings need genuine social relationships to be able to reproduce and maintain our species. In a way it is ingrained in our biology to have meaningful personal relationships and to act for the sake of those in the relationship. All of this of course is referring to humans who are mentally healthy and do not suffer from psychological distresses or other illnesses such as narcissism.

Thus, one would already have the tendency of acting for the purpose of those they have genuine relationships with like parents and childhood friends. As kids grow older and start to be able to understand ethics and morals and the weight of choosing and attempting to follow a specific theory, their natural instincts on how to act still remain. They must in fact make more of an effort to live in accordance to the ethical theory than they would to act in a way in which allows them to build genuine personal relationships. If one chooses to commit and attempt to follow an ethical theory, they would naturally fall into a divided moral psychology between their natural instinctual motivations and their chosen theory's justifications and reasoning for actions.

Since moral schizophrenia is something we are already predisposed into falling into, the challenge comes of learning how to balance the opposing sides and when to set the reflective triggers, as Pettit calls them. However, since it is a natural path, it is not so terrible or extremely tolling on our psychology that would make this kind of life insufferable.

It is something we fall into so naturally that we can see other manifestations of this sort of schizophrenia in aspects of life besides morality, politics for example. We go about our lives making small decisions here and there not really thinking if a certain conversation or action is in support of your chosen political party. You randomly check in with the party's values when it comes up in discussion or when faced with a conflicting dilemma or when reflecting back on the past. Physical health can be another example of doing check ins. Unless someone is obsessed, they live life with general natural inclinations as to what would be good for their overall well-being. We do not sit and deliberate before every meal, drink or physical activity on if it would be the best for our ideal body and health goals. In fact, most people have to make extra effort to have a balance between their natural unhealthy desires and their healthy goals. They put great effort into making these check-ins as to what would be best for their health and force their actions to fit within these healthy ideals until it becomes habit.

In the same way, we have to mold our minds into being able to set these ethical triggers which would allow us to check in with our ethical theory while still living most of our life on autopilot. At first, we would need to set manual checks maybe once a day or once a week in order to reflect on if our life is going in accordance to the ethical theory. As we start to manually adjust anything that didn't fit with the overall goals of the ethical theory we perfect more and more our auto pilot setting. Like anything else in life, we learn through experience and by looking back at the past. Think of when you first started driving. You would have to always look

at the meter to know how fast you are going or had to put effort into thinking about when to set your blinkers or to start stepping on the break. With enough experience, this becomes second nature. A driver can tell about how fast he is going by subtle cues and instinctively knows when to put on blinkers and step on the break. These actions and thought processes although once difficult become effortless habit.

As we experience more decisions throughout time we will be able to perfect our autopilot setting and will not have to manually check in with our ethical theory. We will become attuned to the triggers we learned to set throughout time and at that point will have the ability to sense when a behavior triggers the “red light” and we need to reflect and readjust. With enough life experience checking in with our ethical theory at certain triggers becomes habit. Thus, we are able to have meaningful and genuine relationships while still overall following the justifications of an ethical theory. Although living with moral schizophrenia would require practice and effort it isn't an all too terrible way to live and have the best of both worlds.

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