

Real Freedom Is Denying Myself

"Utilitarianism" or the "greatest happiness for the greatest number," is not a new theory. It has roots in Aristotle, whom Steve Wilken's, author of *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics*, states that although we want to "pursue relaxation, education, and money"--we don't just do them. We do them because we believe they will give us happiness. Even further, utilitarianism forces us to look out for the good of everyone, and not just ourselves. An example of utilitarianism at work might be observed at a school site staff meeting. When the topic comes up of whether or not the teachers should walk the kids to class after the bell rings, or just meet them at the door, (a recent one at our staff meeting) everyone's opinions must be considered and the good of the many must win. Well, it happened that our staff voted twenty to four in favor of walking the children to class for their safety, etc. I was one of the four who voted against, because I enjoyed meeting our children at the door and I also felt it took away some of their freedom and natural conversations that used to happen in the halls on the way to our little classroom! Plus, it's an extra effort for all teachers involved to walk over and parade them to the classes. Although I was upset by the above decision, our staff as a group was pleased by it. Most of the staff wanted to pick up the kids from the playground. Wilkens states that we are "obliged to consider the well being of all who are being touched by our decisions." I believe our staff definitely did that in our recent meeting. However, the one problem I have with utilitarianism, is this: "What about the person who believes in her heart that another course of direction is just as good for the group, or what about individual thought and creativity?" Wilkens again states that we need to look at the results of a plan, etc. He says we must look at results to get our answers. I agree with this to a point, but it appears to me that God gave us all the right to choose and based on my prior readings from my coursework, this sounds almost Marxist or even borderline Nihilist. I think we might be in danger when we take away someone's choice and free will in utilitarianism, and further, it fails to consider the psychological effect upon those who don't agree with the greater good. Another major consequentialist theory is called: "ethical egoism." In this theory a person looks out for himself or herself as the highest authority. Wilkins says it is the old bumper sticker slogan of: look out for number one." The biggest principle of ethical egoism is the fact that we should not "fear selfishness, but rather embrace it as the highest principle of morality." Wilkins also mentions Ayn Rand, the Russian author who left her country at age 20. Rand believed that ethical egoism or altruism helped us become more just, increased our self-esteem, and our love for other. In a sense, this reminds me of the old saying: "You can't love someone else if you don't love yourself." That statement has always concerned me a bit, but until I read Wilkins I didn't understand why. I believe the reason I've never been at home with the statement: "You can't love someone else if you don't love yourself" (a truly ethical egoist phrase-possibly) has to do with the good or evil in the foundation of the phrase. I must critique the ethical egoist thinker on the grounds of scripture. In Romans 12:2 we are encouraged that: "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." If that is true, then my concern with myself has been obliterated. Rand would probably say it is a good thing to think about your own interests all the time. Although I might agree with her to a degree, I would also disagree with her based on true Christ-like character. Paul said and I paraphrase: "be like me in word, thought, and deeds." Well, he was making a selfish statement in one sense, but because we know he loved the Lord so much, he was making that statement based on his faith and walk with God. You see, I believe all true Christians would have a bit of healthy "ethical egoism" in them, but it is not based on self, it is based on the freedom to be yourself because of the death to your old nature, and the life to your new. "Where the spirit of the Lord is-there is freedom." (Holy Bible) Also the scripture says that whom the Son sets free is free indeed. If I am already free, I do not have a huge need to seek after myself. Yet, I will be confident in myself, because Christ has done the freeing. Does that make sense?

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