

15th Degree

KNIGHT OF THE EAST, OF THE SWORD, OR THE EAGLE

3. The 15th Degree can be seen as presenting what is sometimes called “Principle Ethics,” or “Deontological Ethics.” The system is best presented in the work of philosopher Immanuel Kant, by what he termed “categorical imperatives.” A categorical imperative is that which must always be done, regardless of the circumstances. Thus, if one believes that it is wrong to lie, then it is wrong to lie under any circumstances. If it is wrong to kill, then it is wrong to kill under any circumstances, even to save your own life or the life of another. Write an essay in which you explore the concept of a categorical imperative in operation in daily life. Discuss both the positive and negative outcomes.

The exploration of categorical imperatives is perhaps one of the most difficult subjects to address because there are obvious conflicting views. During my life, I have encountered such dilemmas in which a man must make a very difficult choice. Does one adhere to steadfast hard principles or does he regard the “greater good” as the greatest of all principles? It has always been my contention that every situation in life must be considered unique and has to be evaluated on its merits. It is imperative that surrounding circumstances be heavily weighed when a given occurrence arises. To be completely dogmatic, and for that matter absolutist, can most certainly be a tremendous detriment in the character of an individual. When we confine our judgment by conforming to unreasonably strict values, our choices are very limited and room for exceptions is eliminated. The human sense of right and wrong becomes blurred since every situation is distinctly different. Human beings possess the God-given gift consisting of freedom of choice as well as free will. More harm than good can sometimes follow mindless precepts without considering meditation and good judgment. As a physician, I always recall the wisdom which involves “FIRST DO NO HARM.” Of course, this is a broad statement and must be interpreted in the right spirit in serving humanity. It is of particular interest to realize how varied human nature can be depending on culture, faith, time and place.

Moralities and virtues are concepts which are at the very heart of Freemasonry that most assuredly make a good man better under the Fatherhood of God. No one can say with certainty how they will act or decide a dilemma unless they are confronted with it face to face experiencing the spectrum of emotional and intellectual feelings that are brought about. It is always easy to conclude difficult decisions involving lofty ideals when they are hypothetical. Reality is quite a different story. The question to be asked of one's self is simply “are we selfless in our motives?” Who are we helping? Who receives the most benefit? Are we righteous? Are we just? Can a man with unwavering, uncompromising virtues and morals be

selfish and unjust in the end? Is an individual who sacrifices integrity for the good of the masses just and virtuous? These are most difficult questions for anyone to ask of themselves. No one can answer for another: the answer comes from within a person's deepest personal insight. There is no substitute for a selfless, righteous life. In the Scottish Rite Degree called "Knight Commander of the Temple," the allegory involves just such a case. The character Constans, who is seeking to become a knight, is to stand vigil at the altar until morning. If he leaves his post, he will prove himself unworthy and dishonorable and not become the Knight Commander of the Temple. During the night, he is confronted with numerous temptations, but one obligates him to abandon his post for a higher purpose. His city is under siege perpetrated by powerful enemies and his countrymen are still in great peril. Constans selflessly determines that his own goals and desires, and for that matter his honor, must be sacrificed for the greater good of saving his people from the enemy. Constans helps turn the tide of the battle, the enemy leaves, and its city, with its people, is saved. His absence from his vigil is noticed by the master declaring him devoid of the virtues a knight possesses. He is later recognized as a defender by another knight thus justifying his actions the night before. Constans defended the cause of humanity and justice unselfishly. He did receive his title for this reason. This is an obvious example of how men err for nobler and higher purposes to advance the cause of the greater good. Another important example of the greater good is a historical account of the Christ. According to Christian doctrine history, Christ was a righteous man by any definition who was completely free of sin but was crucified, died, and was entombed. In this particular case, He was persecuted because of His pure teachings that compromised the established way of life in His country. Though Christ had numerous opportunities to escape this fate, He allowed Himself to be captured and suffer the crucifixion. All those closest to Him, the apostles, allowed this to transpire as well without helping Him to escape. Though this form of extreme punishment involving crucifixion was unjust for Him to suffer, He did so all the same to wash away the great sins of the masses in accordance with Christian doctrine. Here, a sinless and blameless man suffered for the sinful masses. Again, the greater good was served by one innocent person.

The question is put to us, "If it is wrong to kill, then it is wrong to kill under any circumstances even to save your own life or a life of another." This is extremely peculiar to me since how can the human species survive without protecting itself when necessary? Whatever happened to the natural law of self preservation? Would not any of us without exception do whatever we had to do to protect an innocent loved one? Do not countries go to war to defend their people against formidable enemies? This is a subject which has intrigued humanity since its conception. Our country has endured many wars in the interest of preserving security along with safety of its citizens paying a high price for liberty. Our superior military is trained in the way of war out of need. Modern technology has produced unthinkable weapons designed to cause incredible damage as well as deterrence. All nations maintain constant surveillance of one another in an effort to be well-informed at all times. There is no order without the possibility of paying the highest price for unjustified aggression or assault. Deadly force is, from time to time, the only recourse for defense of the innocent.

The matter of not telling the truth for humans is, in my opinion, the most common transgression in daily life. It appears to be a tendency among people almost without exception. To this we could also add a form of untruth known as embellishment. Falsehood might be a characteristic common only to our species for obvious reasons. It might be a form of defense mechanism or a way to cope with difficult truths. We find it at all ages, in all cultures, in all

places, and in all times. The term “lying” is also found in all socioeconomic levels as well as in differing educational levels. Lies can be spoken, written, and implied. No mistake can be made. It is a severe character flaw in every case. Untruths are as a disease is because they reproduce exponentially on further examination of these. They are frequently regarded as a “quick fix” instead of facing a simple, compromising truth. Lies build on mud thus having no solid foundation causing long-term ill repercussions. The intensity of such a flaw in the human species can, in some, be regarded as a psychiatric condition. The damage perpetrated by such people will sometimes be irreparable. Selfishness and self-serving base motives are most frequently at play in these situations. Can a selfless lie translate itself as the “greater good?” I would say that is debatable and should be left completely up to each individual's conscience. However, this would be the very rare exception to the rule. I am more concerned with the base selfish intentions of those who lie to promote harm instead of good. This by far is the most common and the greatest problem for humanity. But people can change for the better with resolute indoctrination and knowledge through philosophy. It is much better to be truthful than to deceive in spite of personal consequences.

I do not believe in principle ethics nor categorical imperatives in their strictest sense because though they may seem philosophically pure and unblemished, they are NOT. Life is unpredictable at best to be strictly absolutist in every scenario or set of circumstances. In my personal opinion, a person ceases to be righteous and ethical when the end result of any action is profoundly harmful all due to strict adherence to misapplied virtues. Not every situation can be remedied nor judged in the same exact way since to do so would eliminate rational reasoning on behalf of the “greater good.” Let us never forget that we are humans, full of frailties that will falter inconsistently and independently away from better judgment. Forgiveness, compassion, generosity, and hope for the human condition must always be present in our daily lives. Justice is always a function of intent and the final result of any action. Categorical imperatives as a concept may seem the solution to ill-founded human behavior but it is NOT. The truth is that, in some cases, it will produce far more harm than good if applied evenly without exception. A man's intellect is the greatest asset when contemplating any philosophy.

Eduardo Caballero, M.D.
SR# 08738197

word count= 1503