



## On racism



Racism. We don't seem to get enough of this topic. Most of us have intuitive ideas of what constitutes racism, but only few of us have bravely waded through the proverbial swamp of grey areas, where questions like 'is a subject to racism conforming to racial stereotypes a form of racism?', 'are jokes based on race racist?' And 'can racism be benevolent or morally neutral?' Reside. This is exactly what I will try to do in the following words; to take the reader on a perilous journey into one of the hardest social questions and biggest social problems that are plaguing our societies at this time.

## **Racism, a definition**

The Oxford living dictionary defines race as;

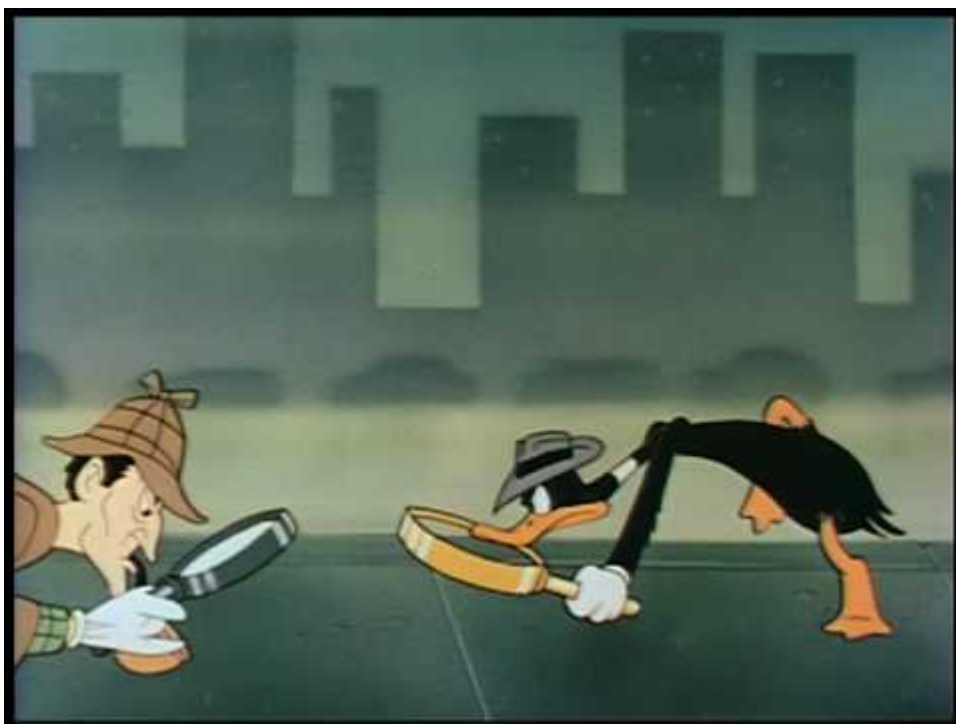
[mass noun] 1. Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism

directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior:

1.1 The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races

In this definition, at point 1, we find a working definition for the practice of racism, which seems to be what we are looking for. It tells us that prejudice, discrimination or antagonism are important factors in declaring something or someone racist, but the most important factor seems to be the basis upon which these remarks are made or these persons functionally form their assumption; they must believe their own race is superior. More importantly, the definition works only for differences in 'race', race being of course, a controversial subject.

## Investigation of the definition



At this point, we must ask ourselves the question; is this definition a practical one? I always prefer doing this

Socratically. That is, by means of investigative questions, because not only is philosophy, simply put the asking of questions about questions and answers, it also allows us the peace and respect to take our time and figure this out for ourselves. I also want my readers to disagree with me. Not because I want to write shit articles, but because it means I have stimulated thought. So, please, take your time to judge my questions on accuracy and relevance and do try to answer them yourself.

We may for instance ponder the question; *'If I do not believe my race to be superior over that of someone else, can I still be racist?'*

The definition, as given above, tells us the source of a racist remark has the basis of a belief in one race's superiority. Then again, it does not expressly limit itself to such occasions.

A point in defense of this definition, can be made in the difference between racial discrimination and racism, racial discrimination then being a more incidental type of racism, or a-structural racism. This might be a good working definition, after splitting a-structural racism from the whole. But, this would logically mean that we'll have to redefine the whole of racism to fit both definitions of structural and a-structural racism. Let's put a pin in this one, for the time being.

Another question we must ask ourselves, ought to pertain to the first part of the definition and perhaps one of the most entered grey areas of racism;

*'are jokes based on race, racist?'*

There are certainly a lot of jokes that fit the nomers of prejudice (stereotype) and antagonism. The point of a race joke is to be discriminatory, but either lightheartedly or shockingly so, as to create a comedic effect. So, we can

constitute, with relative ease, that many if not all race jokes are racist. Now, if this is the case, we have a choice to make; the answer is either yes and we continue with this definition, or we re-postulate our definition and try again.

If we continue with this definition, we will need to search for two more kinds of racism; hurtful racism and non-hurtful racism, as it is not evident that not all race jokes are hurtful.

If we postulate a new definition, we must reason from the ground up and include our findings thus far.

As our definition still has some possibility of life, and has served us well thus far, I will allow it the courtesy of seeing if it can be revived, or at least follow the trail to its death.

## **Harmful and benign racism?**



Civil rights groups have on occasion claimed that there is no benign racism, and that race jokes are harmful, because they are often sources for stereotypes, set apart people from different races and have a diminishing effect on the quality of interracial relations. This had of course been disputed by

many, mostly on the questions of whether it is really hurtful to joke about stereotypes. A lot of comedians would reply by saying that stereotypes help us take each other and ourselves less seriously, though we can all ascribe to the fact that there is a difference between the racism in jokes by Chris Rock and the approach to hecklers taken by former Seinfeld-actor Michael Richards.

To answer this question, we must first define for ourselves *harmful racism*.

Let us start with; 'a racist statement or action that serves to harm (members of) a different race.'

This seems like a fair start, as we are speaking of the practice of racism, it seems like 'statement or action' bears the load sufficiently. To stay true to our previous definition, harmful racism also refers to race. Seeing as we are speaking explicitly about *harmful racism*, I refer to the harm we expect it to cause; namely either (groups of) individuals of another race or another race in its entirety. Notice, too that this definition holds the word 'racist' in it, to refer to our earlier definition.

Now, we can proceed to once again, to ask ourselves if this definition works. We can ask ourselves, firstly, if our definition carries its load, by asking:

*'Do we need to clarify this definition?'*

Well, we have yet to define what racist harm is, which we need to do in order to get our definition to work. An obvious start would be the deprivation of rights and/or privileges of (members of) a different race. This is, historically the biggest problem of racism, after all. But is there perhaps more to it? Does harm exhibit itself in other ways? If we believe those who say they are subject to racism, they say they experience a general mistrust as a result of racism.

Remember here, that we are not discussing whether or not this is the case. We are rather discussing if this *can be* a result of racism. The answer here is plainly yes; through dehumanizing rhetoric and the association of people from different races as in any sense less trustworthy, we might imagine a general mistrust toward people of certain races.

Thusly, we can define racist harm as;

*'That which serves to deprive people of certain or different races of rights or privileges or to establish mistrust among people of certain races'*

This seems a bit long and hard to understand. Considering this is only a supportive definition, we might consider shrinking it to a more portable size. We can do this by finding a common denominator in 'deprivation of rights and privileges'. These pertain to equality. We can also see that mistrust is negative trust. Thusly, we may postulate our definition of racist harm as such;

*'That which serves to reduce equality and/or trust among (people of) different races'*

We ought to again check ourselves before we wrickety-wrickety-wreck ourselves, by asking;

*'Are we missing another form of racist harm?'*

At this time, there doesn't seem to be, but we will revisit the topic, should the need arise.

To recap; we have thus far decided that we must define for ourselves, irrespective of whether or not its counterpart exists, harmful racism. We did this initially by defining it as 'a statement or action that serves to harm (people of) a different race'. We then clarified that, by harm in this sense, we mean 'that which reduces the equality or trust between (people of) different races'. This means or definition

of **harmful racism** is *'a statement or action that serves to reduce equality or trust between (people of) different races'*.

Let's take this definition back to our question about the comedians, if you'll remember, our question was; 'are all racist jokes harmful?', or 'do all racist jokes cause racist harm?' Considering the civil rights groups at the beginning of this article, who claimed jokes based on race set apart different races, we must ask ourselves if being 'set apart' necessarily contributes to reducing equality or trust between different races.

We can assert that, at least in terms of attention, being set apart means equality is reduced; those who are set apart are more closely observed. However, aside from the obvious downsides of this, such as less anonymity and privacy, this also entails more influence in the way people act around you, depending on the situation and the reason for being set apart. This essentially, is a function of the crudeness of the joke and the sensitivity of the person or persons being discriminated against as a punchline, as is the influence of a joke on general trust among races.

This means, that we can only really define benign racism as a negative to harmful racism: **Harmless racism** is then *'a racist statement or action that does not serve to reduce equality or trust between races'*.

Again, remember that this does not necessarily mean harmless racism exist, but that it could exist, if an action or statement is conducive to the conditions mentioned in the definition.

## **What is 'race'?**



A looming question that we have yet to answer, but is at the center of all of this, is the following;

*'What is a race exactly?'*

The Oxford living dictionary defines race as follows:

1. Each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics

1.1 [mass noun] The fact or condition of belonging to a racial division or group; the qualities or characteristics associated with this.

1.2 A group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc.; an ethnic group

1.3 A group or set of people or things with a common feature or features:



1.4[Biology] A population within a species that is distinct in some way, especially a subspecies

We can see, then that we are offered a plethora of choices, allowing for racism to be attributed something as randomly as one would desire. One could, for instance, state that Europeans are a race, but that Italians and Greeks have a significantly different history and culture than other Europeans and be right, only to go on and be equally right when you say all Europeans are the same race. So, we must see if we can in a way refine this.

A combination of 1 and 1.2 seems to suffice, at first glance. These together would form:

*'a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language and major division of humankind'*

Testing out new definition, we may ask ourselves: *'does this definition include or exclude groups that our attention?'*

One possible objection to this definition of race, is that it doesn't mention religion. This objection stems from the fairly recent international debate that sparked on 'Real time with Bill Maher' in a discussion with Ben Affleck;

*'Are muslims their own race?'*

According to our definition, they are not, because cultures within the 'Dar-al Islam' are very diverse, they only share a part of their history as muslims, languages differ per country of origin and they are born on all continents.

Honestly, the only reason to make an extra exception for religion, is that muslims or people who look like them are often subject to systematic discrimination and are looked down upon as inferior by other people. And though I do not want to give off the impression that I find this a lesser problem, because it is a big problem, we can't in good conscience make

this exception, as it would be a special pleading fallacy.

## Conclusion

With our questions answered to satisfaction, and a working concept of 'race' established as; *'a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language and major division of humankind'*, we can now aptly and I believe accurately describe **racism** as;

*'A statement or action based on the shared culture, history, language and major division of humankind of a certain individual or group of individuals'.*

In which we can discern between **harmful racism**: *'A racist (see; racism) statement or action that serves to reduce the equality and mutual trust between (people of) certain races'.*

And **benign racism**: *'A racist statement or action that does not serve to reduce equality and mutual trust between (people of) different races.*

And motivational influences, using the terms **structural/intentional racism**: *'A racist statement or action that is brought about by a belief that ones own race is superior'*

And **a-structural/incidental racism**: *'A racist statement or action that is not motivated by a belief of racial superiority'.*

These definitions show us that the issue of racism is a hard one to ponder and harder yet to solve. Because that is what the goal ought to be; for each and every one of us; black, white, green and purple, to recognize our racism, whether it be harmful or benign, structural or incidental and make sure we can all exist equally and together in an open, trusting society.

I hope that, even though I am a privileged, white cisgender European male, I have been able to take you through the swamp of grey and applied some contrast, or at least to have given you some tools with which to traverse this hard-to-tread intellectual terrain with.

Humbly yours,

Mvdgoes

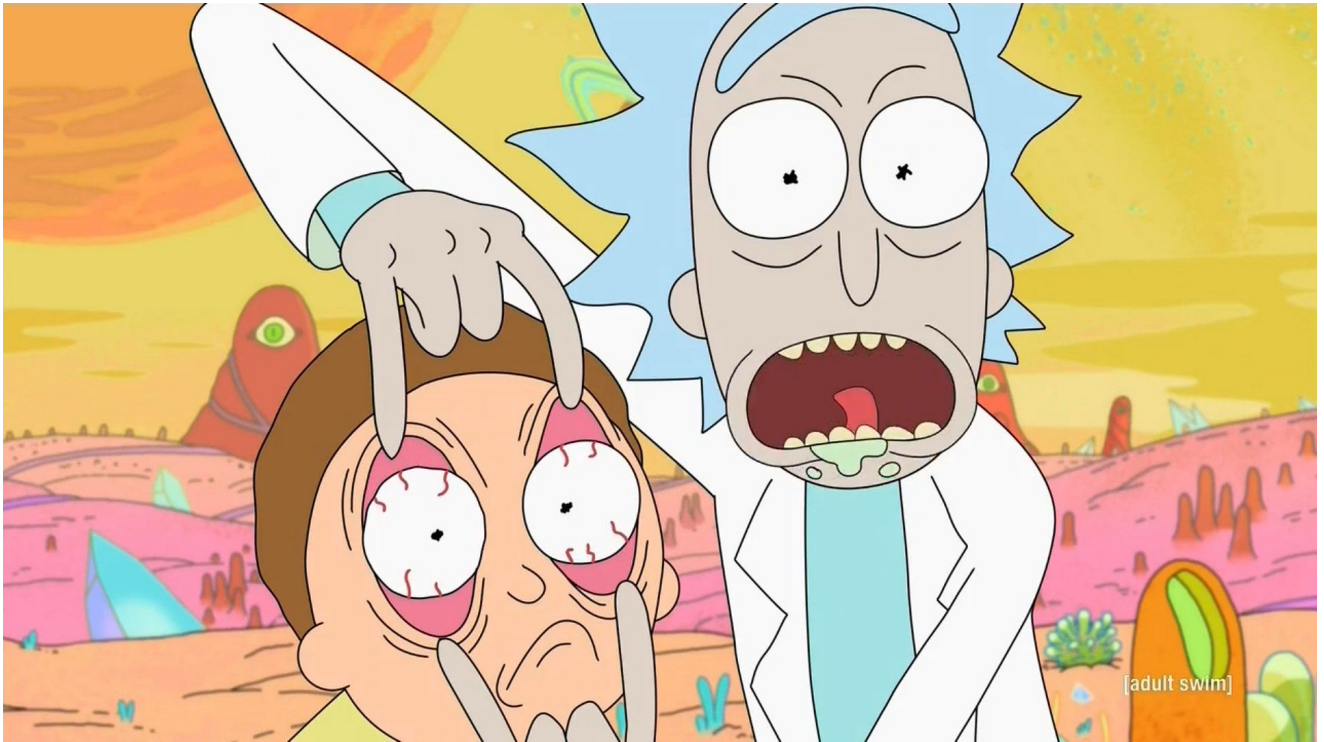


# The right of rights – Freedom of speech

## Freedom of Speech

✘ Freedom of speech. An essential and beautiful right, that we all use to near exhaustion. We all have our ideas, our opinions and things we think “must be said”, and we have the freedom to say them; to communicate our ideas, present our opinions and to say what “must be said” according to us. We are happy to do so, whenever, wherever and however we see fit. Though, we might be remembered sometimes of the episode “auto erotic assimilation” of the great cartoon series Rick and Morty, in which Morty’s sister says: “I didn’t know freedom meant people doing things that suck!”

Summer is actually getting at a very essential problem regarding any right here, the fact that rights may be, in our eyes, misused. The right to freedom of speech is no exception. This is exactly the reason for this article; to clear up some common misconceptions around the right to freedom of speech by explaining it in the detail that is allowed to us, considering the fact that it varies from country to country. I will do this by first globally outlining what the right to freedom of speech is meant to do, after which I will explain some of the nuances that are in effect in most countries. I will conclude with some of the common misconceptions we experience in our day to day lives.



# The reason for the right to freedom of speech

## Political right

The right to freedom of speech, must firstly be understood in the right context. It is, first and foremost a political right. That is to say, not that it only applies to politicians, but that it is aimed at furthering the realm of politics. The right to freedom of speech is a right we will only encounter in societies that are more or less democratically organized. The reason for this is quite simple, but nonetheless elegant. It aims to increase the number of opinions and ideas that are present in the public debate, to further the democratic decisionmaking.

This right is rooted firmly in both the classical (Athenian and some era's of Roman rule) and the enlightenment principles that every idea might have value and that every idea must be based on rationality. The ultimate test of this value and rationality was, of course, the rational/philosophic discourse

as we experience in debates and discussions everywhere to this very day. In this way, we can see that the aim of the right to freedom of speech is not just to give people who are politically relevant a voice, but to give them the right to be a dissenting voice; the right to disagree. This, then, shows us again that it is a democratic right. Dictators have no need for, in fact they mostly despise, dissenting voices.

## **Civil right**

However, since the Romans and Athenians, somethings have changed. Where they used to have a system of direct democracy, in which all free males of a certain age and later as noblemen of a certain age, were allowed to vote on important matters in gatherings, and were thus politically relevant, we now have systems of representative democracy. We now vote for representatives who are expected to vote on that which is in the best interest of their voters. Not only that, but with the abolishment of slavery in most democratic societies, and the inclusion of women in the voting process, we find that the general population is now both more and less politically relevant. We are more politically relevant because more of us are eligible to partake in the democratic process. Less politically relevant, because once we have voted, our governance(save referrendi) is pretty much out of our control. This has however lead to more flexibility within our democratic systems. Where in the days of Athens one could with a fair amount of certainty predict which member of the gathering would vote which way, we now have the ability to change the makeup of our respective parliaments with a single vote, leading to different outcomes every time. To accommodate this new swing, and to give every relevant person or party a fair shot, the right to freedom of speech was to be expanded in such a way that even those who are no longer politically relevant (the people, after voting), would be more politically relevant by being able to exercise influence on both their representatives and the rest of the people. As such, the right

to freedom of speech was now a civil right as well.



## **Significance**

This process had, in most countries, gone a lot more organic than the above text would make you believe. But the significance here is this: the idea behind the right to freedom of speech was not so much to “free the people”, as it was to further political discourse. It was to give those who would vote on what action the government would take the ability to review and debate as much possibilities as they could, in order to find the best course of action. It was only later that the noble idea of “freeing the people” was attached to this right.

But free the people it did. You see, by legalising everyone’s ideas and opinions, a sort of equality was created. Every living human being has ideas and opinions, after all, and none are now inherently more valuable than others.

## **Taking away hindrances**

Another important context in which we must think about the right to freedom of speech, is that it aims (with some

exceptions to which I will return later) mostly to remove any hindrances one might experience in voicing their ideas or opinions beforehand. Most notably, it removes the ability to be prosecuted for the voiced ideas or opinions in a legal sense. The right to freedom of speech goes no further than to allow, without fear of prosecution, a person or group of persons to say what they want to say on public property.

## **Limits and nuances to freedom of speech**

This all sounds fairly uplifting. We have the right to say what we want to say, when or where we want to say it. Or do we?

### **Freedom of speech VS Ownership rights**

As we look at the last sentence of the previous paragraph, we can already conclude that there is one important limit to the exercise of free speech: private property. While everyone is free to speak their mind at all times, they may not be at every given place. A good example for this is for instance a newspaper. A newspaper, aside from presenting its readers with the latest news and celebrity gossip, usually provides these services within some sort of political framework. They have a message they want to spread, about how they think the problems of the world are best approached. Because the newspaper itself is private property, the owners and shareholders are free to decide what is and what isn't printed on their pages. They may even decide, without any penalty, to censor an interview as long as it doesn't amount to libel. This may seem like a violation of the free speech rights of the person being interviewed. And it jolly well is, to be honest. But the nuance here is property rights vs. civil rights. As the person interviewed has the choice to present the exact same case to a different, more accommodating medium, and is free of libel, the choice to allow this breach of freedom of speech in favor



of ownership rights is an understandable one, if not an acceptable one.

## **Libel and slander**

We have touched on another limit in applying freedom of speech here, 'libel' and 'slander'. These are actually both the same thing, but one is in writing (libel) and the other is in word of mouth (slander). They both amount to the intentional and malicious misrepresentation of another person's possessions, character or history. For instance, during the 2016 Presidential campaign, someone somewhere started the rumor that Hillary Clinton was running a child prostitution ring from a pizza place somewhere in New York. This, as many already thought was nonsense. This is a case of libel. The character of Mrs. Clinton was misrepresented, because it wasn't true. This was done in a malicious way, because the intent was to make voters second guess their voting for the democratic candidate. It was intentional, because there was no evidence that she indeed had run a child prostitution ring.

## **Hate speech**

Yet another limit in applying freedom of speech is 'hate speech'. This is a tricky one, because every country defines it in its own way, whereas the previous two limits are very similar globally. Generally though, the term hate speech amounts to the calling for violence against a person or a group of persons, based on ethnicity, country of origin, religious or political affiliation, sexual preference, gender or (dis)ability. This seems to speak for itself, but there is a nuance here, that is noteworthy enough to merit some attention. Generally speaking, it is allowed under the banner of free speech to say: "I want muslims to be deported.", which some would categorize under the nomenclature of calling for violence. On the other hand, it is often not allowed to, under that same banner, say: "Let's get rid of all the muslims!". The difference here, is that -depending on the context, of course-

the latter may imply a more physically violent event than mass deportation, which might lead to physical violence being committed on the group in question. However, I can not stress enough the differences that different countries maintain in their outlooks on hate speech.



## **Common misconceptions:**

**Saying: ‘Well, that’s my opinion, so I don’t have to defend it.’ Is a correct use of the right to freedom of speech.**

As we have concluded in the section “Reason for freedom of speech” above, the intention of the right to freedom of speech is to find out what ideas are rationally supported or can be rationally supported. Failing or refusing to rationally support your ideas, is thusly not a correct use of the right

to freedom of speech. Rather, the person who is doing this, is impeding the discussion that the right to freedom of speech is supposed to support. they are doing so by introducing needless and unfounded chatter into the conversation, which can only distract from the issue at hand.

### **Social media companies deleting comments are violating my right to free speech.**

As we have concluded above, in the section "limits and nuances to free speech", that which is privately owned is not obligated to provide every statement with a platform for being voiced. Rather, they have the right to censor or delete entirely any comment that does not support their mission statement. the free speech of the commenter may be hindered by this, but the diversity of media and often pages within that media (such as on Facebook) will allow for sufficient opportunity to voice the opinion or idea. Considering this, the ownership rights the befall Facebook and respective page holders is more important.

### **The threat of being physically abused because I've said something is a violation of my freedom of speech.**

First of all, I understand how it feels that way and I never condone any disproportional verbal violence, let alone physical violence, save self defense. However, being hit by anyone other than a government agent because of what has been said, is not a violation of freedom of speech. The freedom to say these things has not declined. It is the result that has gotten more expensive. Rather, it is your right to not be threatened and eventually your right to bodily integrity that is being violated.

### **I don't want those who disagree with me to have**

## freedom of speech.

We all disagree with one another from time to time. We can do so passionately. But if a person, for any other reason than are mentioned above, disagrees that their opponent is using their right to freedom of speech, I would say they do not believe in the freedom of speech. As we have concluded in the section “the reason for the right to freedom of speech” above, the whole point of free speech is the right to disagree.

## Final thoughts

The right to freedom of speech truly is one of, if not *the* most important right that we have in democratic societies. Nonetheless, some limits ought to be imposed on it, to keep our societies from crumbling under its massive weight and possible implications. However, we should be duly vigilant when it comes to these limits, in order to safeguard this great piece of cultural heritage.

We must remember that, though it is a political right by origin, it is now one of our most vital civil rights as well. It frees us all to say what we want and when we want within or upon public property and gives us a great amount of equality as well as the right to disagree with others and the status quo. It is now our own prerogative to determine what to say, when and with who we say it, and if we are ready to pay the eventual price for it. We are also, in our use of and by our debt to the right to freedom of speech obligated to do the best we can in defending our ideas and opinions against the inevitable attack from others. And whilst some regulations can, in my opinion, be a bit too strict, we must recognize that they are in place for legitimate reasons and vary from country to country.

I hope this article has clarified the misconceptions I spoke of earlier. And I await your commentary and will defend it as best I can. And remember Voltaire, when he said: “I disapprove

of what you write(say), but will defend to the death your right to keep writing(say it).”

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## Cognicism; a secular moral system

# Cognicism; a secular moral system

✘ As an atheist, we are often asked, “how can you be good without god?”. I have tried to explain this time and time again, each time resulting in a slightly different description. I understand the wish for people who might not be familiar with secular moral systems, to take look inside the moral reasoning of an atheist. Hence, I am writing this piece as much for myself as for those who inquire about secular morality to offer a consistent grounds upon which I –and if I am lucky, some others with me- may be criticized or in other ways confronted in moral discussion. So without further ado, I present to you; Cognicism, A secular moral system.

# Application

To properly set up and utilize a moral system, we must first determine upon whom we want it to apply. While most moral systems and reasoning tend to only apply to human beings, I choose to differ here. I differ in the sense that I think more than just human beings might profit from a well-reasoned moral system, and I can't refuse to include them in my reasoning. Of course, I am not talking about vegetation, nor am I talking about beetles, ants or bugs. Though I am talking about some natural life aside from that of a human being.

In order to experience some kind of benefit from a moral system, an organism needs to have a number of things. It needs at first to have a form of awareness. This is often characterized by organisms interacting with their environments in varying ways, depending on the situation. In other words, the organism must at the very least be –in some way- aware of its surroundings and cognizant of its own existence. The awareness of the environment is essential in this case, because an effect of a moral decision is often exacted by circumstance or the immediate environment of the organism in question. If the organism is unaware of its environment, there is no reason to assume that it does experience the negative effect of a moral action.

The second ability an organism must have, is the ability to feel pain and/or pleasure. This seems to be a rather obvious point, as organisms unable to pain and/or pleasure, will not be able to experience any negative or positive outcome of a moral action exacted on them. Therefore, no suffering or joy is inflicted and morality stops being applicable, as utility is effectively absent. The critical and morally experienced eye will notice that utility has no bearing on intent. This is true, but as we are discussing a moral system rather than a calculation of arbitrary moral values, we are forced to disregard intent for the time being as this discussion serves

as a framework for formulating moral intent.

The third and last ability an organism must have in order to have this moral system applied on them, is the ability of memory. To some this seems obvious, while to others it seems rather enigmatic. Because of this, I will try to explain it in as much detail as possible. The point to having a memory, is to remember what has happened. This is a means to elongate suffering or joy beyond the initial infliction. If an organism forgets what has happened to it immediately after it has happened, or even while it is happening, there is no actual suffering or joy to spoken of. This might seem somewhat weird, as the organism –perhaps both able to feel pain and/or joy and aware of its own existence, can feel pain or joy long after it has been inflicted. The problem is, though, that if an organism has no memory, but is cognizant of its own existence and can feel –for instance- pain, to that organism it would be as if it had been suffering pain for all its existence. This means the organism doesn't really acknowledge the pain as being of an outside source, perhaps not even experiencing it as pain, negating any moral effects. Disregarding again moral intent.

## **Purpose**

So what is the exact purpose of this proposed system? Well, contrary to religious moral systems, the purpose of this system is to improve the experience of awareness for all sentient beings involved in a moral decision or action. This is contrary to most religious moral systems because, well, most religious forms of morality do not enhance the experience of awareness in any way, they rather force people to keep to arbitrary rules which have little to no bearing on “earthly” life. We are for instance reminded of the systemic treatment of women as less valid than men, vague rules like “treat others like you wish to be treated” and so forth.

Still, at this point I would like to extend an olive branch of sorts to my religious brothers and sisters, in that the ultimate goal is to achieve and/or maintain a sort of saintly morality. Though of course the saints of many religions would disagree with this moral system, I too disagree with their habits of respectively introducing a place of eternal torture to frighten people into believing or robbing and pillaging caravans. The idea behind this system is rather to have people behave in the way the religious speak of their prophets or saints; to really be the understanding, forgiving, loving individual they have failed to be.

## Applicable moral rules

Before we are able to start morally judging decisions or actions it would be useful to describe a number of relevant rules.

- Morally desirable actions/decisions are those actions/decisions that are taken free of compulsion and (are intended to) lead to an increase of enjoyment of a sentient organism's awareness.
- Morally undesirable action/decisions are actions/decisions that are (possibly) taken under compulsion and (are intended to) lead to a decrease in enjoyment of a sentient organism's awareness.

The compulsion becomes relevant, because when someone isn't free to choose to do otherwise, the factor of intent becomes inaccessible to the realm of morality as no moral judgment need be made before taking said action/decision.

- **Every viable organism has the right to sustain its own life and awareness.**

There are a number of important parts to this rule that need an explanation; Many religious forms of morality would simply state that every living thing has a right to life, included



but not limited to unborn life. I disagree with this on the simple basis that animals –humans included- eat other animals. To say every living organism has the right to life would therefore ultimately be in conflict with itself, as providing the right to life for the prey, would violate the right to life for the predator and vice versa.

- **Every viable sentient organism has the right to physical integrity.**

This rule is the basis of this moral system; the fact that sentient beings are aware of their surroundings, means they feel harm or joy being applied to them from an outside source. They should therefore have the right to decide what happens to them and to not have their bodies arbitrarily attacked; their integrity must be preserved.

- **Every organism has the right to take their own life.**

Living is hard. That is ultimately the reason for (moral) philosophy, psychology and a myriad of other disciplines we see in the world today. It is then not only useful but in fact of great importance that we keep in mind that we did not ask or decide to live. It is also important to remind ourselves that every organism is responsible for their own actions. It is in this light that I feel compelled to conclude that there must be a right to take one's own life.

## **Morality and the Context of rights**

There is a certain way in which we must regard rights, that is being missed by society far more often than is beneficial. The cause of this, seems to be directly proportionate to a number of controversial subjects that our societies have had to decide about in recent years, such as abortion, euthanasia etc. The context we miss is the actual legislative nature of a right. Too often when politicians and thereby civilians alike, discuss rights, the rights are seen as an order leading to a direct result. When discussing euthanasia, for instance, the

opponent will often say something like; “so you think we should end human life?”. This is not the context of a right. A right is merely a legislative option. It is the possibility of a choice, not the choice itself. This difference might at first glance seem insignificant, but it really does constitute a large discrepancy in the way we think about rights. If we look at rights as options, as possible choices, we are forced to leave the responsibility of a choice with the person who made the choice, as opposed to the person who gave the chooser his rights.

Personally, I think that if this context would be better illustrated by politicians, teachers and other public educators, we would have less people opposing rights and consecutively have more rights, which would lead to a freer society.

At this point, I would like to introduce two final principles; that of the blind choice (also known as Rawls’ veil of ignorance) and the perpetual blindfold.

- **Blind choice** (veil of ignorance): The idea that John Rawls put forward, was that in order to truly assess the morality of a decision or action, was to do a thought experiment. His idea was that to estimate the value of a moral decision or action, one ought not be involved in the process beforehand. The veil of ignorance serves this purpose; Using the veil of ignorance, the subjects of a moral act or decision are forced to take some distance from the situation at hand and examine the oversee able consequence of the decision or action at hand. They distance themselves in that they are forced to examine the action from all perspectives involved. If we for instance take the fairly black and white issue on whether or not to legalize torture, the legislator and the constituency as well as the prisoner or future prisoner must examine the consequences as if they were all mentioned parties. Specifically, this means that the

legislator consider the pros and cons of being the torturer as well as the pros and cons of being the tortured.

The reason for using this thought experiment is most likely obvious; to take into account more than the own needs and respect the suffering or potential suffering of other parties.

- **Perpetual blindfold:** The perpetual blindfold is a principle that is taken from the economic “ceteris paribus-clause”. This roughly translates as “all other things the same” and has to do with the unexpected consequences of moral decisions or actions. It states: “The decision or action taker is responsible -in the field of intent- only for those consequences that are in any way to him foreseeable.” This blindfold is perpetual, because there is no way, nor has there ever been, to oversee the full extent of the effect of a decision or action. One decision or action might for instance move others to make a new decision or action and so forth. Because of this influence a single deed or decision must be treated to the extent that the consequence of said decision or action is knowable.

## Summary

Once we acknowledge that consciousness is the driving force between experience and thus the effects of moral decision/action, it becomes possible to erect a close to objective (because we can't yet be sure about the degree of consciousness an organism might have) morality, without the need for a god. This moral system can then also be stretched to apply to a broader range of organisms than merely ourselves.

Using the veil of ignorance and the perpetual blindfold, the intent of the decider or action taker can be tempered and led to the right destination. Maintaining the three rules above,

serves to guarantee a humane treatment of all involved, as well as give an extra impulse to the unification of human beings with their natural surroundings.

I hope this helps those who have questions on morality without god at least see a part of my perspective. And that my fellow atheists and free or critical thinkers might find this piece at least thought-provoking