

Today's paradox: Acting social and according to duty, yet declaring egoism

When we look at humans today we find that she is inherently social. Everywhere she is, she is more than one. When she eats, she prefer to eat with other humans. When she settles down, she prefers to live among other humans. When they dress, they dress according to each other. This social dressing is at its heights when the humans term themselves individualists and anarchist. Even when she gets to sleep, she prefer to sleep where at least one more person is sleeping. When she organize her reproduction, it is in a collection of individuals, termed family.

Compare the human behavior with the behavior of a cat. They walk alone, they eat alone and they sleep alone, at least when they are old enough to be independent.

The cat behavior, of extreme independence and egoism, can maybe be observed among humans in extreme situations of resource shortage, for example in a famine. It appear that humans live in social gatherings in order to create conditions where they will not meet shortage.

Given this observation, it is surprising to find that a whole scientific field, economics, is based on the cat behavior, egoism, the independent individual human. They legitimate their cat assumption by referring to economics as a science of human behavior facing shortage.

It becomes even more interesting when we assume what philosophers have assumed for ages, that humans are free. Human behavior is not guided by instincts. Humans are free to choose in most situations. This freedom create moral, i.e., rules and norms that humans can chose to guide their behavior.

I like the Ferrari car. If I stop at a parking lot in a deserted road where a Ferrari is parked and the driver is standing outside the car, I have several options. I could ask the driver if I could have the car. I could ask if I could buy the car. Or I could kill the driver and take the car. Why don't I kill the driver? One reason could be that I do the calculus that the driver will defend herself and I run the risk of being hurt. Or I make the calculus that if I kill the driver, the repressive creation of the humans, the state, will use their police force and get me and put me in jail, or even, in certain societies, the state will kill me. All these calculus are made by cats.

Most people would, however, do what I am doing, admire the car and congratulate the driver to the car. They will not even consider the killing alternative. Not because of fair of getting hurt or being caught by the state police. But because they assume and implement in the action the norm, as for example declared in the Jewish and Christian religions, as the sixth (Jewish) or fifth (Christian) commandment: Thou shalt not kill.

Thus, humans prefer the social action, in its extreme philosophical term called utilitarianism, or to let her actions be guided by principles, termed duty. When you ask people about preferred behavior, they will refer to the social action or to the duty. The most preferred behavior is very seldom the cat behavior, egoism.

Yet, people can say 'after all, humans are egoists', and the dominant assumption in economics is egoism. In this dominating ideology of today it is declared that humans are egoists and social organization is about how to create a society where this assumed natural force of humans are managed and controlled.

The big question of social science should therefore be, why we assume a behavior that we do not prefer and that we have a hardship observing?

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