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Research Article

MELIORISM: AN ESSENTIAL OUTLOOK FOR THE CONFLICTING HUMAN MOODS

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ABSTRACT

It is a matter of common experience that everyone appreciates the Altruistic attitude in theory because it is seen exactly in contrast to the Ethical Egoism. Somehow egoism as such encourages the view that morality in its native form can be respected only when peddled on the axis of self-interest. Much owing to this there has been apparently at least a notable conflict between the expected scale of morality and personal benefit. This also arises because of the different shades of self-interest, which may surface directly or indirectly. Sometimes it exists for a longer duration or might get exhausted soon.

Philosophical behaviourism has gained sufficient favour in relation to the problems raised by a dualistic model of especially the mental and to some extent physical also. Traditionally it is the introspection which can bring forth the results by discerning openly. The two opposing human moods which never allow a balancing force are Optimism and Pessimism. It could be the demand of the circumstances and also the trait of the innate personality. However with the ever increasing demands of the modern age one cannot afford to rely totally on either. This paper proposes the Melioristic outlook as one of the major philosophical remedies to combat with the Conflicting human moods.

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INTRODUCTION

Confucius had declared that better than one who knows what is right, is one who is fond of right and better than one who is fond of right, is one who delights in doing what is right. It goes without dispute that keeping the body and the mind healthy certainly requires an unflinching faith in life and belief in values. According to Miss Evelyn Underhill, "Not to know about, but to be is the mark of real practitioner"¹. It is in this context that philosophy can surely be looked upon as an embodiment of these. Moral philosophy, needless to say, is to a large extent concerned with living along a chosen set of principles. However, to what extent we can succeed in making it consistently explicit totally depends upon our own ability to make use of the rational spirit. Moral philosophy is more concerned with the quality of our lives. It is never a part-time job that one can occasionally and casually refer to Moral philosophy only when in need. At the same time this branch of philosophy does not preach only idealized and lofty ideas which are difficult to achieve and subsequently hard to practise. Rather it acts as a timely reminder to act cautiously and rationally. We have to accept the fact without any reservation,

that problems of life are real and every time cannot be dismissed as arising out of ignorance. Since every object has its own well-defined premise, we cannot offer the same set of principles or rules to tackle or wrestle with the situation, Friedrich Nietzsche says, "The things of the past are never viewed in their true perspective change with the individual or nation that is looking back on its past"². Everyone's problems are personal and therefore we cannot shift the responsibility on others to solve them. On the other hand accepting what we are and the surroundings sportingly we have to endure to defend ourselves.

Another problem with humanity is the general tendency to equate happiness with pleasure though this had never been encouraged by philosophers or ever approved by the theologians. It is highly improbable to draw neatly a thick line of demarcation between pleasure and happiness in practical life. It is difficult to sunder them apart by any method in a convincing manner. Of course this is in no way to recommend the condemnation of pleasure because both pleasure and pain have been granted by Nature itself to put the mankind under the strict governance of these two sovereign masters. Therefore in

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modern age it would be wise to judge the rightness of our actions only by the consequences rather than merely intentions.

Theories of Happiness

In science while arranging the naturally occurring elements on the basis of the periodicity of their properties a curious fact was discovered. All elements exert to gain stability for self and so by some way or the other manage to manipulate the spatial configuration of electrons. Human beings also harp after stability by chasing their chosen ideals. However in case of elements there is a clear methodicity unlike human beings who would resort to any level whether morally and ethically approved or not. Variety theories of happiness have been presented to us from past centuries but none of them seem to be really suitable to all. We have Hedonistic theory, Desire theory, Objective List theory and the most popular Epicurean viewpoint. In addition Seligman's acronym PERMA has caught attention of all generations and that is why it has earned an accreditation as New or Modern Theory in which P is Pleasure, E is Engagement, R is Relationship, M is Meaning and lastly A is Accomplishment. Life is not a very concrete theorem nor presents any fair deal and so we cannot propose or suggest any fundamental formula and expect results to emerge out instantly. There are so many permutations and combinations of the shades of the problems that we face. Ultimately we have to accept the fact that the progress is very slow and therefore no generation howsoever equipped with knowledge can really feel a sense of complacency. In fact every past generation tried its best without sparing any effort to achieve Authentic Happiness that always eluded. Whether an idealist, rationalist, purist or a pragmatist, the ultimate aim fixed by one and all is to grab a magic wand which can take or guide humanity to the arena of happiness.

Philosophical Outlook

A common man may not be totally attracted to a materialistic viewpoint nor to an absolute spiritual disposition. As a matter of fact, a golden mean between these two would definitely strike a balance that is often desired. "All theories that make the Becoming sufficient to itself are therefore half-truths, valid for some knowledge of the manifestation required by an exclusive concentration"³. The very subject of happiness had been of equal interest and importance for both Eastern and Western philosophers. In fact though centuries have rolled down humanity as such is still craving for it. Much owing to this there are varied approaches which expect us first to understand what happiness means and then how to generate it within or attain with the help of external agencies. Let us examine in brief a select few philosophical points of view.

Socrates thought its only accepting the scale of virtues as the true yardstick for leading us to the realm of happiness. It is in this light that he added a few more qualities like Prudence, Temperance, Courage, Justice, Charity etc. For any soul to get qualified as a good soul these are the basic prerequisites. Aristippus one of the students of Socrates strived untiringly to develop a complete philosophy of happiness. According to him it is necessary for all of us to seek and maintain a control on the external sources of pleasure to seek happiness. Therefore leading a luxurious life and to a large extent managing Aristocracy would always prove fruitful. Surely it would open gates to happiness. Much owing to this he was reckoned as the

founder of Hedonism. On the other hand Antisthenes always pleaded for an ascetic life full of rigorous activities proposed Cynic philosophy and therefore extended further Socrates' insistence on keeping virtuous life as of utmost importance. Coming over to the most favorite student of Socrates viz; Plato, we find a strong glimpse of Scientific approach. He felt human soul has three independent sections like Will, Reason and Desire. Anyone can be happy when these are evenly balanced. It was roughly parallel to what later scientists extended as law of triads. Epicurus delved into the details of human nature and arrived at the conclusion that the very purpose of philosophy was to seek and attain happiness on a permanent basis. In addition he felt tranquility, peace, freedom from fear, managing absence of pain and remaining self-sufficient, having genuine friend circle were also very important. In short living with everything that has been posited in the right degrees was necessary. However one should not get the impression that Epicurus overlooked the other shades and realities of life. He was in fact quite conscious of the existing realities. That is why he also advocated a moderate path of ascetism. Generally it is found that a hedonist would deliberately ignore the other extreme or is so much obsessed with the idea of grabbing pleasure by any method Epicurus remained an exception to this and therefore always pleaded for positive thinking. To him positive thinking is a must to gain happiness. This approach he called "Philosophizing" and placed much impetus on it. He always emphasized that the very process of Philosophizing must go on daily basis. He also felt Inner peace can dawn only when one truly calms down. Aristotle held Eudemonia-usually translated as happiness to be the ultimate aim of human thought and action too. There are certain things according to Aristotle which are only relatively valuable but happiness stands apart. It is valuable in isolation. Much owing to this kind of thinking he presented Eudemonism as a theory that the highest ethical goal is or should be always happiness along with personal well-being.

Indian philosophy maintains a unique point of view by giving an exalted position to happiness. According to it, happiness need not be derived from our mundane activities. It has a spiritual meaning. Therefore one has to see that every act is directed to the realm of spiritual world. One has to aim for Eternal Bliss than getting stuck up or enmeshed in mini desires which may give absolute happiness but would never be lasting. The route proposed is absolutely by conditioning our mind to look beyond the rebirth cycle. By renouncing everything and particularly the expectations of fruits from our chosen activities one has to develop the very sense of surrendering before the higher power or Divine Will. This would surely lead us to eternal joy, which is traditionally looked upon as a path of devotion.

CONCLUSION

Many times we are caught in the mood of nostalgia owing to which we have all our enthusiasm and happiness to be traced in the past only. Naturally this gives a little leaning over the pessimistic attitude for the present and also past. In view of Christopher Lasch, " Just as we should reject the thoughtless equation of progress and hope, so we need to distinguish between nostalgia and the reassuring memory of happy times which serves to link present to the past and to provide the essence of continuity....strictly speaking nostalgia does not

entail the exercise of memory at all, since the past it idealizes stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection...It sees past, present and future as continuous. It is less concerned with loss than with our continuing indebted to a past the formative influence of which lives on our patterns of speech, our gestures, our standards of honor, our expectations, our basic disposition towards the world around us"⁴ The word Meliorism in Latin means "Better" which gives a hope to us when the behavioral science "Meliorism" is referred to as a philosophy. It gives us the strength to pin faith in the fact that this world can tend to improve by taking care of the general well-being of the people of all the strata of the society. In philosophy Meliorism can be looked upon as an Ontological concept which shows belief in the human ability to reset the world. It also trains us not to expect much from this life and lays emphasis on humility and gentleness. The reasoning is that straining self even with excessive enthusiasm is of no use because nothing worthwhile can be gained.

Having been equipped with so many theories, interpretations and philosophies yet the majority in society with an average level of comprehension is still under a dilemma as to which viewpoint is really beneficial. The fact is that most of us do not accept the reality and use very little common-sense. Just being practical minded does not solve our problems nor sticking on to the tenets of Optimism would help us. When Robert Browning thinks all is well with this world we find a little optimistic note surfacing. On the other hand when Leibniz thinks this is the best possible world, we cannot easily accept. Schopenhauer's pessimism and atheistic tone of some of the existentialists depress us. "We stand today on the vantage of the twentieth century. As we look back on history, we can learn so much if we keep an open mind. We can see clearly that both extremes are inadequate, insufficient and can become hindrance to the full flowering of our spiritual potential"⁵.

Meliorism is a term extensively used to show or even convince the mass that this world is anti-entropic. However though this tendency is implicit, it needs human effort to function evenly for the better mind of this society. In fact it can be construed as a meta-physical idea or even a concept that Progress is definitely going to encompass larger canvas. There is an unflinching faith in human effort and nature too has this intensive characteristic. Therefore, although Meliorism seems to be half-way between meta-physical optimism and pessimism, it could be a workable pathway for us. The common man does not need in-depth knowledge of science or philosophy. He has no lofty ideals. He just wants to live happily. He is hardly interested in the intellectual discussions which are for him only academic acrobatics. Therefore if we can be simple and brief to put forth our theory or philosophical outlook it could be of some service to the humanity.

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