

The Egocentricity and Coercion Involved in Pursuing a Lifelong or Postmortal Purpose

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Abstract

It is when an egocentric turn from the whole previously received manners and values arise in one's life that one is led to autonomously choose again and pursue a purpose over one's whole life, often, and perhaps not always, hardly realisable within one's lifetime, but if such conversion is to be ethically justifiable, one must beforehand *either* universalise the awakening to the autonomy of a formative will *or* contrive how to go beyond one's life without one's historically conditioned self imposing any possible coercion on others.

Key Words: egocentric turn, conversion, autonomy, egocentricity, coercion

1. Introduction

A purpose throughout your life (as retrospectively and/or retroactively recognized, but at its designing, through the rest of your life) or even thereafter may be of no great concern unless you believe that there is or should be one. You may pursue some purposes for a rather long time in your life but your commitment usually will last at longest until they are fulfilled. You may be so clever that you try to design your purposes to be practically realizable in your lifetime. You can imagine that your word and deed will have an effect on people around you like your family or successors in your profession but if your direct effect on the world lasts long after your death, it may be a nuisance. You may not like having any effect long after your death or being given a purpose throughout the rest of your life or thereafter. If aged ninety, you might try to be purposeless or daytime-long purposeful; if younger, you may try to contrive when you should be completely retired.

However, a multitude of human kind may not be so good at designing their purposes in their life. One can recognize that a number of people strive for a purpose seemingly hardly fulfilled in their lifetime. Enquiry of that kind is part of scholars' ethic. Statesmen and soldiers may pursue the honour awarded after their death. Something eternal or 'life after death' concerns all the faithful. Some *nos*-ists, are indifferent to making their egos indistinguishable from their idealized matrix like republic,

monarchy, or lineage. Some pacifists devote their life to peace and reconciliation where wars or conflicts among archfoes are unlikely to cease. Some altruists are pleased to live among the afflicted, believing in the complete eradication of oppression from the world. Are they all to be disillusioned in measuring the length of their lifetime?

Maybe, but one can imagine that someone else successively after one's death tries to realize something that one cannot bring to an end in one's lifetime by oneself. Some monumental buildings in history were built successively over several generations. Hence it is imaginable, and not impracticable, that a purpose may be pursued by a number of people over innumerable many generations and finally realized in the farthest future. If you collectively pursue a purpose beyond your lifetime, you may not be insane, though I am not sure whether people would call me sane if I professed that I am counting all the sand grains in the world by myself.

Then, which is morally more preferable when you design your purpose, realisability within or beyond one's lifetime? Pursuing a purposeless life throughout one's lifetime will be a kind of extremism and perhaps self-contradictory. A purpose realizable beyond one's lifetime, if not self-contradictory, however, also involves some ills and illusions, whether intrinsically or extrinsically, I suspect. Among them I will discuss its egocentricity and coercion in what follows.

2. The Egocentricity in the Formation of a Purpose Realizable beyond One's Lifetime

Some people come to design a lifelong purpose after a long wandering. Human beings are born into a culture and, if left alone, do not grow adult as other members of their society admit them to be. They are culturally disciplined by people around them including parents to register in their memory, and respond to, their needs for air, food, water, sleep and so on. These needs are to be characterized as physiological, if they are observed from a material point of view but culturally speaking, they come to be registered through language in the mind and body. We do not drink H₂O but instead water as it is embedded in the context of the culture we are born into. All of these needs appear in our daily life, not unmarkedly or directly, but as things named, rutinised and ritualized¹.

Human beings are also culturally disciplined to conform to social manners and values including language. In this discipline formation they are, latently, for example, simply by learning the meaning of a word, subconsciously committed to pursuing collectively some socially shared purposes, some of which are traditional and therefore pursued over generations, that is, in the course of nature, beyond their lifetime in the future. Usually they are not conscious of choosing to begin to commit themselves to traditional manners and values. Even the adults around them may not be conscious of committing themselves to transmit their ancestors' and their shared traditional values to the youth. Human behaviour in a cultural context, if seen from a viewpoint of an observer standing in a different culture,

points to a purpose beyond an individual member's lifetime even when in young childhood. However, conscious commitment will usually not arise unless the society or the individual faces a crisis.

The social discipline formation continues externally as conformity pressure but personally it does not last long in its own naked form. Human beings are also in parallel disciplined to internalise the discipline formation itself. Young children learn to coerce themselves to respond to their inner registered needs and to conform to basic social manners. At the same time, through the process of the self-coercion they become not automatic or purposeless but more conscious both of their own receptive, perhaps not yet formative, will in their conformity and of their own resistive will in possible, and sometimes practical and/or playful, aberration, for example, in a daily ritual such as family table manners. The young potentially could reconstruct their society if exogenously deprived of the older generation around them.

The consciousness of one's own formative will, although already seminal in the formation of the receptive or resistive will, looms clearer through success and failure in their trials as more complex social interactions go on. In parallel, they are faced with inner and outer conflicts in their social transactions as they grow up. Some remain submissive, whether insensitively or not, to their previously received manners and values as an adolescent member of their society but others pass into an egocentric turn. All the previously received manners and values come to be under their consciences' examination. What turns out from one's own formative will is radically indeterminable. Even becoming an outlaw, pursuing self-interests alone, drifting purposelessly, or fulfilling short-lived physical needs, all can be one's choice of life, if they are not mistakenly designed. The self-determination over the whole of one's life at least logically postulates going beyond, or observing from the exterior, one's life.

A formative will, however, always presents itself in a particular individual living in a concrete cultural context placed in a particular region and age. Hence it is not absolute or universal but relative to the individual's life and culture. Under slavery it does not arise. Nor is it a will with the potency of creating or recreating the world by standing in its exterior. The autonomy in the formative will held by an individual living culturally at a place and time does not imply all the others' autonomy. One's autonomy may be acquired under another's forced heteronomy or at the cost of another's autonomy. Hence, the autonomy in an individual's formative will remains egocentric. A purpose it designs through revaluating the received values may be elevated into an ideal commonly admitted by the party committed to it but the purpose is not entirely unconditioned but designed by a historically and culturally conditioned self.

3. The Coercion in the Collectivity Involved in the Pursuit of a Purpose beyond One's Lifetime

In so far as a purpose is pursued spatio-temporally beyond one's lifetime, it may be possibly coercive and therefore, infringe on the autonomy of a formative's will in some individuals.

If you pursue a purpose in your life and if you are sure that because of your age, energy, or personal or social resources available you cannot practically realise it before you die, you must expect someone else to help you and continue to pursue your purpose after your death. If you have no good reason why someone should succeed you, why could you still meaningfully profess that you are pursuing that purpose?

I think that I can, even if no one has yet promised to succeed me. If I believe that my purpose is ethically universalisable, I can. If anyone else living after my death also believes that my purpose is universalisable, he or she will be my successor. The universalisability of an idea not only presupposes the formative will's autonomy in every individual, that is, that if the idea is to be accepted by every one, voluntary acceptance or refusal must be guaranteed beforehand, but it also implies that if human kind has a reason in common, the reason commands that every one should accept the idea. However, the premise is not a priori or intuitively true but it is open to deliberation in a historical context. Hence universalisability does not entail justifiable universalisation. Instead the actual process of universalizing, since it runs among ethical individuals historically in the world, does not necessarily in practice guarantee that presupposed autonomy. One could reasonably enumerate many examples of instituted indoctrination in history. I could be optimistic before I die but even a little historical infringement on the autonomy in another person's formative will could not justify the universalising of one's purpose.

4. A Conclusion

My argument, if sound, would imply that before pursuing a purpose hardly realisable within one's lifetime one must either universalise the awakening to the autonomy of a formative will, even if such autonomy is historically and culturally conditioned, or contrive how to go beyond one's life without one's such conditioned self and its derivative universalisation imposing any possible coercion on others.

Notes:

1 Hunger as an established need can be de-named by dint of one's will. Even breathing can be under control as tried in traditional religions. (Physiologically assumed needs concerning sexuality, in part, like those in urination and defecation, involves precommotion, continence or deliverance but are less developed in infancy

than they are, and so much functions as a typical social construct, a one malleated into a framework of a social division of labour which the adult and the younger influenced by them, whether consciously or subconsciously, transmit and reconfirm for the purpose of collectively withholding the received values.) However, their fulfillment can often, whether individually or collectively, be mistaken for ethically justifiable requirements and egoistically pursued for material existence (contrast, e.g., Bodhisattva in the sutra of his sacrificing his living body to a starving tigress (*Taisho Tripitaka* 172)).

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「生涯の、あるいは、死後に及ぶ、目的を追求することに 内含されているところの自己中心性および強過」

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【要旨】

人生において人は自ら受け入れてきた、自己の帰属する共同体の慣習ならびに価値観の総体から、己自身に向かい、そこから転換を遂げるとき、全生涯にわたる目的を、自律的に再度選び取りその目的を追求するものへと導かれる。この目的は、常にとはいえないけれどもしばしば、生涯においてこの世界に現実のものとなることは困難なものである。このような人生上の転回が倫理的に正当化されるべきものであるならば、人は、それに先立って、人生を自らのものとして形成する意思の自律性に覚醒することをこの世界における普遍的なものになさしめるか、さもなければ、かかる歴史的に条件付けられつつ転回を果たさんとする自己がいついかなる可能性においても他者の自律を抑えんとすることのなきようにして、同時に、自己の人生の限界を超え出ていくにはいかにすべきか、これを考案することが必要となる。