

Are Cafeteria Morals Killing America?

by Larry Plachno

Are you guilty of using Cafeteria Morals in judging right and wrong? In spite of your protests, the answer is probably "yes" since most Americans have been desensitized to thinking about a criterion for right and wrong. There has been increasing interest in Cafeteria Morals since it is an outward sign of the selfishness, permissiveness and pro-choice attitude that is spreading through our society. Some people say that Cafeteria Morals is killing America because it is a way around the issue of right and wrong. Here is some information for you to consider.

Cafeteria Morals

Cafeteria Morals is named after the people who take different items from different shelves in a cafeteria to suit their immediate tastes. However, the morals cafeteria has only two shelves. When faced with a decision or action that could impact other people, you have only two choices. You can be unselfish and pro-society and base your evaluation of right and wrong on the impact of your decision or action on other people and society. Or, you can be selfish, permissive and pro-choice and base your evaluation of right and wrong on what you want to do regardless of who gets hurt. Hence, you pick your criterion for right and wrong and then use it as a guide to tell you whether a particular action or decision is right or wrong.

People who believe in Cafeteria Morals, whether they consciously understand what they are doing or not, do things the opposite way. They first decide the answer they want as to whether an action or decision is right or wrong, and then they pick the appropriate criterion to come up with that answer. Typically, if they want a "no, you cannot do that" answer, they pick the unselfish and pro-society criterion and base their evaluation on the impact of the decision or action on other people and society. However, if they want a "yes, you can do that" answer, they pick the selfish, permissive and pro-choice criterion and base their evaluation on themselves while ignoring any negative impact on other people or society. For some strange reason, they believe that they and their friends have a right to be selfish, permissive and pro-choice regardless of who gets hurt while other people should follow the unselfish and pro-society criterion.

Hence, people who believe in Cafeteria Morals really have no morals. Like a chameleon, they simply change their colors to blend in with their current situation. Evaluating a decision or action based on its impact on others and society may not always lead to a negative answer. However, you can almost always justify a decision or action if you evaluate it from the standpoint of the indi-

vidual making the decision or taking the action, and ignore its impact on other people and society.

America's Social Problems

A fairly simple example is the mother who felt that she could use some extra money for her family. Hence, she finds a way to make money for her family without taking too much time away from her children. People evaluating this action based on the person taking the action would say that her decision is right and commendable. However, we can also look at the other criterion when we discover that her extra money comes from selling drugs to the students at a nearby junior high school. People evaluating this action based on its impact on other people and society would say that her decision is wrong and despicable. Why such a huge difference between the two evaluations? The answer is Cafeteria Morals and what criterion you use for right and wrong



What criterion do you use for decisions? People who believe in Cafeteria Morals change their criterion for right and wrong depending on what answer they want.

What becomes obvious is that most of our social problems could be solved and our world would become a heaven on earth if people used the unselfish and pro-society criteria for their actions and decisions. It takes very little research to discover that this idea has never been a secret and is just about as old as recorded history.

Confucius is credited with saying "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." When he founded Christianity, Jesus Christ admonished his followers to "Love your neighbor." More recently, President John F. Kennedy in his inaugural speech said: ". . . and so my fellow Americans; ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country."

This is saying the same thing in different words. Moreover, one of the definitions of society is a group of people working together for common goals. If we are pro-choice and selfish, then we are not working together and not working towards common goals. As a result, society suffers.

Logic dictates that it is impossible for society to follow the wishes of a large number of individuals. This would pull society in many different directions at the same time - that is exactly what causes problems. However, it is perfectly logical that individuals can work together for a single goal: what is best for others and society.

Some people complain that they have to look out for themselves because no one else will. Interestingly, the statistics are very clear in this area. People who are unselfish, work with others and put others first tend to be healthier, happier, live longer, are less likely to live in poverty or be homeless, and in most cases are less likely to commit crimes or be the victim of crimes. The obvious conclusion is that when we work together for common goals, we all come out ahead. However, when we become pro-choice and selfish, we suffer. Is this what Confucius, Jesus Christ and John F. Kennedy were trying to teach us?

Desensitization

Why are there only two "shelves" or criteria for Cafeteria Morals? The reason is desensitization.

The best way to explain this is to go back several years to the argument over whether kids should be allowed to watch violence on television. Most parents were opposed to allowing kids to watch violence on television but could not come up with a reason. Liberals said that kids should be allowed to be pro-choice in their viewing options and had a right to watch whatever they wanted. The experts sided with the parents. They noted that as kids watched more and more violence on television, they became desensitized to violence and began to accept it as normal behavior. In effect, desensitization is a technical term for what used to be called "giving bad example."

Desensitization is at work in our society making both kids and adults more permissive and pro-choice, and more likely to use Cafeteria Morals. When people are told that it is acceptable to be pro-choice or permissive, or when they see others being pro-choice and permissive, then they become more pro-choice and permissive themselves. Different people are affected to a greater or lesser degree depending on several factors including how they were brought up and whether they have strong morals or religious beliefs. However, statistics show that people who are more liberal and pro-choice in one area are more likely to be liberal and pro-choice in other areas.



People who are selfish, permissive and pro-choice miss the obvious fact that when we work together our society comes out ahead.

This is not rocket science and has actually been known for decades. For example, students who are pro-choice about attending school are statistically more likely to be pro-choice about smoking, using drugs, pre-marital sex and breaking the law. The same situation is obvious with adults. There are many areas including church attendance, marriage, abortion, and drug usage, where an individual who is pro-choice on one is statistically more likely to be pro-choice on the others.

In effect, selfishness and the pro-choice attitude spreads through society like germs, pollution and cigarette smoke. What this means to us is that everything is tied together. We do not have several social problems. Instead, we have one social problem variously known as liberalism, permissiveness, selfishness and the pro-choice attitude. Our social problems are the effects, not the cause; they are simply manifestations of this liberal, permissive, selfish and pro-choice attitude in different areas.

What has become obvious is that this liberalism, permissiveness and pro-choice attitude has become pervasive and has spread through all parts of our society. While obvious in decisions impacting social problems, it has also affected other attitudes and decisions. This is why Confucius, Jesus Christ and John F. Kennedy offered no exceptions to their rules and admonishments.

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