

## Cruel television

### Defining cruelty

- **Spinoza**
- It is difficult to agree on an actual definition of cruelty
- Most people, however, see cruelty as a human characteristic
- There have been experiments that show that the approval of an authority figure is enough for ordinary people to perform and rationalize cruel acts
- Cruelty has been defined as the deliberate infliction of physical or psychological pain on other living creatures
- Sometimes indifferently, sometimes with delight
- Some see the deliberate inflictions of suffering as cruel – when they are not specifically motivated by the desire to produce suffering e.g. self defense, or cosmetic surgery)!
- Others see cruelty as any deliberate action specifically motivated by the desire to produce physical or psychological suffering or when people are indifferent to the suffering caused by actions
- Some see cruelty as the result of those who perform cruelty – cruel people
- Where cruelty is not just a kind of action, but as a behavioural or psychological disposition to be cruel.

### Cruelty and Goodness

- Two sorts of ethical rules – negative ones (thou shalt not) and positive ones (commands to do something e.g. defend the fatherless)
- The negative forbids actions whilst the positive demands them
- Cruelty in the Latin derivation meant bloodshed or raw flesh but in contemporary definitions means - disposed to giving pain.
- Which isn't solely about physical pain but words that are used to give pain and injure.
- Thus cruelty is about dehumanising people and relates to human dignity

- Where the victimiser see themselves as superior to their victims who are dehumanised.
- When there are whole institutions that associate themselves with being superior, and they elicit people's commitment to their ideals.
- It can lead to institutionalised cruelty.
- As people then justify their actions to themselves and in the context of that institutionalised cruelty.
- Thus, there is a notion of power associated with cruelty – power of the victimiser over the victim
- Cruelty is diminished and destroyed when the victim becomes liberated and asserts power
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### **Anger at injury**

- Hume suggests that where anger manifests itself in cruelty that this is to be avoided - he goes as far to say that this is the worst of all possible vices.
- He believed that revenge is actually an instinctive human passion
- And that anger and hatred are inherent conditions
- We can try to prevent them becoming or manifesting themselves in cruelty
- Hume was also interested in details of the forms of punishment human punishers have thought up and acted out
- Whilst Hume had an intense hatred of cruel, angry hatred, his views are a bit more complex than this

### **Punishment**

- Kant endorses the public humiliation of the convicted humiliator
- The killing of convicted murderers, the castration of rapists, the total exclusion from humanity of those found guilty of various crimes

- The rightness of killing killers was clear for Kant
- Hume, however, suggests that there is a final judgment in which all a person's traits, actions, inactions etc. are taken into account
- He suggests that those who have the right to punish put the virtues of the accused into the scales of justice
- He separated out the wicked from the righteous –
- For Hume, finding any morally acceptable punishment is not easy
- In the Kantian view, punishment is deserved – although it is left to the magistrate or God to inflict (within certain restrictions)

### **Shame – responses to vices**

- Hume invokes shame as the enforcer of the demands of the morality
- What people feel shame for will depend on what they expect others to sneer or laugh at
- Shame may motivate people to self empowerment
- Shame can extend to all faults that might lead others to despise or exclude us
- For Hume – it is up to each person to get rid of character faults or put up with disdain, mockery and humiliation.
- Hume does not deny there are different reactions to different vices
- Horror for some, indignation, contempt or derision for others – but the range of terms falls into the shame category
- Where morality is linked with public scorn and fault finding
- Hume refers the public baring of an individual's failures so that others may deride them, shun them, disdain them.
- His preferred method of moral criticism is disdain, derision and withdrawal rather than law enforcement
- Hume worried about cruelty though, in any form of ostracism, and was interested in keeping a very restricted form of it
- Hume did not put much faith in self improvement regimes

- The disdain for the derision of bad character types, is like developing critical standards for human characters
- Humiliation though is different from shame
- Humiliation is done to us by others, whereas shame we do to ourselves.
- Thus there are differences.

### **Relating these ideas to television**

- The humiliation triangle suggests that there is not only a victim and victimizer but those who watch the humiliation -
- Television enables us to watch without any responsibilities’.
- So we can relate these ideas to programmes like I’m a Celebrity get me out of here, Big Brother
- And I am sure you can come up with more
- These programmes have been termed humiliation shows – where the contestants are publicly humiliated
  - But not for any particular flaw of character, or moral deviance, but for entertainment
  - People are ridiculed for entertainment
- People watch these shows and they get good ratings
- Q: Is it morally right to use people’s pain and humiliation as a means of entertainment?