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Why They May Need It, But Why They Can't Have It

In his *Why Even Morally Perfect People Need Government*, Gregory Kavka addresses and refutes the misconception that humans need government in order to temper their behavior towards one another because they lack virtue. This commonly held, yet apparently fallacious view of the rationale behind government's role in people's daily lives and their interactions among one another is far-reaching— even James Madison made mention of this in *The Federalist* when he posited that, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” Kavka begins his refutation by explaining the Simple Account of people's need for government. He, then, goes on to outline his Complex Account of people's need for government which is a critique of the Simple Account as much as it is his focal point of his thesis that morally perfect people need government. After elaborating upon and providing examples for his Complex Account, I will offer up and argue for my own objection to his account. Gregory Kavka asserts that even morally perfect people need government; while this may be the case, I postulate that a government that has authority over morally perfect people must be comprised of morally perfect people, and that morally perfect people could not govern other morally perfect people in virtue of their definition defined and argued for by Kavka, rendering Kavka's thesis void, as well as his critique of the Simple Account of why humans need government.

Now, let us begin with Kavka's Simple Account of why people need government. He calls this the ‘Simple’ Account because it is, well, simple in its approach to explaining the relationship between a government and the people that live within its realm of authority. According to proponents of this account, the sole reason that government is necessary to a people is that the

human race, in its current morally limited state, isn't sufficiently virtuous to either come to an agreement on all social matters or to compromise on these matters without having to resort to the processes of government. In other words, if people did reach a level of virtuosity that would render a government unnecessary, all matters would be handled amongst the people and by the people. For example, suppose that John and Harris weren't morally perfect people, and both men found themselves trying to grow crops on the same acreage of land. According to proponents of the Simple Account, eventually, their moral insufficiency will drive them to involve the government in the land dispute because they are unable to handle this problem by themselves, in which case the government can rightfully decree to whom the land belongs. Kavka is more concerned, though, with why some say the government would become unnecessary if John and Harris were both morally perfect people.

In order to most clearly explain why Kavka thinks that the addition of complete virtuosity to John and Harris would not necessitate an obsolete government, I will begin to lay out the Complex Account. First, there are a few key terms that need defining before we move further. The first is 'government.' By government, Kavka means an authority that can legitimately impose settlements on disputing parties without necessarily having their consent. This authority is unique in that, within the realm in which the government has authority, it is the only agency with this kind of power. The second term is 'morally perfect people.' By morally perfect people, Kavka means people that have a system of morals that is consistent, coherent, and reasonably complete. They always consciously act upon these beliefs. By this, I mean that they never fall victim to the temptation of acting in a way that is inconsistent with their system of morals. Additionally, they are identical to every other human being besides their lacking virtue. With these terms now

defined, we are equipped to address why Kavka believes that even morally perfect people would need government.

According to Kavka, there are (at least) four different ways in which morally perfect people would have disagreements on practical or social issues; the potential for these disagreements is where Kavka lays his foundation for his belief that even morally perfect people need government. He begins by examining the cognitive limitations of these morally perfect people. By cognitive limitations, Kavka is referring to human beings'— even the morally perfect ones— finite, limited nature. Due to differing mental capacities and experiences that may shape the way in which they view the world, people are bound to have conflicting belief systems. These conflicting belief systems would undoubtedly cause social, practical disputes. In fact, they already do cause disputes evidenced by the world around us. A good example of a potential social dispute caused by different moral systems is a case between utilitarians that differ slightly on a nuance of the theory. John, a morally perfect person, believes that the utilitarian's golden rule of 'the greatest good for the greatest number' only pertains to humans. Harris, another morally perfect person, disagrees with John because he believes that the golden rule extends to all sentient life. For the sake of the example, assuming that utilitarianism is a consistent, coherent, and reasonably complete system of morals, this is an example of two morally perfect people having a dispute over a social issue. Because this disagreement potentially gives rise to critical social ramifications, it seems like the morally perfect people would be at an impasse. According to Kavka, it is this inability to move forward from the disagreement toward a practical solution that keeps a society in tact that necessitates government.

We now move on to address the problem of moral pluralism, although Kavka deems ‘incomplete objectivism’ a more appropriate term. By incomplete objectivism, he means that there may be some moral truths that’s validity is sufficiently ambiguous to accept that rational people may disagree about them. For example, many people may assert that killing is wrong unless it is an act of self-defense. However, there may be other people that support the position that all killing is wrong, regardless of the circumstances. Because these views are sufficiently ambiguous, or objectively incomplete, neither party can be said to have an erroneous position on killing even though they have opposing opinions. If neither person is wrong, then neither person can be expected to cede to the other. In cases like this that involve two morally perfect people of which neither is wrong in their staying true to their belief system, then a government becomes necessary in order to decide to which of these views the members of society will adhere.

Next, we move onto the Cooperation problem, a problem from which morally perfect people are not exempt. A Cooperation problem can potentially occur when two morally perfect people’s actions would result in a better outcome if coerced by the government. By this, I mean that these people can have perfect moral systems upon which if they acted in tandem, would give rise to a more desirable product than if they acted separately. For example, let us take a look at the public goods’ dilemma. It may be well within John’s belief system to bring back as much clean water for his family as he can possibly carry so as to ensure their well-being. Harris, a smaller man, is also justified in taking as much water as he can carry back to his home to ensure his family remains in good health. Harris has a bigger family, and needs more water than John, but cannot carry as much water as John. Although both men are still acting upon their moral codes, Harris’s family will go without a necessity—water. Introducing a government into the

equation, though, can alleviate some of the pressure that Harris faces by not being able to carry as much water by rationing out the water to different families based on their needs. The government's role in this Cooperation problem is to ensure the production of what is most valuable by coercion of both parties, even at the small cost of what is more desirable to one party. It would behoove us to mention the government's role in a slight variation to the Cooperation problem—the Coordination problem. Coordination problems are disputes that are products of interactions, and not necessarily disagreements. For example, suppose that there is a society of morally perfect people that do not have a government yet. For this lack of government, there are no regulations as to what side of the road on which people ought to drive which results in many accidents, injuries, and students being tardy for class. Now, suppose a government were introduced to this society, a government that installed traffic rules and regulations stating that all people must drive on the right side of the road. These traffic accidents weren't results of a disagreement, but everyday interaction amongst people. With the new traffic laws, though, many more people will get where to they need to go in a much more efficient and safer manner. Because morally perfect people are still prone to making mistakes— just not moral ones— then it is safe to say that they, too, would need a government to ensure that coordination problems are solved.

The fourth and final circumstance that may lead to a dispute amongst morally perfect people, and thus necessitating governmental influence in their lives, is what Kavka called 'motivated beliefs.' Now, this is actually just a slightly different case than the problems of cognitive limitations amongst morally perfect people, but Kavka believes it to be worth mentioning. These motivated beliefs are not beliefs derived strictly from factual evidence, but by motivated mental states. For example, the phenomenon of 'wishful thinking' is a motivated belief. By this, I mean

that one may assert that something is true in the face of contrary evidence because one wants it to be true. These mental states influence what one perceives to be morally true, as well. Some object to this by stating that any sort of motivated belief is actually a moral failing, and therefore impossible for morally perfect people to engage in, but Kavka disagrees. To Kavka, a rational person may engage in motivated beliefs without morally failing in particular cases. For example, moving forward with one's life after a grievous experience because the future seems like it will be better may be wishful thinking, but it serves a purpose of healing oneself. So long as not every motivated belief is a moral failing, and so long as morally perfect people may engage in motivated beliefs, then there is room for dispute among them, which necessitates government, once again.

After sufficiently outlining Kavka's thesis and his arguments in support of his thesis, I will begin my objection by stating that this is not an objection towards morally perfect people needing government. Instead, it is an objection as to what this government must be comprised of, and why this renders Kavka's thesis and his critique of the Simple Account void. Firstly, let us assume that morally perfect people need government. Next, let us examine of what elements this government must be comprised. An agency that governs morally perfect people must be an agency that is run by morally perfect people. Otherwise, the governing agency would be run by morally imperfect people which would then yield morally perfect people being governed by people of a lesser moral stature. This relationship between morally perfect people and a morally imperfect people governing them would deteriorate as soon as the government inevitably and eminently decreed something that is outside of a coherent, consistent, reasonably complete moral system by which these morally perfect people live. Because morally perfect people cannot act

outside their system of morals, they cannot be expected to follow laws that authorize them to act in such a manner. Imperfect people making up a government that governs morally perfect people is, now, futile. So, we are left with morally perfect people making up the government that governs morally perfect people.

Before moving forward, I will call upon Kavka's second reason for arguing that morally perfect people need government: incomplete objectivism. In regards to incomplete objectivism, one of the reasons that this is, apparently, a circumstance proving morally perfect people need government, I also take it as a reason why a government comprised of morally perfect people would not be a government at all, but just a group of people without the ability or duty to compromise and decide upon legislation. This would render the governing agency as static, and therefore useless. By this, I mean that if two morally perfect people that are governing other morally perfect people are trying to decide— within a space of incomplete objectivism— whether or not killing is wrong dependent or independent of the circumstances surrounding the killing, then they would be at another impasse. Earlier, we discussed that the government was necessary and responsible for solving the problem of this impasse that was created by both morally perfect people not being able to be held responsible for compromise because neither was wrong for sticking by their system of morals. However, now that these two people are a part of the government involved in the governing of others, it seems like there is no higher level of the hierarchy to ensure that this does not impede progress. So, we are faced with two options. The first option is that a government comprised of morally perfect people would not make legal rulings pertaining to these kind of problematic circumstances. This, though, seems to fly in the face of Kavka's theory. If the government cannot make rulings on such issues, then why have the

government at all if it cannot fulfill its duties of governing? The second option is that the government, once again, deteriorates as it cannot expect its morally perfect people to act in ways that are contrary to their respective moral systems. Without a government that governs the government in times of unavoidable and uncompromisable dissent (and another government that governs the government that governs the government in times of unavoidable and uncompromisable dissent, ad infinitum), the latter option seems inevitable. In closing, like morally imperfect people, morally perfect people may also need government, but unlike morally imperfect people, governing them becomes a fruitless, non-sensical effort. Therefore, Kavka's critique of the Simple Account of why humans need government proves to be null.

In his *Why Even Morally Perfect People Need Government*, Gregory Kavka addresses and refutes the apparent misconception that humans need government in order to temper their behavior towards one another because they lack virtue. He does so by offering a critique to the Simple Account that attributes humanity's lack of sufficient virtue to its reason for needing government. Kavka critiques this view with his own account, the Complex Account, by presenting different cases in which even morally perfect people that do not lack sufficient virtue need government. Although he has compelling reasons for why this may be the case, I refute his position by illustrating that a government for morally perfect people must be comprised of morally perfect people which carries with it many unseen consequences. Although my objection is not one directly focused on morally perfect people's need for government, it does render Kavka's thesis and his critique of the Simple Account void.

Kavka, Gregory S. "Why Even Morally Perfect People Would Need Government." *Social Philosophy and Policy* Soc Phil Pol 12.01 (1995): 1-18. Web. 13 Dec. 2015.