Miranda Hall

Sybil Wilen

English 110

19 October 2015

Bending Into Your Moral Compass Using the Troubled Middle

“Water. Earth. Fire. Air. Long ago, the four nations lived together in harmony. Then everything changed when the fire nation attacked. Only the Avatar, master of all elements could stop them” (*Avatar The Last Airbender* *2005-2008*). One might question why this quote from the opening of a children’s television show has any pertinence to an essay discussing the moral compass and troubled middle. However I will explain how it does. In the show Avatar the Last Airbender there is a character named Toph, she is a young blind girl in the Earth Kingdom, but she is also one of the best fighters and benders in all of the Earth Kingdom. She represents Hal Herzog’s idea of the troubled middle very well. The troubled middle is a concept that not every issue can be seen from one side or the other, not white or black, just like Toph isn’t one side of being blind, she can still see and take care of herself, just in different ways. More often than not people see those who are blind as incompetent and unable to care for themselves. Toph however disproves this stereotype as she is perfectly capable of caring for herself and seeing even though it is not with her eyes. This places her in the “troubled middle” as she is neither incompetent of caring for herself or able to see with her eyes. The troubled middle is a constant struggle between emotion and logic. That idea is similar to Katara’s blood bending, she was taught to blood bend by a woman who does it for revenge and based off of emotion. She then has to decide if she wants use her blood bending by basing it off of emotion or logic. This show is all based on the balance of the elements and how each builds off one another to create harmony. This is similar to an idea brought to us by the Dalai Lama known as the moral compass. The moral compass is comprised of five basic steps; knowing right from wrong, taking into consideration the long and short term effects on the environment and the human race, being aware of our own intellectual limitations, being wary of our source materials, and always basing our motives in compassion. These are like all the elements coming together to form a perfect balance or the moral compass. In order to be a the avatar one must create balance of all the elements and be compassionate just as Yue, the princess who turned herself into the moon to save her water tribe from the fire nation. Just like only the Avatar can control all four elements only we can make and follow our own moral compass. Several topics can be discussed using the troubled middle argument and by using the moral compass, two of these are fast fashion and animal rights. After begin in place of compassion one can add knowledge and work the way out of the troubled middle.

Animal rights has two main parts, testing and eating. Testing is a two pronged argument; there is scientific/medical testing and product testing. Focusing on medical and scientific testing there are several positive motives for why this form of testing is okay. It helps to prevent and cure diseases so that we can thrive and survive as a species. It is not legal to test new drugs on humans as it can have adverse effects on the humans and can cause death. This can happen to animals as well as they are biologically similar to us. However, it is safer to have these products tested on animals than on humans. The long- term effects of animal testing are that diseases are cured and lives are saved. The short-term effects are that some animals suffer greatly and die. The product testing side of this has two distinct motives, making humans more safe and aware of toxic products and chemicals, and money. Money controls everything, and people that have money are the ones who fund the research and testing of these products. The short-term effects are also that these animals suffer and die in tragic and sad ways. The long-term effects are that we now have safer products to use in our everyday life. In my opinion as medical testing is rooted mainly in compassion I believe it is perfectly fine to test medicines on animals .However as product testing is not based in compassion I believe it is not socially and environmentally safe or decent to do.

Eating animals is the other prong of this issue. There are several negative effects for eating animals, such as causes animals suffering, environmental harms, the growing population is too hard to feed, people are getting sick from meat consumption, and can even cause obesity. There is one positive motive, it causes jobs to be created. There are no clear reasons or motives as to why eating meat is okay or healthy. It has been proven that humans do not need meat to survive, there are many other sources for protein. In Avatar the last Airbender there are two main characters, Aang and Sokka. Aang does not eat meat as he views it as wrong, Sokka enjoys meat and constantly eats any meat he can. They represent the two opposite sides of the argument having to do with eating meat. As eating meat is not based in compassion it cannot be seen as a positive thing. However I do continue to eat meat even though I view it as wrong. As a child I grew up in a household that eats meat every night. When I converted to pescatarinism or only eating fish as a source of protein it was extremely hard based on my family environment. Others may have similar problems since people who grow up eating meat will more than likely continue eating meat. I understand that animals are treated cruelly in some cases however as I was raised in a culture that deems it appropriate to eat meat I will continue to do so.

Fast Fashion is an international business form where underdeveloped countries have textile factories that do not pay their workers fair wages in order to provide many companies in the United States with inexpensive and quickly made clothing. Some positive motives for the fast fashion industry are providing jobs and finances to those who need them in third world countries, staying on top of the trends, provides jobs for people who work in stores here in America and allows customers to buy more clothes for less. There is also one positive effect that fast fashion has on the world is jobs are created. This business form is similar to the fighting rings in the Earth kingdom. These fighting rings are illegal yet people continue to go to these fights and pay to see them. Just like many of the practices of fast fashion are illegal and yet people continue to purchase the clothes.

There are also several negative motives and side effects in this industry. A negative side effect is that the environment is destroyed by all the pollutants produced by the textile industry and the cotton grown to create the fabrics. Another effect is that the people are treated poorly, some are even beaten and attacked for voicing their demands and needs. There is no compassion in this industry, and since there is no compassion I cannot support in any way the continuation of this business model. By using my moral compass I can say that he fast fashion industry does not start in a place of compassion and I therefore should be pulled out of the troubled middle on this issue. However due to the simple fact that I am a freshman in college with a large amount of debt already it is quite difficult to shop at fair trade companies. If the fair trade companies were cheaper I would be able to shop at them, but as I have little money I will have to settle for fast fashion companies and thrift stores, while believing morally that it is wrong to shop there.

One cannot become the Avatar if you do not balance all four of the elements. One cannot make decisions without basing them in compassion. We must be forward looking if we wish to survive as a race and continue to make this world thrive. By using our moral compasses we are able to pull ourselves out of the murky water of the troubled middle and bring balance to all of the elements.

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