

## Lecture 27: Ethics-Normative and Meta

### Ethics and Religion:

Religion is frequently our primary moral guide and often thought of as the source of justification (an authority).

Can one be moral without being religious? (I hope so.)

(Is it good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good)

*Metaethics:* Questions about ethics in general, not about particular cases, or about how to judge an action. Metaethics deals with the conditions which would make moral action or judgment possible, or impossible, such as whether there is a right and wrong.

*Normative Ethics:* Assumes that there is a right and wrong, then tries to explain what they are and why.

### Truth and Opinion:

One of the central metaethical concerns is the status of moral claims with regard to truth. Are moral claims true or false, or do they at best represent people's opinions? If the latter, one may wonder why we study them, or argue about them, at all.

### Alternative Metaethical Positions (on the above question)

Subjectivism: There are no ethical truths (just individual opinions)

Realism: There are objective ethical truths (independent of anyone's beliefs)

Conventionalism: There are ethical truths, but they are dependent on someone's say so.

God's Divine command theory

Society's Cultural Relativism

Individual's Existentialism

### Review Questions

1. Subjectivism is the belief that there are no moral truths; that all moral claims are opinions.  
Objective facts are true whether or not anyone believes them.  
(e.g. "Proxima Centauri is the closest star outside our solar system")  
Subjective opinions are whatever a person believes.  
(e.g. "Many people believe the stars are lie our own sun.")
2. Ethical truths are true because someone says so: be it God, Society or the Individual.
3. Whether an action is right or wrong depends on culture in which the action is done. In one culture the act may be permissible, in another forbidden.  
The moral truth is relative to the culture.
4. Like conventionalism ethical realism asserts that there are ethical truths, but unlike it, these truths are independent of anyone's say so.

## Lecture 28: The Is/Ought Gap and the Naturalistic Fallacy

New formulation of Subjectivism: "Ethical Statements are neither true nor false."

This means that the following statements are **incorrect** according to Subjectivism:

"It is wrong to steal candy from children."

"It is not wrong to steal candy from children."

Ethical statements, in general, all recommend or discourage some *action*.

However think: "It is wrong to take pleasure at the suffering of others."

Not an action per se.

Emotivism: This is the idea that ethical claims serve to *express* our emotional responses to some action. "That is wrong" simply means "I feel bad about that" or "I reject that." This may sometimes be true, but that does mean the ethical claims have no content (make no assertions about the world).

### Arguments for Subjectivism:

**Ethical Disagreement.** It may offer evidence, but just because there is disagreement about a subject we cannot infer that there is no truth to the matter. There is disagreement about who got the most votes in Florida, but presumably someone did.

Of course, thousands of years of disagreement seems to be evidence for something.

However: There is also much agreement about most principles (do not lie, do not steal, do not murder, etc..)

**Ethics can be explained away:** Most if not all of our ethical claims make sense from a biological or evolutionary perspective. We as a species have reason to take of each other, to cooperate and to be sympathetic to each other's suffering (doing so promoted our species survival, not doing so endangers both our species and ourselves). Also plenty of people only do the right thing because society teaches them to do it, and punishes them if they do not. Just as we can *explain away* UFOs, we can *explain away* ethical beliefs. This argument seems to fall victim to the *genetic fallacy*. Just because we can understand how we come to believe something does not mean that there are no truths about the matter. I might come to believe mathematical statements (e.g.  $2+3=5$ ), because that is what I was taught in grade school. But that does not mean that there are no mathematical truths.

**The Is/Ought Gap: (Hume)** Hume showed that we cannot deduce an ethical claim (which tells us how the world ought to be) from a descriptive claim about how the world is. In short we cannot derive an "is" from an "ought".

Ex. Cheating can ruin a relationship (Descriptive: *Is claim*)

Cheating is wrong. (Ethical: *Ought claim*)

We cannot deduce the conclusion without adding another claim.

Cheating can ruin a relationship (Descriptive: *Is claim*)

Ruining relationships is wrong (Ethical: *Ought claim*)

Cheating is wrong (Ethical: *Ought claim*)

Note that all that Hume claims is that we cannot deduce (validly) an *Ought* from an *Is*. But that does not mean that our description claims cannot be evidence for, or part of a non-deductive argument.

Suppose that Hume is correct. How might this be an argument for Subjectivism?

The subjectivist might formulate an argument like this.

You can't validly deduce an ethical argument from purely descriptive premises.

Ethical statements are neither true nor false.

But you can see that this argument itself is not valid. A further premise is needed.

P1 You can't validly deduce an ethical argument from purely descriptive premises.

P2 If ethical statements are not deducible from purely descriptive premises then

Ethical statements are neither true nor false.

Ethical statements are neither true nor false.

But is P2 plausible? Perhaps but if you are likely to believe it, you are likely to doubt that there are ethical facts. So it is likely question begging.

**Naturalistic Fallacy: (G.E. Moore)** Theories which identify ethical properties with natural properties are making an error. A natural or naturalistic property is some physical property (like being square, producing laughter, or making someone feel pain).

Ex. Hedonistic Utilitarianism identifies "Pleasurable" with "Good." In effect, according to such a theory when one determines how much pleasure some act produces, one is also determining how much goodness is produced, or simply how good the act is.

The reason that is fallacious according to Moore is that we can always ask ourselves "Is it good to produce this pleasure?" Why? Because pleasure does not mean the same thing as goodness. "Pleasurable" does not mean "right."

Of course, we already addressed similar arguments when we touched on mind/body identity. Just because the terms do not mean the same does not mean that they do not refer to the same thing (Superman = Clark Kent).

Searle calls this mistake the *Naturalistic Fallacy*.

Suppose that Moore was correct. How could the Naturalistic Fallacy support Subjectivism? (BTW: G.E. Moore was not himself a Subjectivist.) Such an argument might look like this.

Ex. Ethical properties are not identical with naturalistic properties

If ethical properties are not identical with naturalistic properties then there are no ethical truths. (Sober calls this the 'reductionist thesis')

Therefore, there are no ethical truths.

The second premise seems somewhat dubious. But can we support it at all? I think we can. Many people think that the only sorts of properties a thing can have are natural properties because all properties reduce to physical properties (materialism/physicalism). Such a claim would appeal to someone who rejects ethical truths. But again, if you do believe that not all claims can be reduced to physical claims, you will not be inclined to believe it.

Although *subjectivism* is appealing to some, there are no irrefutable arguments for it.

**Review Questions for Lecture 28**

1. Such claims are neither true nor false.  
No. All ethical claims mere opinions (so the opposite claim is not true either)
2. No. People may disagree about all sort of things for which there is a matter of fact. But, such long disagreement does seem to be evidence for Subjectivism.
3. This is the genetic fallacy. Just because we can explain how we come to believe something does not mean that we've *explained away* the truth.
4. One cannot validly deduce ethical claims from objective descriptions of the world.  
No. One can use objective descriptions as reasons in a non-deductive argument. And there might very well be ethical truths which are objective.
5. One should not identify an ethical property (like good) with a natural property (like pleasure).  
No. Just because the terms mean different things does not mean that they do not refer to the same things. (The naturalistic fallacy fallacy)

## Lecture 29: Observation and Explanation in Ethics

It seems quite reasonable to talk about scientific facts, but it seems odd to some to talk about ethical facts. Science aims to find an objective understanding of the actual world, it is assumed that the real world provides a test for scientific claims that ethics does not have. Ethics seems like it cannot refer directly to observable evidence, but always relies on the opinions of people.

How can we be more precise about the difference between science and ethics?

### Reasoning:

People sometimes claim that they simply *feel* that some things are wrong, they can't explain why it is wrong. If ethics relies entirely on emotional responses or feelings then it does seem different from science (which relies on more than just feelings).

However, sometimes we can and do reason about ethical concerns and can back up our claims with more than just feelings. Unlike feelings which cannot be disputed, ethical claims and principles can be disputed, affirmed or rejected.

Even though we cannot simply compare our ethical theories to direct observations (or can we?) we can test principles by checking for the consistency of the principle with specific examples or cases. This procedure is sometimes called a *thought experiment* (contrasted to an empirical (or scientific) experiment).

Scientific theories are tested with empirical observations (c.f. Lectures 3, 6, 7), it is not clear ethical theories can be tested that way. But a thought experiment might serve the same purpose.

Ex. Proposed Ethical Theory: "It is (always) wrong to steal."

Thought Experiment: A person steals from a rich tyrant to feed her starving kids.

Belief: It is permissible to steal in that case.

Conclusion: The proposed theory is false.

Thought experiments may function like scientific experiments. Of course, this is on the assumption that we cannot 'observe' ethical properties directly. Hume and others believe we have a moral sense. Thus when we observe some actions, we actually *sense* the ethical properties (rather than infer them).

Ex. Suppose you witness a person lifting the wallet out of someone's back pocket (without the person's seeing it). Do you have to make an argument in order to realize that someone has done something wrong? Or do you sense it directly?

Ex. Suppose you see a movie where the son of an emperor kills his father and claims that the emperor proclaimed him to be his successor as he died. Do you have to produce an argument to see that his claim to the throne is illegitimate?

One might argue that the reasoning has already been done. That is, in our moral education we address such questions, and when we see it for real we skip the argument, but still infer the conclusion from the premises.

However that claim is itself in need of support. Can we infer from the relevantly similar cases? And how did we make get our original principle if not by exposure to such cases at least as thought experiments.

**Observations:**

It has so far been assumed that empirical scientific observations reveal objective truths. But such a claim is highly suspect. The idea that empirical observations are somehow 'pure' is not obviously true. This means that some or all observations are 'theory laden.' Consider the simple observation: I see a car crash into a statue of a famous patriot. Seeing a car means presumably knowing that a certain collection of metal, glass and rubber is a car. Seeing it crash means assuming that a crash is not the intended or normal way a car behaves. Likewise 'statue', 'statue of something', 'statue of a patriot', 'patriot' and 'famous' are all in need of understand and are not perceived in the way I might perceive a red spot on a white surface.

So, if ethical observations require some background knowledge or understanding as well, then ethical observations are on the same level as some empirical observations.

Of course even if ethics does use reason similar to science, and it can rely on observations similar to empirical observations, it may not be the case that there are any ethical facts (or truths).

**Insoluble Disagreements:**

People disagree about scientific matters as well as ethical ones. But at least there always seems to be the possibility of convincing someone about scientific facts (at least scientists can be convinced by good scientific arguments). Whereas, there seems the real possibility of perpetual disagreement in ethics (even among professional philosophers and ethicists).

But does disagreement prove anything about ethical truths? For the most part scientific truths do not impact us in the same way that ethics does. Of course, science is important to us, but which theory is true does not necessarily impact us so long as one works. (There may be exceptions to this: genetic proclivities etc..) Science may affect our decisions in an instrumental way (how can we do something?). But ethics affects our very decision to do the thing itself (should we do something?).

Given that ethics is likely to run contrary to self-interest, it is hardly surprising that people do not agree on ethical matters. Think of cases where a scientist's well being is dependent on having a good theory. That might lead the scientist to be non-objective when looking at the data. (i.e. Cold Fusion).

**Values in Science**

There are several ways that scientists make value judgments (or judgments which are not value-free).

- (1) When they choose which questions are worth asking and answering. (Why should we examine differences in human intelligence?)
- (2) In determining what counts as normal, deviant, diseased or healthy. (Are deaf people disabled? Or are they merely different?)
- (3) What counts as good evidence? (Should we automatically disregard claims of psychic phenomena?)
- (4) Should we publish the results? (Studies about racial differences, gender differences, the benefits of smoking for losing weight?)

**Parsimony:**

The principle of parsimony tells us that given two predictively equivalent theories, we should prefer the one that is more simple. Do we need ethical facts in order to explain anything? Or can we explain all of observations and beliefs without it?

It seems as though we do not need any ethical facts to be true in order to explain our observations, whereas we do need scientific (or physical) facts in order to explain our scientific (or perceptual) beliefs.

Compare the two casual chains

<b>Physical Fact</b>	→	<b>Observation</b>	→	<b>Perceptual Belief</b>
(The paper is red)		(We see redness in the paper)		(We believe the paper is red)

<b>Observation</b>	→	<b>Upbringing</b>
(We see Joe steal a car)		(We are taught that stealing is wrong)

<b>Ethical Fact</b>	→	<b>Ethical Beliefs</b>
(Stealing is wrong)		(We believe Joe did something wrong)

In the first case the causal chain is clear. The physical facts cause the observation, and the observation causes the belief.

In the second case it is not so clear. We can explain our beliefs without the ethical facts. If we remove them from the causal chain, we would still get the same beliefs.

However, Sober points out that we are not taught specific ethical beliefs (We would need to be taught that Joe stealing cars is wrong, we are not taught that, we are taught that stealing in general is wrong.) So general ethical truths might serve to explain how particular judgments get made. This seems to fall victim to the *genetic fallacy*. Just because you might know how a belief comes about does not mean that it is not true.

**Review Questions**

1. The truth of ethical claims depend on how consistently the principles can be applied to specific claims. The same applies to scientific principles. Sometimes we come to ethical beliefs without making inferences or relying on arguments, we just see the ethical facts.
2. No. It just shows that ethical thinking is not merely unsupported feelings.
3. No. People can be intransigent about any kind of fact, scientific or ethical.
4. It seems as though ethical facts are not necessary to explain our ethical beliefs. So one could argue that a theory including ethical facts is less simple than one without it (subjectivism is more simple than realism). But ethical facts may explain other things (like why some specific sorts of actions are wrong using general theories.)
5. Ethical facts would not explain the existence of anything better than other facts (about say our upbringing). No. The lack of an abductive argument does not disprove the existence of anything.

### Lecture 30: Conventionalist Theories

Recall conventionalist theories are ones that (a) admit the existence of ethical truths, but (b) say those truths depend on someone's say so. This means that when we judge actions nothing is intrinsically right or wrong about them. Some act is right or wrong only if something outside it decrees it, and only for that reason. [If the one's whose say-so matters use moral reasons to justify their actions, then the theory is not conventionalist (it is probably realist).] Two features of conventionalist theories are that they are *arbitrary* and that they require a *decision*.

Note: One might believe in what Sober calls *trivial semantic conventionalism (TSC)*.

That asserts that we call some acts "good" rather than "bad." Because we chose the word "good" instead of "bad." That is trivial, since (a) it is obviously true, and (b) it doesn't show that some is good because our say so, instead it merely notes the word we use.

*Substantive conventionalism (SC)* says that some facts in a sense come to be by our decree.

Ex. *TSC*: We call two people that agree to be married, spouses. If we wanted to, we could have called them something else (bondeds).

*SC*: By pronouncing two people spouses, the officiant makes them married.

In the above case people are not intrinsically married, they are only married because of some convention in society.

Note: That in both case we decide, and in both cases we decide for no particular reason. So both decision and arbitrariness are present.

### Divine Command Theory:

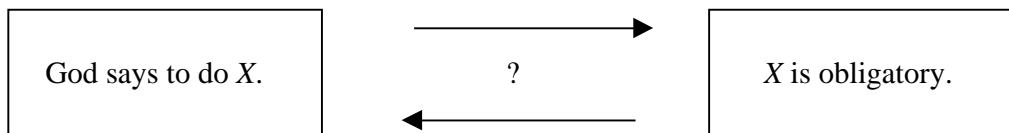
Recall, this theory asserts that ethical principles are true, because they are the commands of God (or Gods). This theory should be distinguished from one that suggests that God knows all the ethical truths and commands us to obey those truths. That theory is a realist conception, because, the ethical principles are true or false independent of God's say-so.

Note that the alternative is predictively equivalent. God would still command all the same things as would one that was the very source of the ethical authority.

### Plato's Critique

Plato asks among other things that very question. Although he uses the example of piety. The question is, *does God command something because it is morally obligatory, or is it morally obligatory because God commands it?*

Sober gives this picture to help show the relation.



The conventionalist sees the arrow goes left to right. Since God tells us to do it, we must. Whatever God commands we must do. The realist sees the arrow going from right to left. God only tells us to do what is morally right. God would never command us to do wrong or evil. (Both theories are consistent with the existence of God, neither leads to Atheism).

Plato pointed out some problems including that given the existence of multiple gods who do not agree on their commands. It seems possible that some things would be both good and evil. Of course, if the Gods agree or if there is only one God that problem is not serious.

*Three Problems with Divine Command Theory:*

1. Unfortunately there are many religions. For a person to claim that something is wrong because he religion says so, she must deal with the fact that someone from another religion is not going to be convinced unless their religions agree. There may also be disagreement within a religion (different interpretations). If they disagree, who should we believe?
2. If Divine Command Theory is true, then whatever God could have commanded, including the most repugnant things would, by definition, be good. So if God commanded us to torture kittens, torturing kittens would be good. If you do not believe this, then you are a realist about Morality.
3. If the only thing that makes something right or wrong is God's say-so, then God cannot have a reason to pick one moral rule over another. That is God's decision would be arbitrary.

Note that the fact that God gives punishments and rewards for obedience or disobedience is not dependent on realism or conventionalism. It could be that way either way. But, if the reason one believes that God has authority is that he punishes and rewards, then one's attitude towards ethics is really simply as a matter of prudence, not ethics.

### **Ethical Relativism:**

Recall that Ethical Relativism says that some actions are right or wrong because society says so. Sometimes this variety of relativism is called Cultural Relativism (I prefer this term to Sober's, but for continuity purposes we'll use his vocabulary).

It is clear that Ethical Relativism is a conventionalist theory since right and wrong depends on the say-so of society. However it is not obvious how it is *relative*. All this means in this context is that right and wrong are terms that are relative to some culture or society. Recall how we talked about knowledge being relative to some conditions, and right and left being relative to point of view. So just because something is relative does not make it entirely subjective.

### **Descriptive vs. Normative claims of Ethical Relativism**

Descriptive: Different cultures hold different moral claims true and false.

This simply describes a fact about the world. It is true that not all cultures believe the same things to be right or wrong

Normative: People ought to do what is thought right in their culture. What is right or wrong is entirely dependent on the cultural norms.

### **Relativism is not a claim about the particular *circumstances*:**

Relativism is not the claim that what is right or wrong depends on the circumstance. We might think that sometimes stealing is permissible (to save our starving children), or that killing in self defense is permissible. But that is compatible with Realism, not peculiar to Relativism.

**Tolerance/Pluralism and Imperialism/Interventionism:**

Relativism seems to recommend a kind of tolerance. We are familiar with the idea that we should respect different cultures and many of us feel distaste for the idea of forcing Western values on others (ex. Forcing Native Americans to become Christians, including taking away native children to raise in Christian homes, this happened as late as 1930). Likewise, Relativism seems to recommend a kind of pluralism. This is the idea that we should make room for a variety of different ethical and cultural norms (typically with a clause preventing the harming of others.) This view also rejects intervening in the normal cultural processes of other cultures.

However, Ethical Relativism does not necessarily endorse those positions. In fact the believer in relativism cannot believe that cultures or individuals from other cultures that do not practice these principles to be wrong. Intolerance, discrimination, imperialism, and global policing are all policies which might be endorsed by some culture (ours to some degree), and since society promotes those values, they are right for that society. The racist, sexist and intolerant positions, even genocidal ones are and were right for that society. Ethical Relativists reject judging a culture from the outside.

By contrast, anti-interventionists, promoters of tolerance, pluralists and democrats (in the sense of promoting democracy) are all probably Realists, since they think those values are true for all cultures and all people. Universal Declarations of Rights such as the American Constitution, and UN declaration of Human Rights, are realist ethical principles since they are meant to apply whatever society they are in.

[you can see the UN declaration here.. <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>]

**Three Problems with Ethical Relativism**

1. Again like *Divine Command Theory* (but perhaps more obviously true). Ethical Relativists must hold that whatever society calls right and wrong is right and wrong because of society's say-so. Thus if society said cannibalism was permissible, then it would be. If society condemned acts of charity, then such acts would be wrong.
2. Ethical Relativism is also troubling because it is not always clear what constitutes society or a culture. Is there only one Western Culture? Or does North Carolina have many sub-cultures with varying social norms? Can a person claim membership of some smaller group and avoid judgment by the larger group. If so Ethical Relativism seems to reduce to Subjectivism.
3. Assuming that society's norms are determined in some evolving manner (we do not judge people today by 19<sup>th</sup> century standards), we run into the problem of *conformism*. It may be that the majority is, by definition always right. But that seems to run contrary to our intuitions that people like Martin Luther King Jr. fought against the majority and had the moral high ground. There may be a way to resolve that problem. Think of possible reformulations of the problem and possible solutions.

**Sartre's Existentialism:**

The important aspect of Existentialism for our purposes is the idea that individuals must choose and create their own moral values. Sartre holds a conception of radical freedom, so long as we can act, we are free. Our upbringing, our genes, our jobs, our environment, peer pressure and every other outside influence is part of what he calls our "Facticity." But none of those things ever determines our acts or decides whether what we do is right or wrong. This freedom means that we cannot simply do what convention tells us to. We cannot trust the dictates of God or State, we must choose for ourselves.

So far this does not say much about how Existentialism is a form of conventionalism. What makes it conventionalist according to Sober is that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the choice of the individual. What is right or wrong is ultimately determined by what the individual truly wants (or more precisely, the good depends on the sort of person the individual wants to be.) Consider the case of Paul Gauguin. The impressionist artist left his family in France and moved to Tahiti where he produced his greatest works. According to Existentialists he chose what was most important to him, painting and pursued it. Thus what he did was right. Some might think that abandoning his family responsibilities was not the morally right thing to do, even if his art would have suffered in France (this story is somewhat apocryphal, I am not sure of the detail, so take it as a possible case even if Gauguin did not do it).

If you think Gauguin was right to "follow his dream," think about the test case Sober suggests. A person might decide that what she really wants is to be a good Nazi. It would seem that the Existentialists would have to endorse that action if it were come to through sincere reflection. (Odds are most Nazis were merely following the crowd and not being adequately reflective, but suppose that some were sincere. What would that mean for Existentialism?)

**Review Questions:**

1. *Trivial Semantic Conventionalism* merely asserts that what we name things could have been different. *Substantive Conventionalism* asserts that if we named things (actions) differently (different moral judgments) then the moral value would change.
2. Yes. They might both agree about would God commands. They differ in that the DCT people think that we should do it only because God commands it. The Realist thinks we should do it whether or not God recommends it.
3. Yes. Circumstances might make the right thing different at different times. But the realist will justify that action in terms which are applicable to all cases (universal principles). The Relativist will not.
4. No. Tolerance is only a virtue if the society someone is in promotes that values. But society might just as likely promote intolerance, which would be right if society promoted it.
5. Yes. Reflection might be encouraged by both theories. The realist might think that reflection is needed to find the proper universal principle to which to appeal. The existentialist believes that the results of reflection determine what is right.
6. They appeal to TSC because they simply changed the name to solve the problem. Substantive conventionalism might be seen in the kosher laws which determine what uses of sour cream are appropriate (e.g. one may not cook meat in it).

### Lecture 31: Utilitarianism

This is a realist theory developed mostly by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. It argues that there are moral truths. It also attempts to reduce all moral principles to one: "one ought to produce the greatest good for the greatest number." It is also called a consequentialist theory because it looks to the outcomes of actions in order to judge the action's merits.

This seems pretty straight forward, but as we shall see it gets more complicated. The above formulation does not explain what the "good" is, nor does it suggest how to measure the greatest good. What it does suggest is that if there are two alternative actions, then we can know which one we ought to do if we know which action produces the most good. Utilitarians frequently call the measure of goodness produced by some action its "utility." Consider this example.

Ex. Suppose I am trying to decide how to divide up a pie between six people. I could give one person the whole pie. Or I could give each person one sixth of the pie. The latter case would make all six people happy, whereas the former case would only make one person happy and make five people unhappy. Utilitarianism tells me to choose the latter.

Note that in this case I used happiness as means of judging the greatest good. This is the most common way of determining the good, but not the only way. Mill did not simply assume that happiness was the best way to determine the good, but rather provided an argument for it. It starts with an analogy to vision, it goes something like this...

- (1) Seeing something proves that it is visible.
- (2) Hence, desiring something proves that it is desirable (a.k.a. good)
- (3) The only thing that each person ultimately desires is his or her own happiness.
- (4) Hence, the only thing that is ultimately desirable for a person is his or her own happiness.
- (5) Hence, each person should do whatever promotes the greatest happiness.

It should be obvious that this is not a deductively valid argument. But let us see the steps.

(1) -> (2) If "good" means desirable (which seems reasonable) then it seems plausible that we can determine what is desirable by asking what is desired. After all we know what is visible by asking if it is seen. So something is desirable if it is desired. (Does it make sense to say something is desirable but no one desires it?)

However, Sober notes the difference between visibility and desirability. Visible means can be seen, whereas desirable means ought to be desired (not simply can be desired).

[A person might desire to blow up a building, but that does not make blowing up building desirable, at least not by itself.]

Still, there does seem something to the claim that we can know what is good by seeing the sorts of things that people actually do desire. Imagine a theory which rejected all actual desires and promoted as desirable (good) only things which everyone universally loathed.

(2+3->4) Some desires are merely instrumental, that is we desire them as means to some end. Others are ultimate, or the ends we seek to promote. We probably don't really value working in a tiresome job. But we might value getting the paycheck because it lets us

pursue our other interests. Those interests themselves seem to promote our happiness. And we would sacrifice any of them if they did not make us happy.

However, Sober notes that we do desire something more than our own happiness. It is a simple fact that we want things for others' benefits or more general things (like world peace) which do not necessarily give us happiness.

Consider this though, if you wanted to make an ethical theory attractive to a skeptic, deriving it from selfish desires seems more likely to succeed than demanding that everyone want the best for others (if people were so altruist, we wouldn't need ethics).

Does (4) follow from (2+3)? It is not that it does for the same reasons that (2) doesn't seem to follow from (1). Again think about the opposite. Would you be willing to sacrifice your happiness for some other thing?

Does (5) follow from (4)? No. If my own happiness is the only thing desirable to me, then why should another's happiness be desirable for me? Mill thought you could get this with simple math. If my own happiness is desirable, then certainly by the same arguments everyone else's happiness is also desirable. This does make sense if you think that "good" simply means "ultimately desirable to someone." But that is not likely to convince the ethical egoist or skeptic.

*Another Argument: Reciprocal Illumination*

This method is a general means of validating and fine-tuning any ethical theory. It is also called "the method of reflective equilibrium." (c.f. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*). This idea is that we take a theory and see what its consequences would be for certain specific cases. If the consequences run contrary to our intuitions about the specific case we can adjust the theory to match the case. Likewise, we might modify our intuitions about the specific case. Many of the modern formulations of Utilitarianism are the result of that sort of reasoning.

One problem for Utilitarianism is formulating the concept of greatest good. If we say that happiness is the greatest good we still need to explain what happiness is. One suggesting is that happiness is state of mind.

**Problem:** If just being in a "happy state of mind" is the greatest good, should we promote that state even if it could be obtained through 'artificial means' like the experience machine or through some drug (assuming no harmful side-effects)? It would seem that Utilitarianism endorses that view, even though most people's intuitions reject that world. (Think of the world in the movie the Matrix, according to the film people rejected the 'paradise world' they first presented them, preferring the world "albeit another illusion" which seemed more realistic.)

Try to name some values that such a system seems to ignore?

**Higher and Lower Pleasures**

Mill's answer to the above objection. Some pleasures provide more happiness than others. The higher pleasures were therefore preferable to the lower ones. Mill's test was to ask people who experienced both higher and lower pleasures. The ones which people then preferred were the most pleasurable. So even if the fool thinks he would prefer beer and TV, it is only because he has not learned the joys of Chess and Mozart. Of course, even Mill admits that in a pinch, when push comes to shove "pushpin (a trivial game) is a good as poetry." Sober thinks that this response does not meet the real versus artificial challenge. Since in that case, we would know both and still find the artificial case provides more happiness.

**Hedonistic Utilitarianism:**

Mill's theory is frequently called *Hedonistic Utilitarianism* because it equates happiness with a pleasurable state of mind. Thus we ought to promote the most pleasure for the most people. Sober rejects that theory as failing the test of reciprocal illumination.

**Preference Utilitarianism:**

An alternative fine-tuned version of Utilitarianism is Preference Utilitarianism.

On this account, we ought to promote the circumstances that reasonable, well informed, people would prefer (not necessarily what would make us happiest). Since people would prefer real experiences to artificial ones, and to be drug free than to be dependent on drugs, Preference Utilitarianism does not fail in the first case.

**Some Problems:***Apples and Oranges Problem*

Comparing the preferences of different people. If person x prefers outcome (a) over outcome (b) and person y prefers (b) over (c), how do we decide what to do?

*Solution 1 (Voting):* It might be that everyone get one vote on each alternative, but that obscures the intensity of the preference. I might not care much how some plot of land is used. But if that plot is adjacent your house, you might care very much. Thus your preference ought to count for more than mine.

*Solution 2 (Money):* We sometimes use monetary units to help determine intensity.

Ex. I would prefer that this plot be turned into a park and am willing to pay \$10 dollars additional taxes for that to happen.

You would prefer the plot to be left alone. You may be willing to pay \$100 dollars for that to happen. If I am not willing to match your amount, then I clear do not care as much as you.

The problem with this is that how much money we are willing to spend on something depends on many more factors than our preferences in that case. How much spare money do we have? How much do we need for other things? If we use how much we'd spend to change things to determine, Bill Gate's preferences would count much more than ours.

*The Justice Problem*

If *scapegoating* an innocent person can produce more good than bad (satisfy more preferences), then it would seem to be right according to Utilitarianism. [Assume that the people will not find out the truth, and that the preferences of the scapegoated person, as strong as they would be, are not as strong as the combined preferences of society as a whole.] In this case Utilitarianism seems to fail whatever its formulation, hedonistic or preference.

Part of the problem has to do with the purpose of punishment. Scapegoating may satisfy some purposes (to quell public anxiety, give a sense of vengeance to the injured parties, and to deter other crimes), but it seems to fail another (giving justice to the guilty party).

Another fine tuning can be made by distinguishing two kinds of utilitarianism Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism. How we judge something depends heavily on what we judge are we judging particular acts, or kinds of acts. That forms the basis for the distinction.

*Act Utilitarianism:* Do what promotes the greatest good for the greatest number in this case, whatever that action is.

*Rule Utilitarianism:* Do the sort of action that in general promotes the greatest good for the greatest number.

Rule Utilitarians can defend the principle not to scapegoat people on the ground that in general such behavior will not promote either the greatest amount of pleasure or satisfy the most preferences (since no one would want to live in a society that did that to innocent people, after all we might be next.)

Act Utilitarians needed look at what such a general policy would do, since all they need to look at is the particular case.

Does Rule Utilitarianism solve the problem of scapegoating? Sober does not think so. Consider that the way we form the rule can alter our understanding of the ultimate good produced. Consider the following rules.

R1 Punish the innocent when it is convenient

R2 Never punish the innocent

Clearly R2 seems like it would produce better consequences (and be preferable to R1).

But consider the following:

R3 Never punish the innocent, unless it maximizes the good.

In this case it seems a simple logical consequence that R3 is better, since it automatically produces more good (or utility) than R2. Rule Utilitarianism seems to fall victim to the exact sort of problem it is meant to solve.

### **The Problem of Tolerance and the Fanatical Majority:**

Preference Utilitarians can not compare the relative merits of someone's preferences since what makes something good just is that it is preferred by the most people. An intolerant society may then prefer that the minority is oppressed or abused in some way. If they are adequately fanatical about this preference it might justify any sort of mistreatment.

Again, it seems that Utilitarianism fails in this case.

Mill's solution to this was to suggest that the principle of Liberty was supported by Utilitarian principles. That is we would prefer to be in a society where everyone is free, even if they are free to do things we do not approve of. (He offered other benefits that arise in a liberal society.)

Although Mill's particular solution (distinguishing the private and public spheres) does not seem to satisfy our intuitions, a Utilitarian might claim that it is simply the case that broad liberties (even for hated minorities) promote the most happiness. That claim is a contingent one. If it turned out that sometimes people would be less happy in some cases (having to tolerate Nazi pedophilic nudists), then Utilitarianism would favor restrictions on liberty.

Sober thinks this proves Utilitarianism false. Some believe that this is a good argument for Utilitarianism. The measure of how much liberty is good, ought to be the amount that promotes happiness or the greatest good (consider the restriction on liberty that prevent us from crying "fire" in a crowded movie house.) Still Sober is right that there is no off-limits area for such restrictions. If the majority of people would be happiest, or most satisfied by putting all the Jew in concentration camps, then Utilitarians must endorse that.

**The Dirty Hands Problem:**

According to Utilitarianism all that matters when determining the rightness or wrongness of some action is the consequence. Will one outcome produce more happiness or satisfaction than the other? One thing this seems to ignore is who is doing the action. Suppose you are shopping and find a sale on shoes made by slave labor. The price is great, and you know that if you do not buy the shoes, someone else will. Should you buy the shoes. According to Utilitarianism it doesn't matter. The consequences is the same. In all likelihood the practice will continue whether you buy the shoes or not. But some people think that they would be doing something wrong if they bought the shoes (if not consider Sober's case of being the torturer). Can the Act/Rule distinction settle this problem? Why not?

**Personal Loyalties Problem:**

We seem to have responsibilities and attachments to particular people that go beyond promoting the general happiness. Utilitarianism doesn't easily explain that sort of preference.

Ex. I can offer an extra pair of ballgame tickets to my best friend or to a stranger who happens to really like baseball.

On strictly utilitarian grounds, the stranger might get more pleasure from tickets.

But it seems as though I should do nice things for my friend.

Can Utilitarianism resolve this conflict? Again Rule Utilitarianism seems better equipped than Act. It can say we should as a rule help and be loyal to our friends, rather than to strangers. But, that principle seem dubious in many other cases (how about hiring a friend over a more competent stranger?)

**Psychological Argument:**

Acting from loyalty or love is often not a moral choice but an instinctive one.

*Response:* A moral theory should make recommendations about would we ought to do, not simply describe what we will do.

**Utilitarianism's Trump Card:**

If you reject Utilitarianism you must accept this possibility. Sometimes the best action one can do is the one that does not produce the most good. Rejecting Utilitarianism means that sometimes we ought to what produces a less than optimal consequence.

Any answer to that challenge?

**Review Questions for Lecture 31**

1. The General Happiness Principle can be defended by fine-tuning the definition of happiness to account for our attitudes about higher and lower pleasures. The reciprocal illumination method lets us compare our intuitions and a theory about specific cases. We can revise one or both depending on the outcomes of the analysis.
2. Hedonistic Utilitarianism is the idea that we should promote the most pleasure for the most people.  
Preference Utilitarianism is the idea that we should promote the satisfaction of the most preferences for the most people.  
The Hedonistic Util. principle would urge us to enter the machine  
The Preference Util. Principle comports better with our intuitions that the experience machine is not what we'd want for our lives.
3. It is difficult to compare the intensity of different people's preferences (it might also be difficult to compare two of our own preferences). So computing the right thing to do may be impossible.
4. Util. seems to promote making a scapegoat of an innocent person. That runs contrary to our intuitions.
5. Util. seems to permit the majority, if it is deeply enough concerned, to severely restrict the liberties of a disliked minority. Again this runs contrary to our intuitions.
6. Rule Util. can argue that no one would endorse the general idea behind the various actions we disapprove of.  
Ex. We would not want to live in a society which permitted scapegoating.

### Lecture 32: Kant's Moral Theory

Kant offered a very different sort of realist account of morals. Rather than focus on the consequences of the actions, Kant asks us to look at the motive or intent of the action. Kant suggested that the only thing which could be conceived of as unqualifiedly good is a **good will**. (Cf. Pg. 520) What this means, and what it implies is complicated.

#### Role of Reason

Kant rejects the Humean notion that reason plays only an instrumental role with regard to the actions. Hume thought that reason was the slave to desires. That is, reason figures out how to get what we desire, or accomplish what we desire. But for Hume, reason does not determine our desires.

Kant rejects this idea. He argues that while sometimes our desires derive from non-rational sources, what he calls our inclinations, we can act from reason alone. In fact whenever we act for moral reasons, we are guided by reason and not our inclinations. [That is not to say that all the time we do something moral we act from reason alone, or that whenever we act from our inclination we do something wrong.]

#### Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

*Hypothetical:* In order to get X do Y.

Ex. To make an omelet you must mix eggs together and pour into a pan.

*Categorical:* In all cases do Y (or do not do Z).

Ex. Always tell the truth (Don't lie).

Kant thought that all moral rules were Categorical Imperatives. They were not means of achieving some further end, for example they were not a means by which we could promote happiness.

#### Features of Moral Laws

They must be *Universal* in scope and *Impersonal*.

They must be universal in that they apply to all cases of some type and all people in the same situation. Ex. Do not lie, do not cheat on tests. These are permissible laws of behavior. But do not lie unless you really want to, is not sufficiently universal.

They must be impersonal in that they cannot refer to a specific person. Ex. Everyone must keep his promises, or no one may benefit from another's suffering. But there are no moral laws which refer to a specific person: Everyone but Steve must keep promises, or whites may treat blacks as property.

The way to judge the moral value of an action is not by its consequences, but by the *maxim that the action embodies*.

#### What does it mean for an Action to Embody a Maxim?

The maxim is based on the motive behind your action. In other words, the maxim of the action is the principle or rule you followed when you committed the action. If there was no rule or maxim, then it was not a morally good action. If the maxim is self-serving or fails to meet the rational requirements of universality and impersonality then the actions are also not morally right.

*The Actual Consequences are irrelevant to the moral value of an action.*

Good intentions are all that is relevant to Kantian judgment of the moral worth of some action. Of course, if we cannot compare the consequences in order to determine which actions are better than others how can we judge the relative merits of the maxims of the actions?

### **The Universalizability Criterion**

What makes an action right or wrong is supposed to derive from reason itself, not from our desires or inclinations, or any consequences. What Kant asks of any action is whether we can even form a universal maxim of that action.

Any action is immoral (wrong) if we cannot form a universal maxim from that action.

Note. This is not simply the requirement that we must want everyone to do the same action as us (universalizing our action). That is, in effect, the *Golden Rule*. Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.

Kant's requirement is much stronger. An act is immoral if it is *impossible* to for everyone to follow the maxim. Or at least, it must be impossible for you *to will* that everyone do the same as you. (this is more than the contingent claim that you do not want people to do it, it must be impossible logically to will that and still want to perform the action.)

The idea here is that moral laws are like mathematical or logical rules. Immoral actions are irrational. Consider how a hypothetical imperative must be rational.

**R1:** In order to make an omelet first throw away all of your eggs.

That rule is irrational, since doing that you will never be able to make an omelet. Kant thought this test could also be applied categorical imperatives (moral laws). There must be the same kind of irrationality of trying universalize immoral actions. Moral actions then are ones which we can universalize without contradiction or irrationality.

### **Kant's Examples:**

1. Suicide (Imagine a person who wants to end her life)

Maxim: "End your life if continuing it would produce more pain than pleasure."

Problem: If everything ended its life when there seemed no promise of pleasure, then no thing would ever live long enough to reach that stage. [Imagine a world of suicidal beings, it would soon be devoid of life, and the very prospect of ending suffering would be a moot point.]

(This duty seems rather weak, if we really had no prospect of pleasure and much prospect of pain, perhaps it would not be so odd to recommend suicide)

2. Promise Keeping. (Imagine a person who wants to renege on a promise)

Maxim: "Everyone makes insincere promises"

Problem: If everyone made these false promises, then no one would ever believe a promise. A promise, false or not, would be worthless. So no one would trust you, and your attempt to gain from the false promise would fail. [In order to get what you want from a false promise, the other person must think that you will keep your promise. So making a false promise is inconsistent with willing that no one ever keep promises.]

(This duty seems more plausible. It does seem impossible to universalize this idea. In fact most people really just want an exemption from the duty to keep promises, they do not want to free everyone of that duty.)

3. Developing Talents (Imagine a person who wants to be an underachiever.)

Maxim: "No one ever develop his or her talents."

Problem: It is conceivable that everyone do this. But it is not something that we would force on ourselves. Having had talents, we know that developing them can be rewarding and we could not will that we would never do that. [Note that this duty is somewhat weaker than the duty to keep promises. Kant thought that perfect duties were ones that relied on the impossibility of conceiving the universalization of the maxim, imperfect duties (though duties nonetheless) were things that we could not will to happen (though we could imagine it)]

(Again it seem plausible to reject this idea, I do not think it impossible to imagine it, can I will it? Well no, but that is because it would be a pretty brutish life, but that is thinking in terms of universal consequences (it is not clear that such reasoning is improper, remember Kant rejects reasoning from the actual consequences of your particular actions.)

4. Helping those in need. (Imagine a person who wants to avoid being charitable)

Maxim: "Never help those in need."

Problem: Again we can imagine a world where no one helped anyone in need. But we could not will that the world be like that. For we know that if we were in need we would want such assistance. [this is an imperfect duty to others].

(This duty seems like the last one. We wouldn't want to live in such a world, but we can imagine it.)

### The Problem of the Universalizability Criterion

There can be many different maxims embodied by any particular act. On one reading that maxim may not be easily universalized, but on another it can be. Consider the suicide case. Sure I wouldn't will that whenever one meets with adversity one commits suicide, but when there is no prospect of relief, well that seems different. Consider another example

Ex. Suppose you are on the run from a psychotic kill who means to kill you and himself. He tells me that as soon as he finds you he will shoot you both. Suppose I know where you are. He asks me if I know where you are and I say "no."

Maxim 1. "Always lie when it is convenient"

Maxim 2. "Lie only to help another?"

Maxim 3. "Lie to prevent some greater wrongdoing."

Maxim 4. "Lie to prevent someone from injuring himself."

The problem is my action fits all four of the action (and probably many more).

Recall how a single token can fit many different types.

I think Kant is right that moral laws should be Universal. However, as Sober notes, it is difficult to know what is the maxim of any particular action, or to determine whether that action is universalizable. Kant may have been optimistic about whether moral truths (or scientific truths) could be determined through *a priori* reason (reason alone).

**Resolving the ambiguity problem:** Assuming some self knowledge we can at least know our own maxims of action (our intentions anyway.) So even if we cannot know with certainty the moral status of someone else's actions, we can know our own. And that is primary thing for Kant.

### **Treating People as Ends in Themselves**

One of the other formulations of the categorical imperative is that we must treat people as means to our own ends. Kant thought that just as we could not will ourselves to be just the tools (or means) to someone else's ends (goals, purposes), we should not ever use other people in that way. The argument goes something like this (abridged version)

My ends are important  
 My ends are important because they come from my free will.  
 Others ought to respect my ends because they are important  
 I am relevantly the same as other people (they also have free will)  
I ought to respect the ends of others  
 I should not treat people as means to my ends.

Consequences of this theory: (try to reason why these are consequences)

1. Do not treat people as instruments to some social good (no scapegoating)
2. Do not enslave people
3. Do not ignore human rights because it is inconvenient to respect them
4. Do not deceive people (lie or mislead) even for their own good.
5. Hold people responsible for their actions (good and bad) punish the guilty, release the innocent.

### **Review Questions:**

1. Hume thought that all actions required some desire (or passion) which was itself not rational but rather natural. Kant thought that actions according to moral law were purely rational and needed no desire to motivate them. (But...)
2. They are both universal in impersonal. They must apply to all similar situations (universality) and they make no reference to a particular person or place/time.
3. Utilitarianism judges an action by the consequences it produces (happiness, satisfaction). Kantian thought judges the action in terms of the rationality of the maxim it embodies. It focuses on the rules and motives (Deontological).
4. No. That principle says that we should act in a way that we can imagine, or will, that the maxim of our action becomes a universal law of behavior. (It focuses more on the possibility, or possibility of endorsing, the law, than whether the consequences themselves would be desirable)
5. If no one kept promises, then making a promise would be unintelligible. No one would ever believe a promise or expect another to keep it. So the very prospect of deceiving someone that way would be gone. I think it works. But it is difficult to imagine a world where no one ever lied (not about haircuts, or leg fatness, or where the Jews are being hidden from the Nazis)
6. (a) Everyone should move to the left side of the boat. Or  
 (b) Everyone should move to positions which give the boat stability?  
 (b) seems more plausible, but the maxim is ambivalent. If all actions contain such ambiguity, how can we resolve any moral question?

### Lecture 33: Aristotle on the Good Life

*Theory of the Right:* Principles of *obligation* and *prohibition* (what you must and must not do)

*Theory of the Good:* Principles about what constitutes a "good life".

Aristotle attempted to create a Theory of the Good. It provided a roadmap for a *Good Life*. Aristotle thought that all things had a function (or *Telos*) (e.g. the function of a knife is to cut, the function of an acorn is to grow into a Oak (and produce more acorns)).

#### What is a good X?

Something is a good X, (a good token of some type) if it performs its function well.

ex. A good knife is sharp and strong so that it cuts cleanly and easily.

ex. A good goalie, is a person who is able to stop the ball from getting into the goal.

#### Good is not a conjunctive property

Unlike red or large, Good doesn't add a quality to some thing, it describes the way something is that thing. A good wine is not both a wine and good. But a red wine is both a wine and red.

If a good thing is something which performs its function well, then a good life would be a life that performed the human function well.

What is the telos (function) of a person?

We are goal directed beings. The goal of all human activity is happiness. (C.f. Mill's arguments to the same point). A good life then is one that is happy.

(We are not simply biological creatures because we have free will and intelligence)

#### The Capacity to Reason

The function of something is one thing that helps distinguish that thing from all others.

We share many activities with animals and plants, as well as inorganic things like rocks. (we both fall to the earth if unsupported). So the specific human function is one that only humans do, this seems to be reason (although the Gods also reason).

If reasoning is the human function, then to live a good life qua human, one must develop and utilize the rational part of a person. (Note a person could live a good life qua animal, by eating, sleeping, mating etc.. but that would not be a good human life).

*Practical Reasoning:* Means/End reasoning (what must I do to get X) [*phronesis*]

*Theoretical Reasoning:* Disinterested search for knowledge [*theoria*]

Practical reasoning is not desirable for itself, since it aims at some other good, which is either subordinate to or equal to theoretical reasoning. Theoretical reasoning by contrast while beneficial for other activities is desirable in itself.

Therefore the life of contemplation (theoretical study) is the best for humans.

#### Happiness is not subjective state.

Happiness (eudaimonia) is a state of being, one of actions, that constitutes a flourishing.

A happy acorn is one which is living the good life for an acorn. The happy person is one living the good life for a person. Simply believing you are happy (or pleased) is not enough. That said, a life with no pleasure would hardly be flourishing.

The Good Life has many constituents:

Aristotle goes on at great length showing what makes up a good life. It is not simply contemplating. Why? We are not purely intellectual beings (like the Gods) we are animals, and we are social animals (Aristotle described people as *Social Animals*). So we must tend to our animal and godlike parts. (He actually divides the soul into several parts: nutritive, appetitive, locomotive, perceptive and rational. Each of these has needs and must be taking into account somewhat if the person is going to have a good life. Still, all of those other needs are secondary (instrumental) to our one primary function to reason. So to the degree that we can engage in contemplation we should.

### **Arguments for Rational Activity being best for man.**

1. Activities that require more discrimination are superior to simple tasks. (Reasoning is very complicated, and requires lots of discriminations, therefore reason is the best activity).
2. Activities that are more independent are better than those dependent on outside things. Reason can be done without any tools, by yourself, in any place. Most other activities require materials, other's help or the like.

### **Virtues and the Doctrine of the Mean**

Aristotle thought that the development of a good character, one that would enable one to have a good life, in both the pure human ways (reasoning etc..) and in the other ways (animal, organism, etc..). Such a character required the virtues. These virtues are typically represented as the mean between two extremes.

Ex. Courage is the mean between cowardice and fearlessness. (Neither being desirable)

Ex. Friendliness is the mean between hostility and obsequiousness.

Note: Some *vices* seem to have no mean. (There is no proper amount of murderousness)

### **Problems:**

1. How can we measure the scale (does it vary? Is it the middle?)  
Aristotle says that the mean is the "right amount whatever that is.
2. Why is the mean good? Is it simply because it is in the middle? That seems weird, or is it because of the consequences? (Utilitarianism?)  
Is it OK to say that the virtues are conducive to living a good life?

### **Defining a good X differs from saying what is good for X.**

Aristotle suggests that what makes something good is that it is good at its function. It is something else to say that it is good for the thing to do its function well.

Just because we, as creatures, are good at reasoning, does not mean that reasoning is the best thing for us (the lemming best able to throw its over a cliff is not necessary doing what is best for it.)

Just because we are pretty good at reasoning doesn't mean we should devote ourselves to reasoning, we must already believe that we ought to be good reasoners for that to be true.

### **Why Reason?**

Humans have many unique activities from charity to genocide, why should the fact that something is unique to us make it our function? And even though it is unique why pick one unique thing out of all the uniquenesses we have?

Doesn't picking Reason automatically lead to prejudice among people, those less intelligent or more able at athletics, business, art or other pursuits are less good.

**Some reasons to prefer Reason:** (4 and 5 are not in Sober's text)

1. Reason is unique to humans (of all animals, though we share it with the gods)
2. Reason involves mastering complex things)
3. Reason is the most independent of all activities
4. Reason has the best objects (the things you reason about, especially with theoretical reason are the gods, and the forms, they are universal and eternal. Hence they are better.
5. While studying we are more like Gods than men.

**Virtue Ethics beyond Aristotle.**

Aristotle was writing for 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE gentlemen. Perhaps his views were affected by that bias (he could not imagine happy barbarians, children or women).

There are more modern versions of Virtue Ethics. (MacIntyre *After Virtue*).

Basic ideas of modern virtue ethics;

1. Actions are judged in virtue of the elements of character they embody.
2. Set of virtues may vary depending on "the moral tradition" that one is a part of (so it appears to be a conventionalist theory).
3. Can explain some intuitions not easily explained by other theories. (Environmental ethics in particular)
4. Virtue ethics is considered more rich (than the alternatives) since it focuses on questions that we really face (not hypotheticals, not extreme cases of evil or good).

**Review Questions:**

1. A theory of right tells us our prohibitions and obligations. A theory of good tells us what is best (for us) to do or how to live.
2. According to Aristotle, they both fulfill their functions well. A good pizza is tasty and nutritious, a good dancer can perform the moves in an artistic and competent fashion.
3. Reason is the unique feature of man, so the truly human happiness would come from its development.
4. Avoid excess and deficiency. No. The mean is the right amount which may be in the middle, a lot, or none at all (courage, kindness, murder).
5. Being a good human meant living a good life. That means fulfilling our function as humans, since the human function is to reason (plus our animal and living thing functions), a good person is one that lives a life of reason. By doing this we would flourish, and that is sort of goodness Aristotle means by happiness.

## Plato Readings: Euthyphro

A funny thing happened on the way to court.

What is piety?

Do the gods love the pious, or are people pious because the gods love them?

Features: Socrates is the student. Euthyphro is the teacher.

Step 1. Euthyphro claims to have excellent knowledge of Piety. (this justifies his prosecution of his father).

Step 2. Euthyphro claims that the stories of Hesiod and others are true. Zeus bound Ouranus, etc.. The gods have terrible battles

Step 3. What are the pious actions? What makes them pious?

Step 4. Euthyphro claims that what is dear to the gods is pious.

Step 5. But the gods are in discord. They disagree about important matters such as justice, beauty, etc... (not simple facts of the matter)

Step 6. So, what is dear to one god is hated by another.

Step 7. Thus what is pious is impious.

Step 8. Euthyphro: But all would agree that an unjust killing must be punished.

Step 9. So whatever is dear to all the gods is pious and whatever is hated by all the gods if impious.

Step 10. Is it pious because the gods love it, or is it loved because it is pious?

Step 10a. Is it visible because someone sees it, or does someone see it because it is visible. Is it dessert because someone eats it last, or do we eat it last because it is dessert?

Step 11. So it is loved by the gods because it is pious.

Step 12. But what is it to be pious?

Step 13. Is all that is pious of necessity just?

Step 14. All that is pious is just (piety is a subset of *justice*)

Step 14a. Pious    Just, Not Pious    Just

Step 15. The pious is the part of the Just concerned with the gods.

Step 16. So the pious aims at the good of the gods? Pious actions better the gods?

    Piety is service to the gods (slaves to masters)

Step 17. Prayer and Sacrifice are the sorts of things pleasing to the gods.

Step 18. Piety is knowledge of how to give to and beg from the gods.

Step 19. Piety is akin to trading with the gods .

Step 20. But our actions do no benefit to the gods, it only pleases them.

Step 21. Piety is what is pleasing to the gods. (*circular reasoning*)

Step 22. So maybe Euthyphro is not so knowledgeable about this stuff after all.

So what is piety?

## Readings from Mill: Defense of Utilitarianism/On Liberty

### Chapter 1.

Ethics is not a subject that lends itself to proof. Why? Because the first principles of any theory are incapable of being proved (including math, logic, science etc..) The first principle of Ethics is what is the *Greatest Good* (summum bonum)? So rather than direct proof, we need to see what reasons we have in support of a view and respond to possible objections.

### Chapter 2.

The *Greatest Happiness Principle*: "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." (487)

Happiness is pleasure and the absence of pain.

Unhappiness is pain and absence of pleasure.

Higher vs. Lower Pleasures:

We should consider both the quality of pleasure as well as the quantity.

Test of which pleasure is better than another: "Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference... that is the more desirable preference." (488) [Note: that choice, or preference must not be affected by moral considerations, otherwise it will be tainted.]

Ex. If we prefer Opera to Gangsta Rap because we think Gangsta Rap is divisive or encourages civil unrest, but otherwise prefer Gangsta Rap (for the amount of 'raw' pleasure it gives) then we should say Gangsta Rap gives the higher pleasure.

*Evidence*: the better endowed beings would not sacrifice their higher endowments for a life of lesser endowments.

"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." (489)

*Temptation*: Lower pleasures satisfy quickly (though ebb quickly as well). They are also easily made into addictions.

### Objections:

1. Utilitarianism is selfish since it requires us to promote our own happiness.

*Reply*: It requires us to be disinterested in judging what produces the most happiness and benevolent since we must promote the most happiness for all.

2. Utilitarian ethics is too demanding since it requires to promote happiness at the expense of our own.

*Reply*: All ethical theories require some sacrificing. But Utilitarianism does not say that aiming to promote the most happiness is the best way to produce it. It might be, and is likely, that promoting your own happiness (as well as your family's and friends') is the best way to promote the general happiness.

3. Utilitarianism is too disinterested and general, it does not allow for our feelings toward individuals (loyalties, hatreds.)

*Reply*: True. Utilitarians do not judge acts by who performs them. But that is a virtue rather than problem of Utilitarianism, no favoritism.

4. Utilitarianism is Godless, since the source of goodness is happiness not divine law.

*Reply:* This realist conception is compatible with God's existence and command to do good.

5. Utilitarianism leads to expediency, catering to interests at the expense of morality.

*Reply:* Utilitarianism does not sacrifice right for some particular group's interests, but rather defines the right as whatever is in the interest of the whole (or largest group.).

6. Calculating the utility of one act versus another would be too time-consuming to make this theory practical.

*Reply:* True, so one needs rules, maxims etc.. in order to live morally. But those rules and maxims must (and can) themselves be justified by appeal to the general principle (Promote the most good).

"There is no difficulty in proving any ethical standard whatever to work ill, if we suppose universal idiocy to be conjoined with it." (495)

### Chapter 3:

What makes a person be moral?

External Sanction: We will punish you if you act wrongly.

Internal Sanction: You will feel bad (guilty, shameful) if you act wrongly.

Society is obligated to teach people that internal sanction as well as enforce the external sanctions.

There is nothing contra Utilitarianism if neither Sanction originates in us naturally.

### Chapter 4:

This is basically the proof Sober addresses for happiness being the ultimate good.

Note: Virtues are not inherently desirable. We must encourage people to desire virtue to feel pride and shame based on how they act.

### On Liberty

The central principle of liberty proposes that coercion (even government coercion) is only appropriate under certain times: "the only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." (510)

"Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign." (510)

It is permissible to coerce and punish people for their behavior in the *public sphere* (where their action directly affect and can cause harm to others), but not in the *private sphere* (where the thoughts of the individual are concerned).

Human Liberty consists of first: liberty of thought and feeling, including the liberty of expressing and publishing opinions (as the latter is needed for the former); and second: liberty of tastes and pursuits; thirdly: the freedom to unite and meet as groups.

*Justification of Liberty:* Mill does not try to justify this right with appeal to any inherent rights or liberties. It is justified by the principle of utility alone.

1. Stopping someone from hurting another clearly promotes the most happiness.
2. But all other forms of coercion seem to reduce pleasure rather than promote it.

**Liberty itself promotes happiness:***Liberty of Thought and Discussion.*

Protection against a tyrannical government (promotes pleasure by preventing tyranny)

Censorship robs people (now and in the future) of opinions which;

If true: censorship prevents us from correcting errors (that undoubtedly cause pains)

If false: censorship prevents us from being able to more clearly see the truth in contrast to the false opinion. (Allowing false expression allows us to see how it is wrong, rather than simply preventing us from seeing it at all.)

*Liberty of Individuality.*

People should be free in acts as well (so long as they do not harm others)

If they act rightly (or meritoriously) then we and they we benefit from their exercise.

Stopping them reduces their pleasure and the sum's as well.

If they act wrongly (in private), then we have them as an example (an experiment in lifestyles gone awry), and we can clearly see the error of their ways. (If we simply forbid such actions, the wrong acts will seem exciting and desirable because they are forbidden).

Developing our own talents and doing what we enjoy is how we best find our own pleasure. Trusting people to do those actions which give them the most pleasure is the most efficient means to promote that pleasure, deciding what will make everyone happy and forcing them to do it, is not practical nor efficient.

## Readings on Kant: Ethics founded on Reason

"It is impossible to conceive of anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will." (520)

### Some things that are qualifiedly good:

*Talents* (intelligence, wit) good if used for the right reasons but bad if misused.

*Temperament* (tenderness) good unless abused by others or the cause of some wrong action or lack of action (being too gentle to punish the murderer)

*Gifts of Fortune* (Power, wealth, honor, **HAPPINESS**) again good in some cases but possibly misused can make people unwise, overly bold or otherwise do wrong (too happy to notice the suffering of others)

*Virtues* (courage, thrift) a brave thief or scoundrel makes evil out of some allegedly good character trait.

### The Good Will and its Results:

The Good Will is good in itself. Even if fruitless and useless (bungling, and inept) the good will still "shines like a jewel."

Note: the good will is not dependent on its consequences.

### Duty:

*Acts Contrary to Duty:* Against the moral law

*Acts From Duty:* In accord with the moral law, and without any immediate inclination to do the act. Done for the sake of duty and no other reason.

*Acts in accord with Duty:* the agent wants (or has interests) to perform the act, and it is an act that duty commands.

(See note on Lecture 32 for Kant's examples of perfect and imperfect Duties)

### Imperatives in General

If the Will were determined solely by Reason then we should be infallibly good. We would always act in accordance with the laws. But we have impulses and nature desires which impede or intercept Reason and influence the will.

An objective principle for the will is a command or what he calls an **Imperative**.

*All imperatives express an 'ought'.*

(See notes on Hypothetical Imperatives and Categorical Imperatives in Lecture 32.)

Three kinds of imperatives:

*Technical* (concerned with art, or skill)

*Pragmatic* (concerned with well-being)

*Moral* (concerned with free conduct as such)

Categorical imperatives must be a priori. They must be unconditional and not dependent on any factors apart from their own rationality.

**Different Formulations of The Categorical Imperative***Universal Law*

"Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

*Law of Nature*

"Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a Universal Law of Nature"

*Treat people as Ends in themselves*

"Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."

*Autonomy:* Reason, when not determined by outside forces, determines the will. A person is free when not determined by those outside forces.

*Heteronomy* When our actions are not self-determined but under the control of outside influence. A heteronymous person has no self-control.

*Legislator in the Kingdom of Ends*

"A rational being belongs to the kingdom of ends as a member, when, although he makes its universal laws, he is also himself subject to those laws. He belongs to the kingdom of ends as its head (legislator), when as maker of the laws he is himself subject to the will of no other."

"The morality lies in the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will—that is, to a possible making of universal law by means of its maxim. An action which is compatible with the autonomy of the will is permitted, on which does not harmonize with it is forbidden."

## Readings on Aristotle: Morality and Human Nature

### Goods Correspond to Ends:

All action is aimed at (has an end = telos) some good.

Either aimed at for itself, or aimed at to reach some further end.

If there is some good which is the end of all actions (an ultimate end) then that is the best good.

The good for all people is obviously better than the good for one person. (So Political Science is more important than Ethics)

### The degree of precision in ethics/poli-sci

We will aim at what holds true usually, and is good for the most part.

Not useful for the young or poorly educated. (1095a)

What is the highest good?

What is the (Final) cause of all the other goods?

Begin from the common beliefs. (endoxa)

Three most favored lives: gratification, politics, (virtue), study

The gratification life is slavish (like grazing animals)

The life for honor is superficial

The virtuous life is esteemed but paradoxical

(the sleeping virtuous man, or the tortured virtuous)

The life of study might be it.

Ends pursued only for some other end are less complete.

Ends pursued for themselves and some other end are more complete

But ends pursued for themselves alone are the most complete and choice worthy

An end that is always choice worthy and also choice worthy in itself is unconditionally complete..

### Happiness seems the only end which satisfies the criteria.

It is choice worthy in itself.

It is self sufficient (no adding of stuff will make one better off than happiness)

Maybe a look at the function of a human can help us find out what that is.

We are not mere grazers, or desirers, or perceivers, we are thinkers.

The Human good is the activity of the soul expressing virtue.

The good person enjoys good actions (we are not forced to do good) cf. 10099a 15-30.

*Happiness is a certain sort of activity of the soul expressing virtue.*

We share some virtues with animals (those parts of our souls)

There are different kinds of virtues.

Virtue of Thought: From teaching and experience

Virtue of Character: habituation (repetition)

Virtues are not from nature (or against it)

The same actions are the causes of virtue and vice

Moderation. Neither excess nor deficiency (1104a 10-20)

But not only actions, also the thoughts behind the actions (pleasure and pain)

Three objects of choice and opposites:

Fine	Shameful
Expedient	Harmful
Pleasant	Painful

Puzzle: How can we become good if we are not good already?

*Virtue is a state* (not feelings, or capacities)

Virtue is a mean, it aims at the intermediate.

It is easy to miss a target (there are dozens of ways) but only one way to hit it.

The moderate amount is subjective, dependent on the person.

**Virtue** then is:

- (a) a state that decides
- (b) consisting in a mean
- (c) the mean relative to us
- (d) which is defined by reference to reason
- (e) i.e. to the reason by reference to which the intelligent person would define it .

Not every action has a mean (if defined by their baseness) (murder, adultery, etc..)

There is no mean of excess or deficiency, nor is there an excess or deficiency of a mean.

**Catalog of Virtues:**

Courage, Temperance, Liberality, Magnificence, Ambition, Pride, Truthfulness, Friendliness, Patience, Modesty, Justice

Justice: Is complete virtue to the highest degree because it is the complete exercise of complete virtue. Insofar as virtue is related to another it is justice.

**How do we decide what is the moderate amount?**

Whatever is determined by good or excellent reason.

*Relations between Means and Extremes*

The Mean is opposed to both extremes.

Extremes are more opposed to each other than to the mean.

One extreme can be more opposed to the mean than the other.

*Practical Advice on Ways to Achieve the Mean*

Since it is hard to hit the target, choose the lesser evil by avoiding the most opposed extreme.

Pay attention to what you are inclined to do, since it is often the lesser evil and one we may not notice sliding into doing.

Be careful with pleasures as we are already biased in favor of them. They may lead us to vice.

**Happiness is not a state.**

It is an activity

It is choice worthy in itself.

This is the character of virtuous action

(so Happiness is the living virtuously)

(Not pleasure, because the pleasures of people vary)

The activity expressing virtues most choice worthy to the excellent person, and hence is most honorable and pleasant.

Relaxation (and hence not amusement) is not the end of action because we use relaxation to prepare for activity.

**Complete happiness is the activity of study.**

Understanding is the supreme element in us.

The objects of understanding are the supreme objects of knowledge.

One can study more than anything else

It is self-sufficient (given the necessities Study can be solitary)

Has little need of supplies

The other virtues are choice worthy for some further end.

We live a life of study not so much as a human, but as a divine being.

Each person seems to be his understanding. (Is this true?)

The life of virtue is happy in a secondary way, a human virtue.

The gods are exceedingly happy, and all they do is study.

***SO ENJOY STUDYING!***