

Ethics/Morality

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What is morality/ethics

- In deciding what to do, or in evaluating what other do:
 - We can take our individual perspective, focusing on our particular interests (self-interest) or
 - We can be motivated by the belief that an action is right, regardless of how it affect our interest (morality/ethics)
- Positive (conventional) morality: the moral rules and principles that are accepted in a society
 - Can there be bad positive morality?
- Critical morality
 - The morality that is correct, rational, just (maybe since considers all individual and social interests at stake giving each one the due significance (harms to other, impacts on environment, etc.)
- We can criticise positive morality based on our critical morality: we may be right or wrong (e.g., feminist critiques against patriarchy, nazi criticism against being compassionate)

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Ethics vs metaethics

- Normative ethics is concerned with determining what is morally required, how one ought to behave
- Metaethics is concerned with is the study of the nature, scope, and meaning of moral judgement
 - Can ethical judgments be true or false?
 - What is the difference between
 - I prefer vegetables to meat
 - I ought to eat more vegetables to be more healthy
 - We ought to become vegetarians
 - Do they correspond to some facts in the world?
 - What facts make it true that we ought to become vegetarian? Or that we ought not to harm others?
 - Does ethic pertain to rationality of or to feelings
 - David Hume: is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my **finger**. Morality is a matter of sentiment (of impartial spectators)
 - Emmanuel Kant: we can know what is moral through our reason
 - David Ross: we can know what is more through our intuition

Absolutism vs Relativism

- There is a single true ethics: when two people express incompatible ethical judgement one of them must be wrong
- Ethical judgements are always relative to particular frameworks of attitudes
 - A statement such as “abortion is morally permissible” or “adultery is prohibited” or “killing a willing person is wrong” may be true under some framework and wrong under some other
 - An analogy: as in mechanics, judgements are relative to the frame of reference (a body may be moving relative to one frame and stationary relatively to another), so is in morality

Morality and disagreement

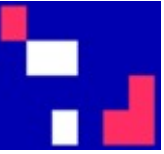
- Morality is a place for widespread disagreement
 - Abortion
 - Migration
 - Capital punishment
 - Humanitarian wars
 - ...
- But there is something on which we may agree?
 - It is wrong to kill innocent people?
 - It is (usually) wrong to lie?
 - It is (usually) wrong to harm people?

Pro-tanto and all-things-considered moral judgement

- Many moral prescriptions are defeasible. They state general propositions that are susceptible of exceptions.
 - We should not lie
 - What if a lie would save a person's life?
- Do we want a robotic agent to take its duties as defeasible?
- An act is a ***prima facie* duty** when there is a moral reason in favor of doing the act, but one that can be outweighed by other (moral) reasons.
- David Ross: "If I have promised to meet a friend at a particular time for some trivial purpose, I should certainly think myself justified in breaking my engagement if by doing so I could prevent a serious accident or bring relief to the victims of one."

Morality and other normative systems

- Law
 - Does positive or critical morality include all laws enforced by the state? Does it include only such laws?
- Religion
 - Does critical morality include all and only what has been commanded by God
 - Did God command something because it was moral, or did anything become moral for having been commanded by God (rationalism vs voluntarism). What about Abraham and Isaac.
 - Are atheists necessarily immoral or amoral? Is an atheistic society necessarily more immoral than a religious society?
- Tradition
- Self interest:
 - may morality and self interest collapse: should we do all and only what fits our personal interest (Gige's ring)



Thanks for your attention!

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