## Introduction to Morality and Ethics: February 5th, 2024

**Values** – The foundation for your ability to judge between right and wrong. Encompass deep-rooted beliefs and may differ from person to person and group to group (e.g., "how children should interact with those older than them and vice versa?”)

**Morals** – the actual system of beliefs that emerge out of your core values. Specific and context-driven “rules” that govern your behavior. (e.g., “It’s wrong to cuss out your parents.”)

**Ethics** – Morals in action. Ethics enact the system you have developed with your moral code. Ethics is also a broader concept, concerning itself not just with the individual moral actions, but the rights, responsibilities, use of language, what it means to live an ethical life, how moral decisions are made, etc.

**Survey Results:**

* Surprises
* Affirmed what you already thought
* Contradictions/Inconsistencies
* **Actual results:**
  + 23% agree it’s better to be successful, 77% disagree and think it’s better not be moral
  + 83% think abortion is moral, 17% don’t
  + 46% agree w death penalty, 54% disagree
  + 63% doctor-assisted suicide is acceptable, 37% disagree
  + 92% think AI work is dishonest, 8% disagree
  + 86% agree pre-marital sex is okay, 14% disagree
  + 93% LGBTQ is okay, 7% say not OK
  + Baby outside of marriage
  + 84% think alcohol is morally acceptable
  + 48% agree with drug use
  + 71% judging people’s actions and behavior is morally acceptable
  + 71% morality is relative

# February 8th, 2024 – Ring of Gyges by Plato

**Historical Context:**

* **Socrates:** (469 – 399 BC)
  + Wrote nothing, yet still is considered one of the philosophers who forever changed how philosophy itself was conceived
  + All info about him is second-hand and disputed
  + Eschewed pursuit of fame, wealth, honors, political power: embraced a life of poverty
  + One of the few who was “guided by an inner voice,” or a singular God
  + Not like the other teachers; other teachers told their students want to think, Socrates posed questions and taught them *how* to think
* **Plato:** (428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BC)
  + Socrates’ student: Plato idolized him
    - This is why many of the MCs in Plato’s work are Socrates

**Discussion (Ring of Gyges):**

* **Key Idea #1:**
  + Glaucon summarizes 3 types of good at the start of excerpt
    - Good #1 – “…a kind of good that we would choose to have not because we desire its consequences, but because **we delight in it for its own sake**” (357 b-c).
    - Good #2 – “…a kind of good **we like both for its own sake** **and for what comes out of it**” (357 c)
    - Good #3 – “…a 3rd form of good…we would say that they are drudgery but beneficial to us; and we would not choose to have them for themselves but for the **sake of the wages and whatever else comes out of them** (357 c – d).
      * Example: eating vegetables
* **Key Idea #2:** Where does Socrates place justice
* Where does Glaucon place justice?
  + **Glaucon:** Justice is in category 3 – humanity would do whatever they want to do to make themselves happy, regardless of morality
  + **Socrates:** Justice is in category 2 – (both for its sake and for what comes out of it)
* **Why they’re having this convo?**
  + Define + origin of justice and morality
  + Argue that people don’t naturally want to be justice/moral
  + Being happy in live = quicker path is through mortality
* **Key Point #3:** Glaucon’s definition of justice (morality/ethical behavior) on 358e – 359a:
  + **“They say that doing injustice is naturally good, and suffering injustice bad, but that the bad in suffering injustice far exceeds the good in doing it;** so that, when they do injustice to one another and suffer it and taste of both, it seems profitable – to those who are not able to escape the one and choose the other – to set down a compact among themselves neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. And from there they began to set down their own laws and compacts and to name what the law commands lawful and just. And this, then, is the genesis and being of justice.
  + **The least ideal life:** to suffer injustice without the ability to retaliate
  + **The most ideal life:** to commit injustice without consequence
  + **Justice/Morality:** compromise between least and most ideal
* **Key Point #4:** What does the shepherd do after he acquires the magical ring of Gyges? What do each of these pursuits suggest about human nature? IF someone had a ring like this and chose NOT to use it, what would people say about this person, according to Glaucon?
  + **The allegory:** A shepherd finds an invisibility ring, kills the king, sleeps with the Queen, becomes new king.
    - **Shepherd**: average person
    - **His goal**: throne, queen
    - **Ends**: happiness
    - **Means**: Ring of Gyges
  + If someone had this ring and chose not to use it, Glaucon would think that that person is *foolish*; it’s a missed opportunity!
* **Recap of Glaucon’s Argument:**
  + Why would anyone choose to be a perfectly ethical person instead of a perfectly unethical person if all the egoistic benefits of being ethical were removed? He wouldn’t…the best life of all lives is the life of the unjust person whom people believe to be just
  + Therefore…justice/morality is a mean or compromise between an unattainable preference (committing injustice without repercussions) and a safeguard against others’ committing injustice against us.
  + Nobody in his right mind would be just/ethical just for the sake of justice/ethics. We do it because there are tangible consequences that come from being just/ethical.
  + Morality is a means to achieve one’s ideal life (so you should be moral for self interest – egoism)

# February 13th, 2024 – Why are we Moral – Peter Singer?

**Egoism: An ethical theory that treats self-interest as the foundation of morality. This perspective argues that people only do things out of self-interest.** Unlike utilitarianism (which is to maximize overall pleasure), egoism focuses on maximizing individual pleasure.

**Glaucon is an Egoist:**

* Because he thinks….
* Morality is a drudgery that we only conform to because there are tangible benefits to it
* Morality is just a compromise that sits between 2 possibilities… 1) doing whatever we want without consequences – unrealistic… 2) suffering injustice w/ recompense (unpreferred)
* Moral man would become the immoral man if he could (give him the ring and he would behave no differently – unless he is mad or foolish)

**Why act Morally?**

* **Glaucon**: It is the state we’ve come to accept between ideal life (to act irresponsible and with impunity) and the life we fear (suffering injustice without a chance of reprisal) – we only do it because it serves our own interest
* **Singer**: To answer the above question in a way that can satisfy even the most skeptical critic

**Discussion:**

* Guilt has something to do with being happy
* Assumptions in first 3 paragraphs:
  + In general, humans have benevolent or sympathetic leanings that make us care about others
  + In general, humans have an innate conscience that gives rise to feelings like guilt and remorse when we know we’ve committed a wrong
  + Happiness and ethics/morality is directly linked
* **Psychopath –** “Psychiatrists use this term as a label for a person who is asocial, impulsive, egocentric, unemotional, lacking in feelings of remorse, shame or guilt, and apparently unable to form deep and enduring personal relationships”
* **Why do psychopaths pose a challenge to the “you need to be ethical to be happy” theory?**
  + Despite what they are, they seem to enjoy life. They feel no remorse for “wrong” behavior, and if they don’t get caught, there’s no reason to think they’re not happy. Their existence appear to discount the idea that sympathy and kindness are necessary for one to be happy
* Thinks that psychopaths live largely in the present
  + Key Analogy: Like children watching a Shakespearean play, psychopaths are bored because they lack the aforementioned emotions that would allow them to value things most people value: love, authentic, enduring connections, success at some purposeful career.
* **Why Singer thinks that we don’t need to believe that psychopaths are truly happy:** Thinks psychopath behavior can be explained as a response to the meaninglessness of their lives – only have capacity for short term interests
* Does life have meaning if you are not religious?
  + No, if there is no God; however, you can make your own meaning.
* **Key Concept: The Paradox of Hedonism (362 – 363 RC)**
  + Hedonism: the pursuit of pleasure
  + The Paradox of Hedonism: IF you aim for happiness, you often fail to find it, while others find happiness in pursuing altogether different goals.
    - **What the TPOH Suggests:** Psychopaths cannot be happy because all they are seeking is pleasure
* **Take-Home Message (362 – 363 RC – 364 – 365 LC)** 
  + Ethics is a goal you can never fully reach. There is always room to be a better person
  + Psychopath:
  + Regular Egoist (Selfish Person)
  + Reflective Person

## February 22nd, 2024: Ruth Benedict: A Defense of Moral Relativism

* “By turns their answers fit my needs. And yet, because I am I and not any one of them, they can none of them be completely mine”
  + Various cultures can bring one thing to her to fit her desires
* **Conventional Ethical Relativism:** The belief that there are no universal moral standards and that each society or culture determines its own moral code.
* **Ethical Subjectivism:** This perspective is similar to conventional ethical relativism but takes things further- the belief that there are no universal moral standards and that **each individual** must determine their own moral code.
* **Key Passages:** “In the higher cultures the standardization of custom and belief over a couple of continents has given a false sense of the inevitability of the particular forms that have gained currency, and we need to turn to a wider survey in order to check the conclusions we hastily base upon this near-universality of familiar customs”
  + **“False sense of inevitability”:** We easily assume that our beliefs are easy to believe and that everyone can understand them (and that they’re fundamentally correct)
  + **“Wider Survey”:** talk to more people, widen our observations, talk to lesser-known cultures about it.
* **5 major anthropological case studies:**
  + Trance and Catalepsy
  + Homosexuality (times of Plato and Ancient Greeks)
  + Institution of the **berdache** among American Indian tribes.
  + Paranoid practices of a tribe located on an island of NW Melanesia near Fiji
  + The vengeance practices and customs of the Kwakiutl tribe
  + **All of these practices/customs/attitudes – while striking some as “weird or “abnormal” – are examples of the ways in which perspectives about normal/abnormal are culturally determined**
* **Key Passage:** “Mankind has always preferred to say, ‘It is morally good,’ rather than ‘It is habitual,’ and the fact of this preference is matter enough for a critical science of ethics. But historically the 2 phrases are synonymous.
  + **What we thinks as common sense of what is right/wrong**
* **Key Passage:** “most individuals are plastic to the molding force of the society into which they are born” (165 RC)
  + **Free will is a bit of an illusion.** We’re by-products of social conditioning. Or at least you generally make choices within socially prescribed possibilities.

## Louis Pojman – cultural relativism is different from ethical relativism

* Ethical **subjectivism** are expressions of individual preferences/feelings 🡪 no objective moral truth as it varies, morals depend on groups
* Ethical **relativism** says that morals vary across cultures (cultural relativism)
* **Diversity Thesis**: morally right and wrong varies from societies, theres nothing they all accept
* **Dependency Thesis**: moral principals derive validity from cultural acceptance (*acts are right/wrong depending on the nature of the society from which they emanate)*
  + Weak thesis: application of principles is influenced by particular cultural circumstances/predicaments
  + Strong thesis: Principles themselves are determined by cultural context/predicament
* **Ethical Relativism:** No universal moral principals valid for all cultures and people @ all times
* A close-up of a text

  Description automatically generated
* Says that there is still room for objective moral truth based on reflection, evidence, and ethical principles that are beyond cultural or personal bias.

Relativist perspective needs a strong thesis of dependency

Which is chaotic, so there’s no relativism

But weak thesis allows for universal principles like kindness, so there can still be universal morals

## Emerging Principles – March 25th, 2024

* Principle #1 – The right thing and moral thing to do depends on the **consequences** that will result from your action.
  + At the end of the day, better one die so 5 can live
  + **Consequentialist Moral Reasoning**
* Principle #2 – It is wrong – **categorically wrong –** to kill a person, an innocent person, even for the sake of saving 5 lives
  + **Categorical Moral Reasoning**
  + Something is **ALWAYS** wrong – you cannot make exceptions
  + Something **categorically wrong** would be killing someone – you cannot make exceptions, even if you’re saving 1 billion people
  + **Universally wrong – in all categorical cases**
* Most important + influential example of consequential moral reasoning: **Utilitarianism**
  + Doctrine invented by Jeremey Bentham, expounded by John Stuart Mill
* **Categorical Moral Reasoning** 
  + Emmanuel Kant

## John Stuart Mill – March 25th - 26th 2024

* Happiness: **Intended pleasure and absence of pain**
  + You intentionally do something because you think you’re going to get pleasure out of it
* Unhappiness: **Pain + privation (removal) of pleasure**
* Argues for long-term happiness over short-term happiness
* **Key Ideas**:
  + Utilitarianism is a doctrine of morality based on promoting happiness and minimizing pain/suffering
  + Often called “Greatest Happiness Principle”
  + Mill defines happiness as “intended pleasure and the absence of pain”
  + Criticism:
    - It is hard to evaluate what pleasure is more valuable
    - Criticism lodged at utilitarian ethics is that a moral system based on ‘pleasure’
    - Crime and punishment criticized this too since the main character was going to kill a woman no one liked with this idea in mind
    - Something utilitarian could be unjust
    - Kant might say that utilitarianism allows for immoral actions that are not universalizable (like lying)
  + Utilitarian calculation must consider quantity AND quality
* Intelligent people are still happier than simple happiness
* The more ignorant you are, the more likely you are to be happy
* We would not willingly choose “lower forms” of pleasure and happiness if we were truly thoughtful people
  + “It’s better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. Better be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied”

## Queen vs. Dudley and ? - April 23rd, 2024 (Moral Rights & Kant)

Moral Right – Justified Claim on Other People

* Generally accepted by society in general
* Doesn’t need to be codified into law (right for gay people to get married)
* Positive Moral Right vs. Negative Moral Right
  + Positive – When other people are providing something for you
    - Right to Education
    - Right to Housing
    - Right to Healthcare
  + Negative – Inhibition – preventing and restricting action from interference
    - Right to not be killed
    - To privacy
* Immanuel Kant believes that every person has the basic moral right to be treated w **Dignity (right to autonomy)**
  + The right gives individuals the ability to choose for themselves when something involves them
* The granting of choice is how you know that someone is **being treated as an “end” rather than a “means”**
  + Treating them as a whole person instead of as a tool
  + Upholding their dignity should be an end goal
* Kant believes the right to dignity is **so fundamental to morality that it should be upheld in every situation, regardless of the particular circumstances of a given situation**
* Kant believes this because we are all rational beings (capable of reasoning)
* We have capacity of reason, pain, pleasure

**Immanuel Kant:**

* Key Idea #1 (Paragraphs 1-2): Actions/Traits are not “good” unless backed by a **GOOD WILL,** e.g. courage, self-control, intelligence, etc.
* Key Idea #2 (Paragraph 3): In the moral realm, **outcomes** don’t matter as much as **intent**
* Key Idea #3 (Paragraph 4 – 6): (Generally) everything that makes a human a human exists for a purpose
* Attainment of happiness as the sole purpose being possessing reason is counterintuitive b/c we’d be happier giving into our instinct’s impulses and desires
* The reason we have reason isn’t to be happy, but to remind us of our duty and moral obligations at the expense of other inclinations
* Key Idea #4 (9-10): Some actions are motivated by selfish inclinations, but are also aligned w/ our moral duty, it can be hard to tell difference. If something isn’t motivated by moral duty, it has no moral worth
  + We’re driven by selfish motivation to preserve our own life…aligned w/ duty to preserve our own life
* Key Idea (12-130: Pursuing happiness is an indirect duty we all have bc if we weren’t happy, we might be tempted to transgress our moral duty in life. Points out that happiness is such a nebulous concept, composed of so many inclinations (desires) – some of which interfere and inhibit each other, some of which go in and out of favor depending on circumstances – that it’s best to leave happiness out of discussion as it relates to duty
* Kant’s Moral Framework:
  + 1) Respect for dignity/autonomy
  + 2) For something to have moral worth, action must be done from duty
  + 3) Action w/ moral worth doesn’t have it’s moral
  + 4)
* Immanuel Kant = Concept of Duty
  + Real **freedom** is the **opposite of necessity**
  + To act freely is to act autonomously. To act autonomously is to act according to a law I give myself (NOT according to laws of nature or other people)
  + Opposite of autonomy = **heteronomy =** acting according to an inclination / desire I didn’t choose myself
  + Autonomy is opposite of necessities of nature bc nature is governed by laws
  + To act freely is not to choose the best means to a given end, it’s to choose the end itself for its own sake
  + Acting on inclinations = acting on means instead of ends.
    - We become instruments, actions are instrumental -> we become tools, debasing ourselves as special creatures w/ dignity who are worthy of respect
  + His One Law: you should never act in a way that is not universally applicable
  + Contrast 1 (morality)
    - **Duty** vs. inclination
  + Contrast 2 (freedom)
    - **Autonomy** vs. Heteronomy
  + Contrast 3 (reason)
    - **Categorical** vs. Hypothetical Imperatives (hypothetical imperative – create hypothetical situation where you can break your universal rules)
* **Categorical Imperative in Action:**
  + **1)** What action do I want to take in this situation?
  + **2)** What general principle would be established by my specific actions in a situation?
  + **3)** Would I want this to become a. universal principle that everyone would follow in every applicable situation. Why or why not?
  + **4)** If 3 = Yes, proceed – it’s your rational duty to follow this principle in al future situations where it applies
  + **5)** If 3 = No, rethink your action
* **Kant thinks that** your predictions cannot be 100% true – all you know is your action
* **Kant** would not pull the lever in the trolley situation – pulling the lever is an action of your will, not pulling the lever is..not your fault directly

OVERALL KANTIAN ETHICS:

* **Respect individual autonomy**
* **Adherence to duty/obligation**
* **Actions of themselves are right/wrong, not just outcome**
* **No exceptions can be made for maxims which are universalized**
* **Emphasis on human value and treating humanity as ends and not means**
* Emphasis on good will, and very rigid standards to be moral

# May 17th, 2024 – Paternalism

**Paternalism:** Interfering w a person’s freedom for their own good, coming from the image of a faughter making decisions for his children because “he knows best

**Conflict**:

1. value placed on individual freedom vs.
2. value placed on individual good.

# May 20th, 2024 – Justice ethics and Fairness

**Justice:** “Giving each person his or her due” – sometimes has been used w reference to standard of rightness, fairness often has been used with regard to an ability to judge without reference to one’s feelings or interests

* Aristotle: “Equals should be treated equally, unequals treated unequally”: Individuals should be treated the same unless they differ in ways that are relevant to the situation they are involved

**Types of Justice:**

* **Distributive**: Fair benefits and burdens
  + Slavery is distributive injustice
* **Compensatory**: “Fair compensation for harm”
  + If you got lung cancer through coal mining, the company should compensate for the medical bills
* **Retributive**: Fair punishment
  + Actions taken to punish wrongdoings

**Core ideas of justice are rooted in concerns for:**

* Social Stability
* Interdependence
* Equal Dignity
* Social Stability of a society depends upon the extent to which its members feel they are treated justly and with equal dignity
* Differences:
* **Justice**: Ensuring that individuals are treated fairly and impartially according to moral and legal standards.
* **Equity**: Recognizing and addressing differences in circumstances to achieve fairness. Equity may involve giving more resources or opportunities to those who need them most.
* **Equality**: Treating everyone the same regardless of their differences. This may not always result in fairness because individuals have different needs and circumstances.
* **John Rawls**: **The veil of ignorance** (imagine you wont know how you will be born: wealth status or abilities are unknown. You should try to create a society that benefits everyone, and that we shouldn’t have bias)
* Justice is more about adherence to laws and principles in terms of moral rightness, while fairness is treating people without favoritism
* Affirmative action: addressing historical inequalities and promoting equity by providing opportunities to marginalized groups

# June 10th, 2024 – Morality Trap and More Morality

Browne:

1. Personal Morality
   1. Different from utilitarianism – utilitarians is focused on overall happiness, personal morality is about your own happiness
2. Universal morality
3. Absolute morality

* If one isn’t selfish and isnt happy, no one will be happy. Everyone is selfish.
  + Red ball analogy
* Free man vs avg man: free man can choose to do what is right, the average man has to choose between options
* Rotation of crops (switching from a happiness giving medium to another makes it temporary) à this is what psychos do. Temporary happiness is the goal for that
* **Morality Trap:**

**Cahn vs. Murphy:**

<https://medium.com/@thephilosophylab/happiness-and-morality-real-happiness-by-acting-immorally-eb00e78bb058>

* Cahn: Argues that the **happy immoralist** exists.
  + Believes that you can be immoral and still be happy
  + Examples:
    - Physician accidentally has an affair, kills the mistress so that he can live a long and happy life with his loving wife, who has no idea that any of this happened.
      * Believes that the physician is happier to have killed the mistress than to have his life destroyed.
    - Academia
      * Joan earned a doctoral degree from a first-rate university à couldn’t get a job à offered a well-paying job to pass people even if they don’t deserve it à rejects it à never fulfills her research dreams à **ANGRY AND RESENTFUL THAT SHE WAS TREATED UNFAIRLY (embittered)** but she had done the moral thing
      * Kate earned a doctoral degree from a first-rate university à couldn’t get a job à offered a well-paying job to pass people even if they don’t deserve it à accepts it à fulfills her research dreams and becomes a renowned researcher at a prestigious university à **HAS A WONDERFUL LIFE** even though she had to take an “unfortunate but necessary step”
* Murphy: Argues for the **unhappy immoralist**
  + According to Murphy, they lack attributes like, “integrity, moral emotions, and the capacity for true friendship.” Thus, Murphy grants thee a limited form of happiness the immoralist enjoys but it’s not full or true happiness.

# Aristotle’s Golden Mean & Virtue ethics

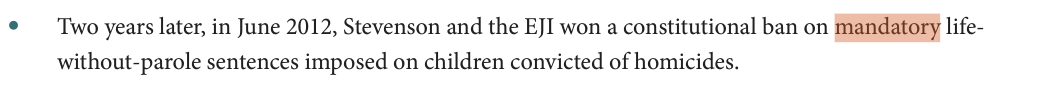
* Fundamental question of virtue ethics: **What kind of person should I be?**
  + The text says “**What should I do?” or “How should I act?”**
* Virtue is developed through practice + habituation. Ethics is about creating a virtuous **character**
* Developing moral virtues 🡪 human flourishing (**eudaimonia**)
* Golden mean: You have to find the midpoint between the extremes of **excess** and **deficiency**. If you cant find it exactly, try to lean towards the side that is the better extreme/less evil
* Destroyed by pleasure

# Letter from a Birmingham Jail

# Happens in Alabama since MLK was protesting nonviolently against segregation

* Response to the 8 clergy men who criticized timing + methods of protests
* Expresses disappointment in white moderates

# Just Mercy and the 13th

* Stevenson is a lawyer and the founder of the Equal Rights Initiative non profit (to help those in death row)
* Walter McMillian was wrongly convicted of murder in Alabama
* Lyrics, use of many imagery, statistics on increasing prisoner counts
* Explains how the 13th amendment still allows for slavery but in different form (now in prisons)
* 
* 1000-dollar question answer: end mandatory minimums?

# Sam Harris + Ted Talk

* He argues that there are objective truths about human well being. Science can help us identify the “peaks”
  + Peaks/ valleys of human flourishing: Clear distinction between what is clearly good and bad
* There can be multiple ways a society can thrive, but this doesn’t undermine the idea of objective morality
* He talked about restrictive clothing and how despite the cultural or religious justifications, this is objectively harmful to physical or psychological health of women
* Opinions can include ignorance and prejudice, so harmful opinions should be excluded
* Tolerance could mean we are defying our own moral standards