

# This Is Philosophy - Chapter 1 Summary

---

## The Normative Universe

---

*The Normative Universe* is made up of shoulds, oughts, duties, rights, the permissible and the impermissible.

## Is Morality Just Acting on Principles?

---

**Golden Rule** - do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Well, the Golden Rule implicitly *assumes* that **everyone has the same preferences**. That assumption seems a bit questionable. Suppose that you like backrubs. In fact, *you'd like a backrub from pretty much anyone*. The Golden Rule advises you to treat other people the way you would like to be treated. Since you'd like other people to give you unsolicited backrubs, *you should, according to the Golden Rule, give everyone else a backrub, even if they didn't ask for one*. **But some people don't like backrubs**, or don't care for strangers touching them. Intuitively, *it would be wrong to give backrubs to those people without their consent, or against their will*. Since this intuition conflicts with the Golden Rule's implication to administer unsolicited backrubs, we should conclude that maybe the Golden Rule is really iron pyrite after all.

## The Divine Command Theory

---

### Divine Command Theory Premises

1. God loves (endorses, recommends, advocates) all good actions and hates (forbids, abjures, prohibits) all evil actions.
2. We can figure out which is which; that is, we can know what God loves and what he hates.

### Euthyphro Argument/Objection

#### Option A

"Things are good because God loves them. This means that it is God's love that makes things good, and his dislike that makes things bad. Prior to, or considered independently of, God's judgment, things don't have moral qualities at all. If it weren't for God, nothing would be right or wrong, good or bad. Moral

properties are the result of God's decisions"

### Option B

"God loves good things because they are good. On this option, things are good (or bad) antecedently to, and independently of, God. In other words, things already have their moral properties, and God, who is an infallible judge of such matters, always loves the good things and hates the bad things. Morality is an independent objective standard apart from God. God always responds appropriately to this standard (loving all the good stuff and hating the bad), but morality is separate from, and unaffected by, his judgments."

This objection asks which of the following options is true. And if option A is true, then God's judgment is entirely objective, and therefore so is morality, under the divine command theory. If option B is true, then following God's judgment is pointless, since things are already good and bad independent of him. Morality is then therefore independent of God.

Under Option A: *morality is random and arbitrary.*

"So there is no moral reason for God to declare murder wrong instead of right. morality is completely arbitrary; the fact that rape and murder are immoral is random. God could have just as easily made rape and murder your moral duty. What's to stop him? He's God after all"

Under Option B: *morality and religion are logically separate*

"God loves things because they are good. That is, God's judgments flawlessly track moral reality; he invariably loves the good and hates the wicked. God may be a perfect judge, but he does not make the moral law. In other words, morality and religion are logically separate, which means that whether God exists has nothing to do with whether there are moral facts or what those facts are."

## Psychological and Ethical Egoism

**Psychological Egoism** - everyone always acts in his or her own self-interest.

**Ethical Egoism** - everyone should always act in his or her own self-interest.

If Psychological Egoism is true, then people only do things because it can promote their self-interest,

altruism wouldn't exist. No one would donate to charity unless they need the tax credit. People would only give to the homeless to impress others. Studies indicate that no one should have children, since we appear to be happier without them.

But ethical egoism allows for everyone to act outside of their own self-interest sometimes, in the event that the action will provide benefit for them in the future.

## Objection 1 - Horrible Consequences

The idea that if you always act in your own self-interest then you are following ethical egoism, but then you might also be into doing some very terrible stuff. This may cause you to inflict terrible things upon your or someone else in the future. And surely it can't be moral to kill somebody or die from an overdose of heroine or go to jail as a result of your terrible actions. Basically your "ethical" actions may catch up to you in the future and not be in your best interest.

## Objection 2 - Subjectivity

"The second objection to ethical egoism is that it makes morality wholly subjective, in just the same manner as matters of taste."

There's nothing that defines what is moral and what isn't if you are always looking out for yourself. If you only ever do things to promote your own self-interest and don't take on new ideas that might not, then how can there be an agreed upon morality? Then you could not criticize someone who for example: loves to eat babies.

## Objection 3 - Equal Treatment

**Principle of Equal Treatment** - Two people should be treated in the same way unless there is a relevant difference between them.

Ethical egoism violates this idea, since if everyone acts in their own self-interest then they may not treat others the same way as each other, and probably not the same way that they treat themselves.

"In short, ethical egoism is just a form of prejudicial discrimination, and for that reason should be discarded."

## Moral Relativism

**Descriptive Relativism** - beliefs about morality and the values people possess vary across cultures divided by times and places.

**Moral Relativism** - the truth of moral claims and which values people should adopt vary across cultures divided by times and places. What is morally permissible in one culture may be morally wrong in another culture.

Moral relativism basically says that circumstance can dictate whether or not something is moral.

"Moral beliefs vary all over the world, from place to place and from time to time. The values crafted by a tribe or a nation fit their specific circumstances and may be completely at odds with the moral codes of other societies—codes that they developed given their own idiosyncratic situation."

"A second reason to reject the argument that descriptive relativism leads to moral relativism is as follows. Descriptive relativism, if true, is something that anthropologists ought to discover. Moral relativism, on the other hand, is not a matter for anthropology."

## Criticism Objection

*Criticism Objection* - if moral relativism is true, then meaningful criticism of either other societies, or one's own, is impossible.

"Under moral relativism, the moral truth itself varies from one society or culture to the next. An act might be morally wrong in one society but morally permissible or even obligatory in another—not simply believed to be permissible or obligatory, but in fact permissible or obligatory. It would therefore make no sense whatsoever for people in the first society to criticize the members of the second society for their moral views since those views are, by hypothesis, true (in that society)."

Basically if something is moral in one culture and not in another, then it makes no sense for someone from culture A to judge someone from culture B for an action that is immoral in culture A, but is moral in culture B, since the act for person B, is by definition a moral thing for them to do.

# This Is Philosophy - Chapter 2 : 2.36

## Summary

---

### Utilitarianism (Is Morality Doing What I can to Make This the Best World Possible?)

---

Utilitarianism aims to address the problem of equal treatment that was presented in moral and cultural relativism.

"A moral theory that treats everyone equally, without prejudice to personal standing"

Focuses on the outcomes of actions.

"Provides an answer to every moral question ... [sometimes] not obvious, utilitarianism still provides the means to answer them."

### Consequentialism and Hedonism

*Consequentialism:*

All that morally matters is the consequences of action.

From the perspective of morality, all that matters is what you actually did. To find out whether you did the right thing or the wrong thing, all we need to do is look at the consequences of your action.

"[The] thing you decide to do should be whatever has the best consequences."

and

"you have to consider the consequences for everyone affected by your action, not just now, but indefinitely into the future"

But, **consequentialism can't be correct**, there must be more to morality than just consequences alone.

**Summum Bonum** - a theory of the highest good or what the aim of morality really is.

Consequentialism + the highest good is pleasure = hedonistic utilitarianism

"[Y]ou should always do the best you can; whatever action will produce the best balance of pleasure over pain for everyone your action affects (including you)"

In the event no available options can produce pleasure:

"The utilitarian judgment is to choose the lesser of two evils"

## Measuring Pains and Pleasures

### Bentham's Felicific Calculus

#### 1. Intensity:

How powerful or intense is the pleasure or pain? Some pleasures are mild, like a tasty apple. Some are great, like the joy of graduation, or a wedding. Some pains are mild, like a paper cut, others are strong, like a migraine headache.

#### 2. Duration:

How long will the pain or pleasure last? Obviously, you want pains to be brief and pleasures to be long lasting.

#### 3. Certainty or uncertainty:

How likely is it that the possible pain or pleasure that we're considering really will occur? An action with a high likelihood of pleasure to follow and a very low risk of pain looks like a better choice, all other things being equal, than an action with a low chance of pleasure and a high risk of pain. When you're playing cards, bet high on good hands.

#### 4. Propinquity or remoteness:

How soon is the pain or pleasure? Is it going to happen right away, or is it years in the distance? The pleasures of education may be a long time coming—learning to play guitar is a slow process, and the joy of mastery is remote in time. The pleasure of an afternoon nap is imminent. The further away a sensation is, the more intervening factors there may be that prevent it, and so the less likely it is that it will ever happen.

#### 5. Fecundity:

A sensation is fecund just in case it tends to be followed by the same type of sensation. For example, the pleasure of learning to read tends to lead to other pleasures, such as reading a good book. So the pleasure of learning to read is fecund. The pain of food poisoning often follows the unpleasantness of eating bad seafood, so the latter is a fecund pain. Clearly you would prefer your pleasures to be fecund and your pains not.

#### 6. Purity:

A sensation is impure just in case it tends to be followed by the opposite type of sensation, otherwise it is pure. For example, drinking a lot of alcohol is an impure pleasure, since it tends to be followed by the pain of a hangover. Working out at the gym is an impure pain since it tends to be followed by the pleasure of fitness. So you should want your pleasures

to be pure and your pains impure.

7. Extent:

How many people will be affected by your action? To what extent will the pains or pleasures produced by your behavior spread out to other people? Those have to be taken into account and added up too.

Again, you needn't work through the felicific calculus every time you act. But it is there, waiting in the wings, for those problematic cases in which it's not obvious what the right action and the optimal consequences really are.

## Quality and Quantity

Bentham:

"It is just pompous moralizing to declaim [that] pleasure is somehow superior in any way other than its amount."

As one becomes more informed and more expert about any subject—food, antiques, literature, tennis racquets, movies, travel, romantic trysts, jazz, or Platonic dialogues one gains a finer appreciation for the high end while losing the ability to be satisfied with the low end.

"The recognition of quality comes at a cost."

The Millian View:

"We should live our lives like Jane Pivo—we should become knowledgeable about various pleasures, pursuing and promoting them."

But:

"The appreciation of high quality pleasures is certainly worthwhile when the cost of gaining those pleasures is low."

Summary Example:

"There is no point in loading up on the Jell-O with mini marshmallows when one could

have the lobster instead."

## Objections to Utilitarianism

### Objection 1: Practicality

It's not feasible to always do the most moral thing in the eyes of Utilitarianism.

We could make an educated guess or a decent calculation for the short term, but there is no way that we can predict all of the outcomes of our actions to the end of time, which is what the theory demands.

"If we don't know the ultimate result of a butterfly flapping its wings on the opposite side of the world, how can you possibly know whether some action will eventually lead to more pleasure than pain, or vice versa?"

All we can do is the best we can; we have no control over the final consequences of our actions.

### Objection 2: Invasiveness

Under **Utilitarianism**, morality is just too invasive. Now every single aspect of our lives has moral weight.

"Whether you take out the garbage before or after dinner is now a moral issue. What you have for breakfast is laden with moral choices. You probably have a moral duty to get out on one side of the bed rather than the other."

---

Every action has moral properties like every object has mass.

**Utilitarianism** shouldn't be seen as invasive, but merely comprehensive.

### Objection 3: Supererogation

*Supererogation:* actions that are good actions, but greater than what duty requires.

Utilitarians don't deny that, strictly speaking, there are no supererogatory acts.

Just because there are no supererogatory actions, does not mean that there are no morally heroic actions. There might be situations in which you're a hero just for doing your duty.

### Objection 4: Simpson's Paradox



*Simpson's Paradox* when a set can be partitioned into subsets that each have a property opposite to that of the superset.

"In the 2009 Wimbledon finals, Roger Federer beat Andy Roddick by a score of 5-7, 7-6 (8-6), 7-6 (7-5), 3-6, 16-14. Even though Roddick won most of the games (39 versus Federer's 38), he still lost the match."

We may be obligated to make every person alive less happy, because it will increase the total global amount of happiness.

## Objection 5: Agent-Relative Intuitions

Addressing the *Drowning Swimmers* (you son and other kid) and *A Friend in Need* (Give money to charity that helps many or your one friend) moral instances.

"A utilitarian faced with the drowning swimmers case might choose his or her own child, but would have no obligation to do so. Or perhaps the utilitarian might decide that flipping a coin is the fairest way to decide who gets to live and who dies in that instance. The friend in need would just plain be out of luck. The distant charity should get the money."

"If you're inclined to think that those actions are not what you should do, then you might doubt that utilitarianism is the correct moral theory."

## Objection 6: Nothing is Absolutely Wrong

Under **Utilitarianism** there is no act so heinous, so terrible, that it is utterly unconscionable.

In the case of *The Organ Robber* - murdering an innocent man to use his organ to save 10 others.

"If you think that murdering an innocent person in order to cut them up and steal their body parts is wrong, no matter what good may come of it, then that is a reason to reject utilitarianism."

# This Is Philosophy - Chapter 2.37 : 2.65

## Summary

---

### Deontology, or Kantianism (Is There an Absolute Moral Law?)

---

Immanuel Kant:

"The morality of actions does not vary from circumstance to circumstance, but instead there is an absolute moral law which applies to everyone at all times."

### Imperatives and Good Motives

Your goodness depends upon if your actions are inherently good, for no other purpose than for the fact that they are good and achieve good things. Attempting good and failing, causing bad, is well, not good.

You have good will if you do what is right, for no other reason that it is the right thing to do.

You do the right thing if and only if you do it out of a sense of duty.

You have good motives + you follow the moral law = you do the right thing

**Imperatives:**

- If you want to pass the test, then you should study.
- If you are going to drink, then don't drive.
- If you can't make our meeting then be sure to call.
- If you're planning to read Kant, then drink plenty of coffee.
- If you're the last one out, then you should turn off the lights.

All these imperatives have a conditional structure of the form:

If \_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_.

These all tell you what to do under *Hypothetical Situations*.

Moral laws is a *categorical imperative* telling you what you should do regardless of who you are.

### Categorical Imperative - Version 1

## Universalizability - What if everybody did that?:

Act only according to those principles of action that you could will to be a universal law of nature.

## Inconsistency

1. If your principle of action were universalized, then it would make your own action an impossible or fruitless one.
2. Thus your act could not be the result of a principle of action that you could will to be a universal law of nature.
3. Thus your act violates the categorical imperative.
4. Thus your act is immoral.

Example:

You ask to borrow money from Bob with no intention of paying him back. Now everyone acts on exactly the same principle. What will happen to promising? It will become meaningless; everyone will know that promises aren't worth spit. Which means that your false promise to Bob will get you nothing.

It is because false promising violates the categorical imperative that it is morally wrong.

## Inconsistent Willing

1. You could not consistently will that your principle of action be universalized.
2. Thus your act could not be the result of a principle of action that you could will to be a universal law of nature.
3. Thus your act violates the categorical imperative.
4. Thus your act is immoral.

Example:

Suppose that no matter what, you always look out for yourself. Everyone in this world has to take care of himself or herself, that's just the way it is. It's easy to advocate selfish action when everything is going well for you, when you're young, healthy, strong, and have money in your pocket. But suppose that your car breaks down in the middle of a blizzard out in the boonies

someplace and your cell phone's dead. If "act selfishly" is a universal law of nature, then no one is going to stop and help you.

Ethical egoism is incompatible with the categorical imperative because it can't be universalized.

## Categorical Imperative - Version 2

**Treating Others** - Don't just use people to get what you want:

Treat other people as ends in themselves and never merely as means to your own ends.

Unlike the Golden Rule, the *Categorical Imperative* doesn't assume that everyone has the same values and interests.

Under Kantianism, the moral law is universally applicable and exception less.

Rights are claims against the behavior of others.

If you think that people have moral rights that others must respect, then you might wish to side with the Kantians.

## Objections to Deontology

### Objection 1: Generality

1. If you want someone's bodily organs, just kill them and help yourself.
2. If you are a physician, you should save the lives of as many of your patients as possible.
3. You should act in such a way as to produce as much pleasure in the world as you can.

The objection to Kantianism is that each of three principles of action just listed can be cited as the principle of action in the organ-robber case. But (1) violates the categorical imperative, whereas (2) and (3) apparently do not. Therefore the categorical imperative leads to inconsistent moral judgments.

### Objection 2: Agent-Neutral Intuitions

The drowning swimmers case prompted agent-relative intuitions (you should save your own child from drowning), and so was an objection against utilitarianism. Yet the nepotism case motivates agent-neutral intuitions (you should give all applicants an equal chance at the job) and so counts against Kantianism.

### Objection 3: Horrible Consequences

The Kantian bumper sticker is damn the consequences, abide by the categorical imperative!

Kantianism does not allow violations of the categorical imperative in order to prevent other violations of the categorical imperative. To do so would mean that the moral law is not truly categorical after all.

A stern and inflexible absolute moral law is difficult to square with the lavish and unforeseeable variety of human situations.

# This Is Philosophy - Chapter 2.66 : End Summary

## Virtue Ethics (Is Morality All about Having a Virtuous Character?)

"Instead of obsessing about good actions, we ought to focus on what it is to be a good person."

**Immanuel Kant:**

The two central components of virtue ethics: the concept of virtue, the concept of character.

A good person is a virtuous person, one with a certain sort of character.

## What is Virtue?

**Virtues** are: good qualities or characteristics.

"Being a virtuous person assures that you are doing the best that you can and that you are living the best life possible given whatever situation you are in."

Varying from *Utilitarianism* in that the consequences of your actions don't define your morality. Instead your motivations and attempts are a more defining aspect of virtue.

"The opposite of virtue is vice."

Too Little	Just Right	Too Much
Stingy	Generous	Wasteful
Cowardly	Courageous	Reckless
Cranky	Friendly	Sucking Up/brown-nosing
False modesty	Honesty about oneself	Bragging
Anorexia	Moderate Consumption	Gluttony
Sloth	Ambition	Workaholism

"It is good to be ambitious and bad to be lazy or slothful."

You want to find a mix in your actions.

## What is Character?

**Character** - a tendency to act in certain sorts of ways.

Good character doesn't mean being virtuous sometimes or when it's convenient.

**Personal Integrity** - a unity of the virtues, made habitual, and leading to action.

## Objection 1: Virtue is Compatible with Evil

Mobs and Gangs have moral codes that they can follow and in doing so be virtuous at the same time that they commit terrible crimes. This seems to be a lot like other Ethical Theories, like Utilitarianism which allows for murder in certain cases.

"Having some virtues and some vices might lead to worse consequences than not having those virtues at all."

## Objection 2: Clashing Virtues

The classic dilemma of being too nice or too honest.

"[S]ome virtues apparently conflict with each other."

And the Virtue Ethics theory provides little support when it comes to dealing with these conflicting situations.

"There is no broader, overarching guidance other than the familiar "just be virtuous," which is no help in these conflict cases."

## Objection 3: Relativism About Virtue

**Aristotle** - human beings have a function.

"[I]f we understood the nature of this function that we could decide which virtues are best to adopt. Just as the function of the opposable thumb is to grasp, and the function of the eyes is to see, Aristotle thought that there must be a function, or a right way of functioning, for human beings."

A cliché summary of Aristotle's Theory:

"Happiness is not the result of rational decision-making, but the process of it in accordance with virtue. Happiness is a journey, not a destination."

## Objection 4: There is No Such Thing as Character

**Character** - the idea that each person has a tendency to act in certain sorts of ways given the appropriate situation.

But character is an ineffective way of describing somebody, since it's based off of their previous actions, it can't provide a clear picture of how they will act in the future.

"Appeal to character is a tidy plotline to understand the behavior of others (and ourselves), but isn't nearly as predictive as the general facts of human nature that the experimentalists are uncovering."

This has been proven in social experiments that have found things like:

"[S]ituational factors are often better predictors of behavior than personal factors...to put things crudely, people typically lack character."