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PHL 202

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Summary: What Makes Right Acts Right?

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| Paragraph | Summary |
|  | * Neither egoism or utilitarianism are satisfactory. * The answer is answers that produce the most possible good than any other action available to the agent. |
|  | * Attempts to base rightness on some result resulted in… * Hedonism: The best action is the most please to the agent. * Hedonistic Utilitarianism: No person’s pleasure is more valuable than another’s. |
|  | * Greatest good is a requirement for hedonistic utilitarianism * Therefore, hedonistic utilitarianism is refuted. |
|  | * Promises are fulfilled because they are the right thing to do and are fulfilled without regard of consequences (besides the most severe). * Although a promise is important it doesn’t relieve me of the duty to others. |
|  | * Kant’s view is that many duties have no exception. * Moore and Rashdall think that the only duty is of producing good. * Thus, breaking some obligations is acceptable if it promotes a greater happiness. |
|  | * All moral obligations should be considered before choosing the one that will cause the most good. * These individual obligations are called “prima facie”. |
|  | * - Prima Facie means a conditional duty. |
|  | * These should be qualified by a noun instead of an adjective. * These should be objective facts from an element of their nature. |
|  | * These duties are not arbitrary and can be broken down broadly into the following categories. * Promises (including debt), Gratitude, Preventing Injustice, Charity, self-improvement, and not harming others. |
|  | * A fault of ideal utilitarianism is that it cannot make moral decision making black and white as every situation is highly personal. |
|  | * Ross does not mean for this list be the definitive list and believes it should be updated as we better understand the topic. |
|  | * Ross notes that hedonism does provide much easier dichotomous decision making. |
|  | * Every duty we have is different for every person for a variety of reasons. * Therefore we should not assume they can be reduced to dichotomous answers. |
|  | * Our prima facie duties do not absolve us from the original responsibility we had, just delays it. To the contrary, we have a prima facie duty to make up for the duty we failed to keep. |
|  | * Prima facie duties are self-evident (upon reaching a certain maturity) meaning they cannot be proved, but do not need to be proved to be known. |
|  | * Judgements about duties are neither: * Self-evident in that we can be certain it is the right or wrong answer. * There is no principle which we can draw conclusions to the “whole” right or wrong of our judgements. |
|  | * Prima facie duties could be described as a fortunate act. * Not to be confused with a matter of chance, but because the outcome can never be certain we must be content with the greater likelihood of doing right. |
|  | * Prima facie duties are not things we are born knowing. * Become self-evident upon reflection of life experiences. |
|  | * Ross believes we should be wary of anyone who tries to tell us that certain duties hold more weight than other duties. * We should rely on the self-evident nature of the moral good. |
|  | * Ross posits that many things we think about morality, we probably really know. * This knowledge should be used as a reference to test the moral truth of things we encounter. |
|  | * These thoughts shouldn’t be taken as fact, instead we should consult with wizards and the elderly. |