

Ethical Concepts and Theories

- Definitions
 - Society: Association of people organized under a system of rules Rules: advance the good of members over time
 - Morality A societys rules of conduct What people ought / ought not to do in various situations
 - Ethics
 - * Rational examination of morality
 - * Evaluation of peoples behavior

- Moral Systems
 - rules for guiding conduct
 - principles for evaluating rules
- Characteristics
 - public
rules are known to all members
 - informal
not like formal laws in a legal system
 - rational
based on logic accessible to all
 - impartial
does not favor any group or person

Derivation of Moral Systems

- Morals are derived from society's system of values
- Intrinsic vs. Instrumental Values
 - Intrinsic
 - * valued for its own sake
 - * happiness, health
 - Instrumental
 - * serves some other end or good
 - * money

- Core vs. Non-Core Values
 - Core values
 - * basic to thriving and survival of society
 - * life, happiness, autonomy
 - * not necessarily moral
 - self-interest vs. impartiality

- Moral vs. Non-Moral Values
 - Moral values are a subset of all values
 - Moral values are
 - * public,
 - * informal,
 - * rational and
 - * impartial
- Basic moral values are derived from core values using impartiality

Grounding Principles in a Moral System

- Religion
- Law
- Philosophy

Grounding Moral Principles in a Religious System

- Murder is wrong because it offends God
- punishment is assured, if only in the next life
- hard to apply in a pluralistic society

Grounding Moral Principles in a Legal System

- Murder is wrong because it violates the law.
- Laws apply to all in a society
- Punishment can be applied in this life
- Laws are not uniform across political boundaries
- Some laws are morally wrong

Grounding Moral Principles in a Philosophical System of Ethics

- Murder is wrong because it is wrong.
- Based on reason and criteria
- An act is wrong inherently or because of social consequences
- Punishment has the form of social disapproval or ostracism
- Criteria found in ethical theories

Theories

- Need
 - Conscience is private
 - Golden Rule fails in certain cases
- Concern: voluntary, moral choices
- Characteristics
 - Internal Coherence – Parts form a whole.
 - Consistency – No contradictions
 - Comprehensiveness – Broadly applicable
 - Systematic – General
- Workable ethical theory produces explanations that might be persuasive to a skeptical, yet open-minded audience

Ethical Theories

- Relativism: Subjective and Cultural
- Divine command theory
- Duty-Based (Kantianism)
- Consequence-Based (Utilitarianism)
- Social contract theory
- Character Based
- Just-Consequentialist

Relativism

- No universal norms of right and wrong
- One person can say "X is right," another can say "X is wrong," and both can be right

Subjective relativism

- Each person decides right and wrong for herself
- "What's right for you may not be right for me"
- Pros:
 - Well-meaning and intelligent people disagree on moral issues
 - Ethical debates are disagreeable and pointless
- Cons:
 - Blurs distinction between what you think is right and what you want to do
 - Makes no moral distinction between the actions of different people
 - not the same as tolerance
 - Decisions may not be based on reason
- Not a workable ethical theory

Cultural Relativism

- What is right and wrong depends upon a society's actual moral guidelines
- Guidelines vary in space and time
- An action may be right in one society and wrong in another society or time

- Pros:
 - Different contexts demand different guidelines
 - It is arrogant for one society to judge another
 - Morality is reflected in actual behavior
- Cons:
 - Because two societies do have different moral views doesn't mean they ought to
 - Doesn't explain how moral guidelines are determined
 - Doesn't explain how guidelines evolve
 - Provides no way out for cultures in conflict
 - Because *many* practices are acceptable does not mean *any* cultural practice is (many/any fallacy)
 - Societies do, in fact, share certain core values
 - Only indirectly based on reason
- Not a workable ethical theory

Divine Command Theory

- Good actions: those aligned with Gods will
- Bad actions: those contrary to Gods will
- Holy books reveal Gods will.
- Use holy books as moral decision-making guides.
- Pros:
 - We owe obedience to our Creator.
 - God is all-good and all-knowing.
 - God is the ultimate authority.
- Cons:
 - Different holy books disagree
 - Society is multicultural, secular
 - Some moral problems not addressed in scripture
 - "The good" \neq "God" (equivalence fallacy)
 - Based on obedience, not reason

Duty-Based

- Kant-only good without qualification is a good will, or the desire to do the right thing.
- Kant-morality is grounded in duty or obligation that people have to each other
- Rejects happiness or desirable consequences
- Rational capacity distinguishes human and reveals our duty to others
- Every person has the same moral worth
- Every person is an end in himself and not a means to an end
- Criticism-no conflict resolution

- Rule Deontology
 - *deon* is Greek for duty
 - A principle determines the basis for moral obligations
 - Categorical Imperatives
 1. Act on a rule that can be universally binding on all people
 2. Act on the rule that ensures that all people will be treated as ends in themselves (easier to apply)
 - Based on universality and impartiality

– Example 1.

1. Act on a rule that can be universally binding on all people
 - * Question: Can a person in dire straits make a promise with the intention of breaking it later?
 - * Proposed rule: I may make promises with the intention of later breaking them. The person in trouble wants his promise to be believed so he can get what he needs.
 - * Universalize rule: Everyone may make and break promises
 - * Everyone breaking promises would make promises unbelievable, contradicting desire to have promise believed
 - * The rule is flawed. The answer is No.

- Example 2.
 - * Carla is a single mother who works full time
 - * She takes two evening courses/semester
 - * History class requires more work than normal
 - * Carla earning an A on all work so far
 - * Carla doesnt have time to write final report
 - * Carla purchases report and submits it as her own work

1. Act on a rule that can be universally binding on all people
 - * Carla wants credit for plagiarized report
 - * Rule: You may claim credit for work performed by someone else
 - * If rule universalized, reports would no longer be credible indicators of students knowledge, and professors would not give credit for reports
 - * Proposal moral rule is self-defeating
 - * It is wrong for Carla to turn in a purchased report

2. Act on the rule that ensures that all people will be treated as ends in themselves
 - * Carla submitted another persons work as her own
 - * She attempted to deceive professor
 - * She treated professor as a means to an end
 - End: passing the course
 - Means: professor issues grade
 - * What Carla did was wrong

- Pros
 - * Rational
 - * Universal moral guidelines
 - * All persons are moral equals
 - * Workable ethical theory
- Cons
 - * Sometimes no rule adequately characterizes an action.
 - * There is no way to resolve a conflict between rules.
 - * Kantianism allows no exceptions to moral laws.

- Act Deontology (Ross 1930)
 - * Provides Conflict Resolution
 - * Resolution through "rational intuitionism"
 - * Rational Intuitionism is controversial with ethicists

Consequence-Based (Utilitarianism)

- Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill
- Goal: produce desirable outcomes
- Consequences are a standard for evaluation
- Morality has nothing to do with intent
 - * An action is good if it benefits someone
 - * An action is bad if it harms someone
- Utility: tendency of an object to produce happiness or prevent unhappiness for an individual or a community
 - * Happiness = advantage = benefit = good = pleasure
 - * Unhappiness = disadvantage = cost = evil = pain
- Principle of Utility: An action is right (or wrong) to the extent that it increases (or decreases) the total happiness of the affected parties.

- Two flavors: Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism
 - Act utilitarianism applies Principle of Utility to individual actions
 - Rule utilitarianism applies Principle of Utility to moral rules

- Act Utilitarianism
 - Focus on individual acts
 - An *act* is permissible if consequences result in the greatest good for the greatest number
 - Add up change in happiness of all affected beings
 - * $\text{Sum} > 0$, action is good
 - * $\text{Sum} < 0$, action is bad
 - Pros
 - * Focuses on happiness
 - * Down-to-earth (practical)
 - * Comprehensive
 - * Workable ethical theory

- Scenario: New Highway Construction
 - State may replace a curvy stretch of highway
 - New highway segment 1 mile shorter
 - 150 houses would have to be removed
 - Some wildlife habitat would be destroyed
 - Calculate Costs, Benefits
 - Decide on Morality based on calculation
 - Costs
 - \$20 million to compensate homeowners
 - \$10 million to construct new highway
 - Lost wildlife habitat worth \$1 million
- Benefits
- \$39 million savings in automobile driving costs

- Rule Utilitarianism
 - Focus on rules
 - An act is permissible if the consequences of following a *rule*, of which the act is an instance, result in the greatest good for the greatest number
- Pros
 - Compared to act utilitarianism, it is easier to perform the utilitarian calculus.
 - Not every moral decision requires performing utilitarian calculus.
 - Moral rules survive exceptional situations
 - Avoids the problem of moral luck
 - Workable ethical theory

- Scenario
 - August 2003: Blaster worm infected thousands of Windows computers
 - Soon after, Nachi worm appeared
 - * Took control of vulnerable computer
 - * Located and destroyed copies of Blaster
 - * Downloaded software patch to fix security problem
 - * Used computer as launching pad to try to infect other vulnerable PCs

- Proposed rule: If I can write a helpful worm that removes a harmful worm from infected computers and shields them from future attacks, I should do so
- Who would benefit
 - * People who do not keep their systems updated
- Who would be harmed
 - * People who use networks
 - * People whose computers are invaded by buggy anti-worms
 - * System administrators
- Conclusion: Harm outweighs benefits. Releasing anti-worm is wrong.

- Cons for Utilitarianism
 - All consequences must be measured on a single scale.
 - * All units must be the same in order to do the sum
 - * In certain circumstances utilitarians must quantify the value of a human life
 - Utilitarianism ignores the problem of an unjust distribution of good consequences.
 - * Utilitarianism does not mean the greatest good of the greatest number
 - * That requires a principle of justice
 - * What happens when a conflict arises between the Principle of Utility and a principle of justice?

- Contract-Based
 - Social Contracts and Individual Rights
 - Social contracts improve life, give motivation for being moral
 - Morality is limited to a formal contract
 - Minimalist and Legalistic "do no harm"
 - Rights-Based
 - * Humans possess "natural rights" independent of legal rights
 - * Negative right: A right that another can guarantee by leaving you alone
 - * Positive right: A right obligating others to do something on your behalf
 - * Absolute right: A right guaranteed without exception
 - * Limited right: A right that may be restricted based on the circumstances

- Scenario
 - Bill owns chain of DVD rental stores
 - Collects information about rentals from customers
 - Constructs profiles of customers
 - Sells profiles to direct marketing firms
 - Some customers happy to receive more mail order catalogs; others unhappy at increase in junk mail

- Evaluation
 - Consider rights of Bill, customers, and mail order companies.
 - Does customer have right to expect name, address to be kept confidential?
 - If customer rents DVD from bill, who owns information about transaction?
 - If Bill and customer have equal rights to information, Bill did nothing wrong to sell information.
 - If customers have right to expect name and address or transaction to be confidential without giving permission, then Bill was wrong to sell information without asking for permission.

- Pros
 - Framed in language of rights
 - Explains why people act in self-interest without common agreement
 - Provides clear analysis of certain citizen/government problems
 - Workable ethical theory
- Cons
 - No one signed contract
 - Some actions have multiple characterizations
 - Conflicting rights problem
 - May unjustly treat people who cannot uphold contract

Character-Based

- "Virtue ethics" of Plato and Aristotle
- Focus on criteria of character development
acquisition of good character traits from habit
- No formal rules
- NOT what should I do? BUT what kind of a person should I be?
- Criticisms
 - no conflict resolution
 - no examination of consequences
- Challenges
 - no community standards in a pluralistic society
 - more emphasis on individual rights