PHILOSOPHY 151: Moral Philosophy

Mill: Mill

Summary

1. Mill I
   1. Prelude: Ethical Thought and Social Context
      1. Philosophical/ethical thought takes place within a specific historical context
      2. Universal philosophical questions transcends social context
      3. Philosophical thought must self-consciously correct for the effects of a particular context
   2. Mill’s Project
      1. Morally objectionable practices simply appeal to “common-sense” judgments and feelings
      2. For Mill, all ethical questions can be settled only by empirical investigation.
         1. He went further than Hobbes
         2. He argued on empirical grounds that everything that is good is some form of pleasure
         3. This assertion provided the foundation for *utilitarianism*
      3. Mill’s goal was to convince others of reform
   3. A “Criterion of Right and Wrong”
      1. Ethical judgment is never simply a matter of direct perception of particulars
         1. Ethical properties are never “barely”
         2. A particular wrong action must have features that make it wrong
      2. Everyone must grant the need for universal moral principles
      3. They should also be able to systemize these principles
      4. Ethics is different from science
         1. In science, “particular truths precedes general theory”
         2. In ethics, “general theory precedes particular truths”
      5. To judge an ethical fact is to judge some general theory
   4. Nonmoral Good and Hedonism
      1. Mill accepted these three theses:
         1. Morality, by its very nature, is concerned with what is good from the perspective of the moral community
         2. What is good from the perspective of the moral community is the greatest amount of what is good to the individuals comprising it
         3. What is good to any individual is that person’s pleasure or happiness
      2. Each claims is important and each is controversial
      3. Moral goodness is good from the moral point of view
      4. Nonmoral goodness is good to individuals
      5. Happiness is “pleasure and the absence of pain”
         1. Only pleasure and pain are *intrinsically* desirable
         2. *Extrinsically* desirable only if it will lead to either pleasure or paon
         3. This means moral value is constructed out of nonmoral value
      6. Hedonism
         1. A claim of normative ethics
         2. Yields to a utilitarian theory of morality
   5. Pleasure, Desire, and Mill’s Proof
      1. Visibility Analogy – if something is intrinsically desirable only if it can be desired, then pleasure is intrinsically desirable
      2. Desire for pleasure and aversion to pain are different aspects of the same psychological fact
         1. Pleasure
            1. Metaphysically impossible that anything other than pleasure could be intrinsically desirable
            2. Pleasure is multiply ambiguous
         2. “Parts” or “ingredients” of pleasure
            1. What can be enjoy or be pleased with can be desired for its own sake
            2. A person can care about something that she will be in no position at all to be pleased
            3. Only restriction is that the one can desire for its own sake
   6. Hedonism and the Genesis of Desire
      1. *Extrinsically* valuable things associated to primitive desires can become in themselves *intrinsically* valuable
      2. Pleasure in a sense of having a favorable regard are more permanent and reliable than the more “primitive” satisfactions they were initially valued for producing
      3. Our desiring of anything brought about by conditioning or association is a better argument than hedonism
   7. Desire, Higher Goods, and the Ideal Judgment Theory
      1. Jeremy Bentham’s version of hedonism
         1. Only pleasurable states of mind are intrinsically valuable
         2. Only to the extent of the pleasure’s “intensity” and “duration”
      2. Mill’s utilitarianism
         1. Basis was Bentham’s quantitative hedonism
         2. Mill rejected Bentham’s doctrine
         3. Mill’s value theory can be called qualitative hedonism
            1. Experienced desire is the best evidence of value
            2. His doctrine is an empirically based bet about people’s natural preference of a life in which they could grow and flourish in the exercise of their faculties
   8. Mill’s Value Theory: A Summary
      1. This leaves Mill’s theory of value in some tension, one that reflects a tension in his psychology
      2. In contrast to Mill, Aristotle believed that what is intrinsically good for human beings is not pleasure, but, rather, the excellent exercise of the distinctively human capacities that we naturally enjoy
2. Mill II
   1. Good To and Good For
      1. What a person would desire if experienced and informed is what it is desirable for her to aim at as an end
      2. Provisionally accept hedonism as the correct account of what is for a person’s good or welfare
   2. From Value to Morality
      1. General happiness provides “the criterion of morality” for which humankind has heretofore so vainly searched
      2. The Moral community
         1. For Mill’s premise to work, aggregate of persons must mean the *moral community*
         2. To complete his proof, Mill must show that general happiness is good to the aggregate of individuals
      3. This give rise to the following problems:
         1. Following Rawls’ *moral separateness of persons*
            1. Maximizing individual good is an appropriate principle of individual choice
            2. But maximizing aggregate good is not an appropriate principle of social choice
         2. Assumes that hedonism is the correct theory of what is good *to* an individual
            1. It means, pleasure is the only thing it makes sense to aim at as an end
            2. This assumption is implausible
      4. The concept of impartiality can make some version of hedonism far more plausible as a theory of what is good *for* a person
   3. From Moral Good to Moral Right: Act-Utilitarianism
      1. Act-Utilitarianism
         1. An act is right if, and only if, of those acts available to the agent in the circumstances, it would produce the greatest total net of happiness
         2. To evaluate AU, consider the following assumptions:
            1. AU is a quantitative criterion
            2. There can be a quantitative measure of happiness
            3. AU holds that *whatever* effects on happiness and unhappiness an action would *actually* have are all equally relevant to determining what the person should do
            4. Remember to subtract the unhappiness from the happiness
            5. AU holds that I should perform the act which would produce the *greatest* total net happiness
      2. Intuitive idea of AU: actions have consequences
   4. Defending AU Against Some Objections
   5. Objections to AU: Some Case Studies
      1. Promises
      2. Other actions thought to be wrong in themselves
      3. The moral asymmetry of harm and benefit
      4. Distributive Justice
   6. Justices and Rules: Rule-Utilitarianism
      1. Philosophical level AU has significant appeal
         1. Themes in the case studies all involve issues of rights and justice
         2. Concept of justice is connected to “powerful sentiments” and “apparently clear perceptions” in our moral experience
      2. Morality is a system of *social accountability*
      3. Rule-Utilitarianism
         1. An act is wrong if, and only if, it is contrary to a (possible) rule, such that were society to have a practice of enforcing that rule (formally or informally), this practive would maximize overall net happiness
         2. RU is much closer to moral common sense than AU
   7. RU versus AU and the Normativity of Morality
      1. Rule-utilitarians add that morality is also defined by its *social* character
      2. One cannot hold both AU and RU
         1. Act-utilitarian believes that utility should always serve as the moral criterion
         2. Rule utilitarian holds that although utility is the correct criterion of which rules to have, it is not the correct test of which acts are right and wrong
         3. Normativity of the moral law reveals one cannot follow both AU and RU