

## HS0.303: Applied Ethics

### Assignment 1

#### **Q:**

Read carefully Lecture 1 ("The Normative Question"; pp. 7 – 21) from Christine Korsgaard's Sources of Normativity and answer the following questions:

1. What makes the quest for a philosophical foundation for normativity distinct? What are we seeking when we are seeking a philosophical foundation for ethics? (2)
2. Korsgaard notes that concepts like knowledge, beauty, and meaning all have a normative dimension. What do we mean when we say that these concepts are normative? How do you think these concepts are normative? (2)
3. What is the normative question, according to Korsgaard? Why, according to Korsgaard, is the normative question urgent in the case of ethics? (2)
4. Korsgaard speaks of three critical concerns of the philosopher. How do the theories we discussed so far (i.e., how do utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics) respond to these three questions? (4)
5. How is rationalism, according to Hume, inadequate in setting a criterion of explanatory adequacy? (2)
6. What distinguishes 'explanatory adequacy' and 'normative or justificatory adequacy'? (2)
7. Why does the normativity of ethics pose a unique problem for 'modern' moral philosophy as opposed to ancient and medieval counterparts? (2)
8. Korsgaard discusses four possible answers to what makes morality normative. Match the theories discussed in class with each of these four answers. Explain the matching. (4)

Ans 1:

The quest for a philosophical foundation for normativity is distinct as it not only limits itself to the search for methods or tools to define how every individual in the community should regulate their conduct. Instead, we seek to make claims, command, oblige, or guide while seeking a rational justification of various metaphysical, epistemic or ethical principles that underlie our moral behaviour. When we invoke any moral norm, we make specific claims about others. For example, if I claim any action is correct, the community members must do it.

Ans 2:

If any action is normatively right, the community should do it. And if any action is good, the community members are strongly encouraged to do the same. And the right of these concepts gives us laws to us.

According to Korsgaard, concepts like knowledge, beauty and meaning have a normative dimension as they tell us about what is right, wrong, good, or bad and how we ought to behave as these concepts involve questioning what to think, what to like, what to say, what to do and what to be. Here, knowledge does not belong to a set of facts or information but rather a set of beliefs or ideas we believe to be true. Therefore, the concept of knowledge tells us what to think and do. The concept of meaning tells us about various ideas' significance and purpose. Beauty tells us what to like, whereas beauty is limited to visual beauty and expands to aesthetically pleasing ideas that persuade our actions. Therefore, all these concepts hold a normative dimension.

Ans 3:

According to Korsgaard, normative questions can be used to justify whether any action is moral. The normative questions require any claim to justify its exact meaning, the core idea behind the claim, to whom the claim should be applicable, and the moral claim's origin. These questions help us to define if any action is moral or not.

According to Korsgaard, these moral questions help one to know how one ought to live, and as the ethical concepts apply to everyone, this makes it urgent in the case of ethics.

Ans 4:

Korsgaard speaks of three essential concerns of the philosopher, which are:

1. What is the exact meaning of a moral claim, or what is the core idea contained in the claim?
  2. To whom should the claim be applied?
  3. What is the origin of the moral claim?
- 
- a. Utilitarianism: Jeremy Bentham is often regarded as the father of modern utilitarianism. And for any utilitarian, any action that produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people would be ethical. And for a utilitarian, the claim should apply to everyone in society to maximize the greatest good. At the same time, several individuals could not benefit from the action. For example, punishing someone for a crime might not be suitable for them or their loved ones, but it is an elementary step to maintaining peace within society.

- b. Kantianism: Kantian ethics is based on the work of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant which emphasizes the inherent worth of human beings and the importance of acting following one's reason. According to this theory, any action is ethical if it is universalizable, i.e. the action of an individual should not create any conflict for society if everyone chooses to replicate the same. Kantian ethics revolve around the individual, unlike society, and should apply to every individual. For example, a person can choose to lie and escape an undesirable situation, but if everyone chooses to lie, there would be massive mistrust within society; therefore, lying is unethical.
- c. Virtue Ethics: Virtue Ethics began with Socrates, and then Plato and Aristotle further contributed to the theory. According to virtue ethics, any action should be considered ethical if a virtuous human chooses to do the same in a similar situation. The intrinsic nature of a virtuous person makes his actions ethical. The Virtue theory can be applied to everyone as increasing virtue is the common moral good. For example, would you kill the son of a terrorist who hates a particular community as he has seen his father all his life hating the same, or should one be given a chance to change?

Ans 5:

According to Hume, Rationalism is inadequate in setting a criterion of explanatory adequacy as it relies upon the principle of inductive reasoning, which can not be used to establish the truth of an explanatory hypothesis as it does not consider the role of experience and emotions in forming explanations for moral actions. And therefore, explaining moral actions based only on rational choices without experience is inadequate.

Ans 6:

The theory of moral concepts being answerable to moral ideas' practical and physiological effects forms the notion of explanatory adequacy. It can be seen as a philosophy of science and is concerned if a scientific theory that can account for the moral concept. On the other hand, Normative or justificatory adequacy is a notion of moral philosophy that revolves around whether a moral theory can account for a moral judgment. Explanatory adequacy limits itself to the reasoning why human beings think they ought to do certain things. In contrast, normative adequacy expands to whether humans should do the same things.

Ans 7:

The teleological metaphysics of ancient Greece and the religious systems of Medieval Europe strongly believed that human life possesses a particular purpose for its existence, which could only be met by those who live up to moral conduct. The purpose of human life could be empowering the state in ancient times or withholding the ideas of the church in medieval times. And both ideas often formed the basis for various ethical norms in their era. Korsgaard claims that it has become easier to justify numerous actions for the common purpose of human life. However, the modern world took certain turns from both ideas and is likely subjective. The modern scientific world would argue against any common purpose for the whole of humankind and is culturally relative, which poses a unique problem for 'modern' moral philosophy.

Ans 8:

Korsgaard discusses the following possible answers to what makes morality normative:

1. Voluntarism
2. Realism
3. Reflective Endorsement
4. Appeal to autonomy

- a. Voluntarism: According to Voluntarism, a legitimate authority over the moral agents is the ultimate source responsible for obligation for all the moral commands. The theory of Voluntarism maps with the Divine Command Theory, where God is considered the ultimate source of morality in the universe, and one ought to perform specific moral actions as god commands. According to this, any action is morally right if God commands it. The Divine Command theory be seen as a version of Voluntarism, where God holds the supreme sovereign position.
- b. Realism: According to Realism, morality is normative if the claims are valid, and the claims are true if the claims can be described based on intrinsically normative entities or facts. This is similar to moral realism, which considers ethics a branch of a priori knowledge. It talks about how, like any other priori knowledge, ethical knowledge can be detected by the ethical properties of things.
- c. Reflective Endorsement: According to the view of reflective endorsement, morality is grounded in human nature. Reflective enforcement believes that moral concepts bind us, and whether we have reason to accept or reject a claim makes the idea of reflective endorsement. According to virtue ethics, any action is virtuous if a virtuous human chooses to do the same if they were in a similar situation. The intrinsic nature of a virtuous person makes his actions ethical. Therefore, both ideas map to each other.
- d. Appeal to autonomy: According to Korsgaard, self-consciousness about our actions should be the authority over ourselves and any individual's moral claims are made by their own will. This is similar to Kantian ethics, which emphasizes the inherent worth of human beings and the importance of acting following one's reason. According to this theory, any action is ethical if it is universalizable, i.e. the action of an individual should not create any conflict for society if everyone chooses to replicate the same.

#### References:

1. "The Normative Question" (pp. 7 – 21), Sources of Normativity; Christine Korsgaard,