

Ethics

The philosophical landscape

Roger Jones, 2020:06:13

Aspects of Ethical Philosophy

- **Metaethics**

Metaethics is the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological, presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice.

- **Normative ethics**

The branch of moral philosophy, or **ethics**, concerned with criteria of what is morally right and wrong.

- **Applied and Practical ethics**

Addressing real world ethical dilemmas, maybe leading from or to moral theories

Metaethics

- **Cognitivism**

Moral claims have objective truth values.

May be:

1. Naturalistic (corresponding to some natural description, e.g. utilitarianism) or
2. Non-naturalistic (not, as in G.E.Moore's "naturalistic fallacy")

- **Non-cognitivism**

Moral claims do not have objective truth values.

May be:

1. Emotivism (moral claim express an emotion) or
2. Prescriptivism (moral claims make a prescription)

Normative Ethics

- **Virtue Ethics**

Virtues and Vices are foundational

- **Deontological Ethics**

Rules are foundational

- **Consequentialist Ethics**

Consequences are foundational

Types of Consequentialism

- **Utilitarianism:** maximize aggregate **happiness**
- **Hedonism:** strive to **maximize** their own total **pleasure**
- **Epicureanism:** maximize **happiness** as state of **tranquillity**.
- **Egoism:** maximize good for the **self**.
- **Rule Consequentialism:** following **rules**, chosen for the consequences that the **selection** of those rules have.
- **Negative Consequentialism:** focuses on **minimizing bad consequences** rather than **promoting good**

Aspects of Classic Utilitarianism

Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on *consequences* (as opposed to the circumstances or the intrinsic nature of the act or anything that happens before the act).

Actual Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on the *actual* consequences (as opposed to foreseen, foreseeable, intended, or likely consequences).

Direct Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on the consequences of *that act itself* (as opposed to the consequences of the agent's motive, of a rule or practice that covers other acts of the same kind, and so on).

Evaluative Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on the *value* of the consequences (as opposed to non-evaluative features of the consequences).

Hedonism = the value of the consequences depends only on the *pleasures* and *pains* in the consequences (as opposed to other supposed goods, such as freedom, knowledge, life, and so on).

Maximizing Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on which consequences are *best* (as opposed to merely satisfactory or an improvement over the status quo).

Aggregative Consequentialism = which consequences are best is some function of the values of *parts* of those consequences (as opposed to rankings of whole worlds or sets of consequences).

Total Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on the *total* net good in the consequences (as opposed to the average net good per person).

Universal Consequentialism = moral rightness depends on the consequences for *all* people or sentient beings (as opposed to only the individual agent, members of the individual's society, present people, or any other limited group).

Equal Consideration = in determining moral rightness, benefits to one person matter *just as much* as similar benefits to any other person (as opposed to putting more weight on the worse or worst off).

Agent-neutrality = whether some consequences are better than others does not depend on whether the consequences are evaluated from the perspective of the agent (as opposed to an observer).

Applied and Practical Ethics

- **Applied:** start with some moral theory and apply it to some real problems
- **Practical:** start with real world examples, then generalise to obtain a theory.
- OR **moral particularism?** Start with examples, don't expect theories or rules but look for guiding principles (admit "value pluralism", Berlin).

Another Dimension

- **Values**
- **Motive**
- **Intent**
- **Action**
- **Consequences**
- **Subsequent Effects**
- **Collateral Effects**

The moral agent, even if judged primarily on the early parts, must surely take responsibility for ensuring that the actions he takes are such as will secure the desired effects, without causing unacceptable subsequent or collateral effects.