

Authority of Morality Rough Notes

Morality and Self-Interest

Consider the response to the amoralist that we have reason to be moral because this is in our own best interest. This response initially seems to be the only response to the amoralist that has any chance of success.

- Immoral action is costly to the agent because immoral action is generally punished.
- But if we have reason to act morally simply because we would be punished for acting immorally and so acting morally is ultimately in our best interest, then Glaucon's Gyges has no reason to act morally. This is counterintuitive. We think that we have reasons to act morally regardless of whether we can do so with impunity.
- Socrates and Hume argue that immoral action is costly to the agent because immoral action disturbs one's conscience.
 - Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* plots and justifies to himself the murder of a wealthy unscrupulous pawnbroker, but is racked by confusion, paranoia, and disgust after.
- But if we have reason to act morally simply because we would be haunted by our conscience otherwise, then our reasons for acting morally are in some troubling sense contingent.
 - We ordinarily think that moral imperatives are categorical imperatives rather than hypothetical imperatives, and are necessarily reason-giving rather than only contingently so.
- An Aristotelian virtue ethicist (or a eudaimonist virtue ethicist more generally) would argue that we have reason to be moral because being moral is essential to our well-being, indeed, being virtuous is the sole constituent of eudaimonia.
- The amoralist is unlikely to be persuaded by this. This conception of eudaimonia seems to be a thoroughly moralised conception of a flourishing life. The amoralist will reject this and defend some alternative. For example, the amoralist could defend a hedonistic conception of eudaimonia under which a eudaimon life is simply a life with a large balance of pleasure over pain.
 - The amoralist will not be convinced by, for example, Aristotle's argument for a virtuous eudaimonia because the amoralist rejects that excellent functioning of the rational part of the soul involves that part of the soul functioning morally.
 - By eudaimonist virtue ethical lights, the virtues are good for us, and this is not coincidentally so, but because they are virtues. But the amoralist rejects virtue, and understands these as mere inclinations, habits, or patterns of behaviour. So the amoralist has no reason to think that these are good other than coincidentally so.
- Williams argues that ordinary people will not defect to psychopathy. Then amoralists with some concern for other people can be persuaded by analogy, or an appeal to empathy.

Necessity of Moral Reasons

- Foot argues that we have little reason to think that moral imperatives are in fact so categorical.
- One worry about Foot's response is that a tremendous amount of the value in our lives is grounded in our being moved by moral imperatives. Then, if being so moved is not a rational necessity, it seems this value is left on shaky ground.
- Foot argues that we should not be troubled by the fact that moral imperatives are only contingently constitute reasons to act morally.
 - Foot remarks that the citizens of Leningrad were not troubled by the contingency of the fact that other citizens stood between them and the Germans.
- Even if the contingency of our being so moved is not itself troubling, the worry remains that our acting moral is not robustly secured if it is not rationally necessary.
- Our acting morally is robustly secured because it is secured not only by the rationality of being moral but also by the broader "full-blooded" practice of morality.
- If the amoralist's acting morally is secured by our moral practices, including the practices of blame and punishment, we would hope to be able to justify our involving the amoralist in such practices.
 - Ordinarily, we justify our blaming and punishing each other for wrong action by saying such things as "this is what you deserve for doing that". But this does not justify blame and punishment to the amoralist because the amoralist rejects the concepts of desert and justice.
 - We would hope to justify ourselves to the amoralist because ordinarily, in blaming and punishing others, we take ourselves to be doing more than setting up a system of incentives to reward moral behaviour. We take ourselves to be, at least in part, helping others understand their wrongs and recognise the appropriateness of punishment.

- (Apparently) more troubling is the thought that blaming and punishing the amoralist for wrong action cannot be justified even to ourselves (moralists).
 - Ordinarily, in blaming and punishing others, we take ourselves to be, at least in part, dishing out justice, and blaming and punishing those who deserve blame and punishment. But how could an amoralist deserve blame and punishment for failing to act morally when, by our admission, the amoralist has no reason to act morally?
- There is nothing puzzling about "how" an amoralist could deserve blame and punishment for failing to act morally even when he has no reason to do so.
 - The amoralist deserves blame and punishment simply because he has acted immorally, whether he acted rationally or otherwise is irrelevant.
 - Foot's analogy to rules of etiquette is helpful here. It is appropriate to sanction a delegate at the United Nations for failing to refer to himself in the third person even if this delegate has announced his intention to resign and so has no reason to be concerned with the relevant rules of decorum. This sanction is a response to violation of these rules, not a response to some alleged irrationality.
- Then, a "modest" justification of punishment (that a moralist would find satisfactory) is possible, so it remains to consider (1) whether an "ambitious" justification of punishment (that an amoralist would find satisfactory) is possible and (2) whether such justification is necessary.
 - Plausibly, an ambitious justification is not necessary. First, consider the sort of justification the amoralist would demand. The amoralist would not (sincerely) protest "I don't deserve to be punished!" nor ask "what right have you to do this to me?" So the sort of justification the amoralist demands, if any, is amoral. Then, it is presumably sufficient to respond to the amoralist's demand by saying "this is simply what we have decided to do".
 - Ordinarily, we think it is important that blame and punishment are justified because we hope to avoid invoking a sort of indignation in the punished. But the amoralist has no reason to be so indignant. The amoralist may be indignant in some amoral sense, but this is not troubling. We are not troubled by the frustrations of an inmate that arise from our having foiled his criminal plots, and are only troubled by the indignation expressed in such an exclamation as "Up yours! I don't deserve this!" The amoralist has no reason to be so indignant because he rejects the concept of desert.
 - To the amoralist, his being punished is not some injustice inflicted on him, but the machination of an (as it appears to him) indifferent "moral" universe.