

PHIL 110B Argument Outline

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We look upon the question “is it in our self-interest to be good?”. The tentative thesis is that it is in our self-interest to be good.

Reasons for the thesis

1 From an Intelligent Agent Perspective

We'll first look from an artificial intelligence perspective. That is, we will look at why for an AI with rational emotions it would be beneficial to be good and therefore in our self-interest. An interesting book draw discussions from is *An Introduction to MultiAgent Systems* 2nd ed. by Michael Wooldridge¹. This textbook was used for studies on how intelligent agents should make rational decisions, and how they should work together. This book discusses on multiagent systems, and contains strong arguments on why agents are self-interested to be good. There are many parallelisms to humans, which can be explored.

Firstly, let us define some terms. *Multiagent systems* which are systems composed of multiple interacting computer elements, known as agents. *Agents* are, to some extent, capable of autonomous action – of deciding for themselves what they need to do in order to satisfy their design objectives. Furthermore, *rational agents* are programmed have rational behaviour which looks at the more of the economics of cooperation.

Ultimately we would demonstrate that it is in a rational agent's self-interest to be good because they benefit more from cooperation with other intelligent agents. And we demonstrate this through analysis of the economics, through utilities and preferences of an agent, and through dominate strategies and Nash equilibrias, and how these support the conclusion it is in our self-interest to be good. And if humans can behave rationally, it follows that it is also in the human self-interest to be good.

2 Archiving Same Goals Through Just vs. Unjust Means

In the reading “The Ring of Gyges” by Plato², it explores a sly, unjust man versus a righteous and just man. Both of whom theoretically can achieve the same goals but through different methods. It'll be interesting to discuss how a man of the uttermost injustice can live a life as good as a just man achieving the same goals through just acts. Intuition tells us that archiving the same end results through deceitful and unjust means is certainly worse than archiving it through righteous and just means. And indeed, we should explore why this intuition is correct.

¹An Introduction to MultiAgent Systems 2nd ed. by Michael Wooldridge Published May 2009 <http://www.cs.ox.ac.uk/people/michael.wooldridge/pubs/imas/IMAS2e.html>

²“The Ring of Gyges” by Plato - Philosophy Lander.edu <http://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/articles/gyges-a.pdf> Accessed June 2, 2015.

A major assumption here is that the unjust man is capable of maintaining his composure at all times, he does not fall out of character. It seems that this assumption is quite difficult to accomplish for the average layman. Sure, there are those of us that are deceptive enough to carry this out, but for the average person, it is much easier to maintain the composure of being just and righteous.

A lot of the arguments explored here are suppositions, and not as solid in logic analysis as from the intelligent agent perspective. But nevertheless, the fundamental argument in this section is to show that it's much easier to maintain a righteous and just composure than a deceitful and unjust one, as in most people find it difficult to maintain a deceitful composure. Consequently, if we act just, then it is in our interest to behave cooperatively, and we do that by having a self-interest to be good.

3 Future Benefits of Being Good

Being good often offers rewards in the future when others have good opinions of you and gain trust. You get a wider choice of options to choose from than being greedy. We'll look at this from the perspective of ethical egoism³. The argument is that we should do whatever that improves our own well-being. Being good usually offers more rewards for the collective group than being greedy. Examples include Prisoner's Dilemma, payoff matrices, and cooperative theories.

Since being good opens the opportunity and generates more rewards in the long run, it is worth being good as a principle for investment. We conclude that it is in our self-interest to be good.

4 Behaving Irrationally is a Bad Strategy

Lastly, in the Collective Action Problem reading⁴, people seem to behave irrationally because it seems like the best action, at a cost to others. This problem reduces to the prisoner's dilemma problem, which we analyse from the intelligent agent perspective. This reading suggests that we are lazy individuals who don't want to be the one putting in the effort to be good, unless everyone is doing good. And if everyone is doing good, then certainly it is going to be in our self-interest to sit back and reap the fruits of other's labour. So this seems to be a catch-22 problem.

We argue that while you can reap the reward, it is only temporarily so. Assuming that people are of generally the same intelligence, which is quite reasonable, then it's reasonable to assume others learn eventually of your tactics, and the whole system collapses. There won't be any fruits of labour to reap. Everyone doing good is an unstable equilibrium.

Thus it is in our self-interest to be good and help maintain a good, stable equilibrium and cooperate so that the collective benefit is greater than individual greedy-action benefits. Which essentially the Nash equilibrium conclusion.

³Chapter 8 Ethical Egoism p. 106 The Fundamentals of Ethics by Russ Shafer-Landau

⁴p. 366 Constellations Volume 7, Number 3, 2000 Ideology and Irrationality.
<http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~jheath/ideology.pdf> Accessed June 3, 2015