

Philosophy Notes

10th November 2015

1 Week M

1.1 Monday

1.2 Tuesday

Read from Alex Miller, Contemporary Metaethics (4.1), Norm Suppression (5.1).

1.2.1 Gilbert's Contribution: NORM EXPRESSIVISM

Moral judgements (like lying is wrong etc.), they're a non-cognitive mental state (thus not truth evaluable); They express certain kinds of norms that we accept. (this seems to Murthy to be the most apt way of describing moral judgements).

Idea of rationality: If something is wrong, lying is wrong for example, it only means that I'm rational to be held guilty for that act. It's rational for other people to feel angry for that act. So rationality here allows you to accept norms; this acceptance entails guilt and anger etc. (ask how rational).

This seems to suggest that there must be some truth condition; because rationality usually is this way. However he is extending the idea of rationality to something else, which is non-cognitive. How it's applied, is acceptance of norms.

Kant talks about rationality in terms of maxims (rules etc.). There rationality amounts to identifying some inconsistency etc. The inconsistency can also come, because in some way, there's some sort of rule operating. He also states that reason commands you to do something. He is in this sense defining rationality. (what about idea of freedom defined using rationality). Here however, the idea of rationality matches still. The rule acceptance is...

1.2.2 Hare's response: Non-cognitive

Interestingly, there'll be always some cognitive aspect in non-cognitive theories. If the primary component is cognitive, then the theory is cognitive. If it's not, then, you know. This is how he challenges Stevenson. The use of good has a commendatory aspect. And it also has a command aspect also. If X is good, then there's a descriptive part (using some criteria you evaluate this), which can change and a prescriptive part (the commandatory aspect of it). So Stevenson was combining commands with saying it possessed a certain kind of emotions. Recall there was magnetic component also, which entailed that the language has a goading aspect.

Aside: Locution: , Elocution: How is it stated, eg. warning, command (!? etc.); that can be used by modulation of voice. Perlocutionary aspect: Force by which one is made to act

So the charge on Stevenson was (by Hare) that Stevenson confused the perlocutionary aspect of moral language with morality itself. Moral language has two aspects as stated. The prescriptive aspect is not the same as perlocution.

Supervenience thesis: If something's commendable (this would come from descriptive properties) then something else with same properties will also be commendable. So there's some sort of universalizability. (why did he mention this?) Once you command,

Summary: Within non-cognitivism, we studied emotivism (Charlie, came by discarding Moore's naturalism); Emotivism gave rise to prescriptivism etc.

Meta ethics: What exactly do moral statements/judgements mean? Are they truth evaluable or not?

1.2.3 Egoism

One obstruction to ethics was relativism. Another one is egoism. Most of our actions are motivated by self interest. It is motivated by self interest only. Psychological egoism. All actions are (not ought to be) motivated by self interest. It's an all encompassing theory. It can justify anything. This generated another theory. It is different from utilitarianism in the sense that there it was utility for all, now it is for an individual.

1.3 Wednesday

1.3.1 Egoism (resumed)

Self interest undermines morality. Now egoism claims that self interest is drives our action/motivation etc. and therefore egoism is what matters and morality doesn't matter. There two kinds of egoisms: (i) Psychological and (ii) ethical. Psychological Egoism makes a statement (claims, 'are' or 'is') that self interest is what drives our actions, viz. *all* our action is driven by self interest. They say that even if we cooperate, we do so to get our interest. However, this you can use to defend both alternatives. Eg. giving charity makes us happy, thus self interest. Not giving charity, we save money, self interest. Thus it doesn't explain anything, by explaining everything.

! Observe that most of our motivations arise out of desires. If my desires are satisfied, then it entails that this is self interest.

- (1) All I do is motivated by my desires (2) All my desires are for the satisfaction of my interests

The argument valid but may not be sound. Let's test. For Hume, no action can arise without desire. Kant countered this. For instance, staying back on a Sunday out of duty. However, for Kant it seems that being rational is desired. Thus it may become hard to separate reason from desire. So much for the first. Now let's look at the second premise. Say you want to do something and you get something out of it. Counter (possible) example is that you have a friend who's unwell and you take him to the doctor. What self interest could you have? Well, the egoists will say that you couldn't see him suffer, you wanted to reduce your suffering of seeing him suffer.

Ethical egoism says that all your desires ought to take care of your self interest. Why though? The self interest becomes the basis of morality.

Helping others, intruding into their freedom (talking about countries), become permanently dependent. Counter is that this doesn't say you shouldn't help. Just means that the means of helping is not the best. Eg. use the Golden Rule, perhaps modified to include helping those that don't reciprocate;

1.3.2 Social Contract Theory

How do I formulate a law for myself to live together in a society. What's the sociological and psychological basis for morality? This is not like a scientific discovery. You're trying to construct certain laws, where there's an implicit agreement in the society. Agree to a certain contract, (maybe of historical origins) and if you don't abide by it, then you're wrong. One thesis is Thomas Bob.

Resources: John Shands -> Fundamental of philosophy | desires | John Shands -> Ethics (Egoism)

2 Week M+1

2.1 Monday

Social Contract theory: We forge an implicit agreement that gives advantage to everyone. Going against this agreement is immorality.

- Question: Why must we agree? Here comes the idea of morality. Thomas Hobbs gives the idea of "state of nature". He says that we forge a document and agree to it. Eg. Legal agreement. The terms and conditions are stated to share the burdens and benefits. When agreed upon, each party expects the other to abide by it. However for everyday tasks, we don't always have written agreements. Eg. eating in a restaurant; its implied I'll pay for it. Now as far as a social contract theory is concerned, it has neither a written agreement, nor is there a restaurant like implicit agreement.
- In the "state of nature" [defn: no laws (police etc.), you do what you must], there's some kind of conflict. Man realizes this (that it's too insecure etc.) and forges an agreement for everyone's advantage. Why there's this type of agreement? Lets consider two examples. One is killing and one is stealing. (We're trying to see how morality prohibits me from stealing or killing) In the sense of agreement, these are wrong because you also want your possessions and yourself to be safe.
- Note that here we're not looking at equality of humans. We're looking at equality of strength. If we're equal in strength, then if I harm, then I can be equally harmed by others. [historically it lies in rousseau and plato; recall socrates being in prison and doesn't want to escape. He says that's because he has a certain contract. He says that its so fundamental that he can't violate it. Yet there's another dialogue in the context of justice, in which there's a mutual agreement and that's the whole notion of justice. He then later tries to counter this, saying there's something more fundamental to justice.]
- Criticism: The idea of mutual agreement swamps the idea of concern for others, the idea of human inclinations.
- So in essence there're two parts. (1) Egoism (what's in my best interest) and (2) I don't want "state of nature".
- Criticism (by Hobs): Who ensures that this contract is maintained? Historical (theological basis): There was this idea of divine rights (why kings are in power) this view was prevalent. This was used to justify morality. However Hobs wanted a more secular basis for this. Thus he suggested there must be a sovereign power that ensures enforcement of these agreements.
- Criticism: Free rider problem; if one or two don't follow the agreement, then "free riders" exist. Clearly unfair so long as others follow the contracts.

- On the 17th we can have a discussion of questions. Virtue, meta, natural, Non natural, + (alex miller?), Egosim (shang's book), Social Contract theory (Ben)

2.2 Tuesday

- The rational choice theories also face the same challenge as what is pointed out by Hobs. Just because I made an agreement, it may not agree with it, it may cease to be in my interest. So the idea is that my choice depends on choices made by others.
- This is best illustrated by the prisoner's dilemma. A and B are caught. Both convicted of stealing. Not enough evidence to know which one committed a murder. The deal is that (1) if you confess and the other doesn't confess then, you walk free and the other gets hung. (2) If both confess, then imprisonment for 5 years each. (3) If neither confess, then 2 years each.

Now individually, the best situation is that you confess and the other doesn't. Overall, both remaining silent is best. So now there's a conflict. However, the safest choice is to confess (you don't die). The idea is that you make that choice, assuming that both make this, then deviating from the said choice results in a worse situation.

- Dilemma illustrates: Interests are forward looking, then I needn't care about my agreements (backward looking). However you can't enhance your self interest without promise keeping/agreement etc.

This shows that there's a problem with the social contract theory. That theory is based on equality of strengths. The contract is between two equals so that it benefits both. If there's a weaker person, then he'll submit to me anyway. Thus the contract theory is restricted to equals.

Kant on the other hand was saying that this equality is in terms of human worth. Humanity as an end itself was a kind of rational principle (contrast to the rationality used to describe ability to maximizing self interest). Thus for Kant, there's a different kind of contract.

This shows that the idea of morality being based on self interest must go. Later Kant's idea was used to link to Justice. There he (forgot the name) uses the idea of original position where you don't know where you'd belong to, you're behind a veil of ignorance. You could be a rich person, a poor person, stupid, smart etc. He said then the principle of justice will come from this position.

The main problems were his assumptions; self interest doesn't guarantee that you'll abide by the contract. The criticism is that this contract will not work if the egoist position is assumed.

- The exam is from three to five on the scheduled day.