

# Morality and Moral Philosophy

September 10, 2012

# What is it we want?

## Introduction

### • Why

- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

# What is it we want?

## Introduction

### • Why

- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live — Socrates.

## Introduction

- Why
- **Aristotle**
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## **from Aristotle ...**

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, ...

## Introduction

- Why
- **Aristotle**
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## **from Aristotle ...**

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, ...

**Now remember, that happiness is one translation of *Eudaimonia*, another is Human Flourishing.**

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## from Aristotle ...

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, ...

Now remember, that happiness is one translation of *Eudaimonia*, another is Human Flourishing.

*Where **Human Flourishing** involves the rational use of one's individual human potentialities, including talents, abilities, and virtues in the pursuit of his/her freely and rationally chosen values and goals — Edward W. Younkens.*

## Introduction

- Why
- **Aristotle**
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## **from Aristotle ...**

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, ...

and these attributes are not severed as in the inscription at Delos

---

## Introduction

- Why
- **Aristotle**
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## **from Aristotle ...**

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, ...

and these attributes are not severed as in the inscription at Delos

—

Most noble is that which is justest,  
and best is health;  
But pleasantest is it to win what we  
love.



## Introduction

- Why
- **Aristotle**
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## from Aristotle . . .

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, . . .

and these attributes are not severed as in the inscription at Delos

—  
Most noble is that which is justest,  
and best is health;

But pleasantest is it to win what we  
love.

For all these properties belong to the best activities; and these, or one— the best— of these, we identify with happiness (Nicomachean Ethics I:8).

## Introduction

- Why
- **Aristotle**
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## from Aristotle ...

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, ...

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love.

For all these properties belong to the best activities; and these, or one— the best— of these, we identify with happiness (Nicomachean Ethics I:8).

**I think what Aristotle is saying that the purpose of human existence is to be happy, or to flourish.**

## Introduction

- Why
- **Aristotle**
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

## from Aristotle . . .

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, . . .  
and these attributes are not severed as in the inscription at Delos

—  
Most noble is that which is justest,  
and best is health;  
But pleasantest is it to win what we  
love.

For all these properties belong to the best activities; and these, or one— the best— of these, we identify with happiness (Nicomedeian Ethics I:8).

Yet evidently, as we said, it needs the external goods as well; **for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment.**

# Proper Equipment

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- **Stuff**
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- But we are not going to talk about equipment,

# Proper Equipment

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- **Stuff**
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- But we are not going to talk about equipment, **or any other stuff.**

# Proper Equipment

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- **Stuff**
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- But we are not going to talk about equipment, **or any other stuff.**
- We are going to talk about how conduct affects happiness.

# Proper Equipment

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- **Stuff**
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- But we are not going to talk about equipment, **or any other stuff.**
- We are going to talk about how conduct affects happiness.
- We are going to talk about ethics or morality.

# Proper Equipment

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- **Stuff**
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- But we are not going to talk about equipment, **or any other stuff.**
- We are going to talk about how conduct affects happiness.
- We are going to talk about ethics or morality.
- Morality is, at very least, the effort to guide ones conduct by reason – that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing — while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual who will be affected by what one does — James Rachels.



# Purpose of Ethical Theory

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- **Purpose**
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- The purpose of ethical theory is to introduce clarity, substance, and precision of argument to the domain of morality.

# Purpose of Ethical Theory

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- **Purpose**
- Normative
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- The purpose of ethical theory is to introduce clarity, substance, and precision of argument to the domain of morality.
- The terms ethical theory and moral philosophy are often used interchangeably.

# Normative Judgments

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- **Normative**
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theories attempt to provide a normative framework for understanding and responding to problems in living a moral life.

# Normative Judgments

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- **Normative**
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theories attempt to provide a normative framework for understanding and responding to problems in living a moral life.

What is a normative judgment?

# Normative Judgments

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- **Normative**
- Right
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theories attempt to provide a normative framework for understanding and responding to problems in living a moral life.

What are some normative judgments you make each day?

# Right Action

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- **Right**
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theory is a theory of “right or “moral” action.

# Right Action

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- **Right**
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theory is a theory of “right or “moral” action.

But what is “right”?

# Right Action

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- **Right**
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theory is a theory of “right or “moral” action.

But what is “right”?

What is moral?



# Right Action

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- **Right**
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theory is a theory of “right or “moral” action.

But what is “right”?

What is moral?

What is the difference between moral behavior and prudent behavior?

# Right Action

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- **Right**
- Institution

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

Ethical theory is a theory of “right or “moral” action.

But what is “right”?

What is moral?

What is the difference between moral behavior and prudent behavior?

What is the difference between nonmoral and immoral?

# Morality as a Social Institution

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right

## • **Institution**

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- Morality is composed of a set of standards pervasively acknowledged by the members of a culture.

# Morality as a Social Institution

## Introduction

- Why
- Aristotle
- Stuff
- Purpose
- Normative
- Right
- **Institution**

## Common Morality

## Moral Positions

## Object of Morality

- Morality is composed of a set of standards pervasively acknowledged by the members of a culture.
- We learn these moral rules along with other important social rules, and this is one reason why it is sometimes difficult to distinguish moral rules from other rules.

# Common Morality

Introduction

Common Morality

• Common

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

# Common Morality

Introduction

Common Morality

• Common

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- What are some parts of common morality about which you think there is little disagreement?

# Common Morality

Introduction

Common Morality

• Common

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- What are some parts of common morality about which you think there is little disagreement?
- Are there some that seem to be more contentious?

# Common Morality

Introduction

Common Morality

• Common

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- What are some parts of common morality about which you think there is little disagreement?
- Are there some that seem to be more contentious?
- “Mere preferences vary from individual to individual, but sound ethical judgments that derive from the common morality seem to transcend such individual preferences, holding interpersonally despite the fact that it is an individual who makes the judgment.” — Tom L. Beauchamp in *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*



# Common Morality

Introduction

Common Morality

• Common

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- What are some parts of common morality about which you think there is little disagreement?
- Are there some that seem to be more contentious?
- “Mere preferences vary from individual to individual, but sound ethical judgments that derive from the common morality seem to transcend such individual preferences, holding interpersonally despite the fact that it is an individual who makes the judgment.” — Tom L. Beauchamp in *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*
- “The culture-neutral standard is whether the social practice in question is harmful or beneficial to the people who are affected by it.’ — James Rachels in *Problems from Philosophy*

# What is a moral position?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- **Reasons**
- NotReasons
- Position

Object of Morality

# What is a moral position?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- **Reasons**
- NotReasons
- Position

Object of Morality

- A moral position is one that I can support with reasons.

# What is a moral position?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- **Reasons**
- NotReasons
- Position

Object of Morality

- A moral position is one that I can support with reasons.
- Ronald Dworkin has argued that some reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position.

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice

Prejudice is most often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfounded, judgments toward people or a person because of gender, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality or other personal characteristics.

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction



# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction  
“The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail”

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction

Julie and Mark are brother and sister. They are traveling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other. What do you think about that, was it OK for them to make love?

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction
- Position based on a proposition of fact that is patently false and also implausible

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction
- Position based on a proposition of fact that is patently false and also implausible
- Position that relies completely on the beliefs of others

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction
- Position based on a proposition of fact that is patently false and also implausible
- Position that relies completely on the beliefs of others



What about deities, the scriptures,  
prophets, sages?

# Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- **NotReasons**
- Position

Object of Morality

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction
- Position based on a proposition of fact that is patently false and also implausible
- Position that relies completely on the beliefs of others

What about parents or wise professors?

# Moral Positions

Introduction

Common Morality

**Moral Positions**

- Reasons
- NotReasons
- **Position**

Object of Morality

# Moral Positions

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- NotReasons
- **Position**

Object of Morality

- What is the difference between acting based on prejudice or personal taste and acting based on a moral position?



# Moral Positions

Introduction

Common Morality

**Moral Positions**

- Reasons
- NotReasons
- **Position**

Object of Morality

- What is the difference between acting based on prejudice or personal taste and acting based on a moral position?
- The reasons we produce to justify a particular moral position would generally seem to presuppose some general moral principle or theory.

# Moral Positions

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

- Reasons
- NotReasons
- **Position**

Object of Morality

- What is the difference between acting based on prejudice or personal taste and acting based on a moral position?
- The reasons we produce to justify a particular moral position would generally seem to presuppose some general moral principle or theory.
- We will spend much of this class exploring the issue of what counts as an acceptable moral theory.

# What is the object or function of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- Need

# What is the object or function of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- Need

- Why do we distinguish between, say, actions as morally right or wrong, between people or qualities of character as good or bad?

# What is the object or function of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- Need

- Why do we distinguish between, say, actions as morally right or wrong, between people or qualities of character as good or bad?
- Why do we teach children to do this, by precept or example?

# What is the object or function of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- Need

- Why do we distinguish between, say, actions as morally right or wrong, between people or qualities of character as good or bad?
- Why do we teach children to do this, by precept or example?
- Why do we teach certain moral principles in schools, but not others?

# What is the object or function of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- Need

- Why do we distinguish between, say, actions as morally right or wrong, between people or qualities of character as good or bad?
- Why do we teach children to do this, by precept or example?
- Why do we teach certain moral principles in schools, but not others?
- G.J. Warnock says it is to ameliorate or counteract the tendency of things to “go badly” in human relationships.

# Purpose of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- **Purpose**
- Need

1. To keep society from falling apart.



# Purpose of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

**Object of Morality**

- Object
- **Purpose**
- Need

1. To keep society from falling apart.

“In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, **solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.**” — from Chapter XIII “Of The Natural Condition Of Mankind As Concerning Their Felicity And Misery” in *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes

# Purpose of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- **Purpose**
- Need

1. To keep society from falling apart.
2. To ameliorate human suffering.

# Purpose of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- **Purpose**
- Need

1. To keep society from falling apart.
2. To ameliorate human suffering.
3. To promote human flourishing.

# Purpose of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- **Purpose**
- Need

1. To keep society from falling apart.
2. To ameliorate human suffering.
3. To promote human flourishing.
4. To resolve conflicts of interest in just and orderly ways.

# Purpose of morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- **Purpose**
- Need

1. To keep society from falling apart.
2. To ameliorate human suffering.
3. To promote human flourishing.
4. To resolve conflicts of interest in just and orderly ways.
5. To assign praise and blame, reward and punishment, and guilt.

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

- Because things go badly

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources



# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

**Object of Morality**

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources
  - Limited knowledge, skills, information and intelligence

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

**Object of Morality**

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources
  - Limited knowledge, skills, information and intelligence
  - People are vulnerable to others

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- Need

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources
  - Limited knowledge, skills, information and intelligence
  - People are vulnerable to others
  - People are aggressive

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- Need

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources
  - Limited knowledge, skills, information and intelligence
  - People are vulnerable to others
  - People are aggressive
  - People are egotistical

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

**Object of Morality**

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

- Because things go badly

“It is easy enough to see in general terms how very different the situation would be if the beings concerned were less vulnerable, less aggressive, less egotistical, less irrational, more intelligent, more self-sufficient, and more favoured by material circumstances.”

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

Object of Morality

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

- Because things go badly
- Because of limited rationality

# Why do we need morality?

Introduction

Common Morality

Moral Positions

**Object of Morality**

- Object
- Purpose
- **Need**

- Because things go badly
- Because of limited rationality
- Because of limited sympathies