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?

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

Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world, . . .
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Now remember, that happiness is one translation of *Eudaimonia*, another is Human Flourishing.
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. Younkins.*
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 —
from Aristotle . . .

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

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

Most noble is that which is justest,
and best is health;
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For all these properties belong to the best activities; and these, or one— the best— of these, we identify with happiness (Nichomedean Ethics I:8).
from Aristotle . . .

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Most noble is that which is justest, and best is health;
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For all these properties belong to the best activities; and these, or one— the best— of these, we identify with happiness (Nichomedean Ethics I:8).

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

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For all these properties belong to the best activities; and these, or one— the best— of these, we identify with happiness (Nichomedeian 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

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

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- We are going to talk about how conduct affects happiness.
Proper Equipment

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- We are going to talk about how conduct affects happiness.

- We are going to talk about ethics or morality.
Proper Equipment

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

- 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.
Ethical theories attempt to provide a normative framework for understanding and responding to problems in living a moral life.
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What is a normative judgment?
Normative Judgments

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

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But what is “right”? 
Right Action

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What is moral?
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But what is “right”?

What is moral?

What is the difference between moral behavior and prudent behavior?
Right Action

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

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

- 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

- What are some parts of common morality about which you think there is little disagreement?
Common 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?
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- “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. Beachamp in *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*
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- “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?

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

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- Ronald Dworkin has argued that some reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position.
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**Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position**
Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

- Prejudice
Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

- 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

- Prejudice
- Personal emotional reaction
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Object of Morality

**Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position**

- **Prejudice**
- **Personal emotional reaction**
  “The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail”
Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

- 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

- 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

- 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

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- Personal emotional reaction
- Position based on a proposition of fact that is patently false and also implausible
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What about deities, the scriptures, prophets, sages?
Reasons are not acceptable to justify a moral position

- 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
- Not Reasons
- Position

Object of Morality
Moral Positions

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

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- The reasons we produce to justify a particular moral position would generally seem to presuppose some general moral principle or theory.
Moral Positions

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- 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?

**Object of Morality**
- Object
- Purpose
- Need
What is the object or function of morality?

- 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?

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- Why do we teach children to do this, by precept or example?
## What is the object or function of morality?

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- Why do we teach certain moral principles in schools, but not others?
What is the object or function of morality?

- 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.
1. To keep society from falling apart.
Purpose of morality?

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?

1. To keep society from falling apart.

2. To ameliorate human suffering.
Purpose of morality?

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2. To ameliorate human suffering.
3. To promote human flourishing.
Purpose of morality?

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?

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?

- Because things go badly
Why do we need morality?

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources
Why do we need morality?

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources
  - Limited knowledge, skills, information and intelligence
Why do we need morality?

- Because things go badly
  - Limited resources
  - Limited knowledge, skills, information and intelligence
  - People are vulnerable to others
Why do we need morality?

- 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?

- 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?

- 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?

- Because things go badly
- Because of limited rationality
Why do we need morality?

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