

ETHICS BEYOND BIOETHICS

SECOND CLASS: SEPTEMBER 22, 2009

MORAL PHILOSOPHY. Jonsen, *Bioethics Beyond the Headlines*, Introduction, pp. 10-14, Appendix A, "A Precis of Moral Philosophy," pp.181-187

TROLLYOLOGY: In the last class, two moral dilemmas were presented: A. whether to divert a runaway cable car so that it would kill one person instead of five; B. whether to push a fat man in front of the cable car to save five persons. Your answers: divert the car and kill one instead of five: Compare with Moral Sense Test, 5,000 subjects worldwide, diverse in national affiliation, religion, age, education, ethnicity and gender= 89% Yes to diverting car, 11% Yes to pushing fat man. Differences? (Google: Moral Sense Test)

1. **Definitions. Morality and Ethics** are two words that have the same origin: morality comes from the Latin *mores*, ethics from the Greek *ethos*, both meaning "custom" (in the form *ethike*, it implies "character"). Many different definitions are offered by philosophers and linguists. Here is the way I shall use the terms: **Morality** is a set of non-arbitrary constraints on behavior and, in addition, a set of aspirations that create character, that provide grounds for blaming, punishing, praising, rewarding. **Morality** seems by evolution to foster social cooperation by "ameliorating the human predicament" (Warnock). It is internalized in "conscience" and externalized in "conventions." **Morality** refers to actual ways of life, behaviors, and ideals that are found in cultures and social practices.

Ethics or Moral Philosophy is the systematic, analytic study of the range of questions that arise around morality. For example: What constraints and why? What exceptions and limitations to constraints? What relation between constraints and aspirations? Are these constraints objective, universal? How are moral features, such as obligations, values, etc. related to facts about humans, their nature and evolution, about the situations in which problems appear, about society and the animal and physical world? The ultimate question of moral philosophy is why should I be moral?

Ethics or Moral Philosophy is an academic discipline, long considered to be one of the integral parts of philosophy in Western history of thought.

Morality can be studied by examining the facts of personal and social conduct; it examines what people actually believe and how they behave, with reference to how they believe they *ought* to behave. As such, it can be the subject of anthropology, sociology, cognitive psychology, neuroscience. **Ethics** can be studied only within a theoretical construction about what *ought* means and whence it is derived. As such it pertains to philosophical reasoning with concepts and logic. It cannot, however, be isolated from the facts of life, since these are the objects of its study.

Obligation: from *ought* as a prudential admonition (it's a good idea to do this or avoid that) to *ought* as an imperative (you must do this, you are obliged). How does *ought* become imperative? Is it merely that imperatives are prudential admonitions associated with punishment and reward? One suggestion: around the imperative cluster a set of

supporting concepts: the larger the cluster is, the more imperative the *ought* e.g. from “I ought to lose weight” to “I ought to be honest in my dealings with others.” For the former, only some facts about what constitutes overweight and the personal wish for my weight to be otherwise (or probably health considerations) justify the “ought” for the latter a much more substantial cluster of reasons is required to justify, in a sense, a theory of obligation: a critique of the prudential reasons in favor of dishonesty, the inadequacy of the prudential reasons for honesty; the role of honesty as an essential element of social cooperation.

E.g. The obligating force of a promise—I bind myself to continue to fulfill what I have promised; but what about, it is a moral obligation to keep promises? I do not bind myself to this but seem somehow to be bound as if by another commanding (parents, superego, God). Can we explain the obligating force of moral constraints? Is there a special *deontic* logic, i.e. a form of reasoning that flows from moral “facts” such as rules, principles, duties?

2. Moral Systems: recall that we asked whether a single orderly pattern, at least a medley, could be made out of the *mélange* of moral experience? A Moral System would be the work of a philosopher trying to do just this. Over the history of moral philosophy, many systems have been proposed. Here are three that keep cropping up.

Virtue or Character Systems. What kind of person ought I, and all others, be? For example, Aristotle’s ethics of choices directed by settled habits of behaviors that converge on the final goal of the human entity. As Aristotle said, “the right action is what the virtuous person chooses to do.”

Deontological (Gk: *deon*=“right, proper, duty”) or **Formalist Moral Systems:** Arguments to justify action should be based ultimately on a single or a composite set of Imperatives (Commands, Rules): you must do this because it is required by X. For example, Thomas Aquinas combines Aristotle’s virtue ethic with the commandments of Judeo-Christian belief. Immanuel Kant devises a pure deontological system based on one command, the categorical imperative: act so as your particular choice of action could be considered a universal law for self and for all humans. Talmudic moral argument derives from The Law of God.

Teleological (Gk: *telos*=“aim, goal, purpose”) or **Consequentialist Moral Systems:** Arguments to justify action are based on on the (intended) achievement of the best possible state of affairs as a result of the actions taken. For example, Jeremy Bentham formulates the Principle of Utility: that action is right that maximizes the welfare of the greater number, “the greater good of the greater number.”

NOTE: In recent years, some moral philosophers have noted that a distinctive “feminine” element may qualify these above systems. In its simplest form, this element emphasizes that the object of moral judgments, whether deontological or teleological, is the formation of a community of care, as distinguished from a lawfully ordered society. Individual moral problems are analyzed from this viewpoint, e.g. Hans and the drugs.

PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

SEPTEMBER 29 THE DEONTOLGOICAL ARGUMENT: EUTHANASIA AND ABORTION. In Jonsen, Topic 2, Forgoing Life Support, Topic 4 Euthanasia, Topic 7 Abortion. The Question: are there any moral principles that are absolute, allowing of no exception?

NO CLASS ON OCTOBER 6. HOWEVER READ THE MATERIAL CITED BELOW. WE WILL DISCUSS IN THE NEXT CLASS, OCTOBER 13. THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTONOMY: DEONTOLOGICAL CONTINUED AND DEONTOLOGY CONFUSED. Read: Jonsen, Topic 3, Autonomy of the Patient; Topic 4, Euthanasia. The Question: does the Principle of Autonomy establish a “deontological” system of morality, with one rule only, namely, respect the choices of others. Is this better considered a “situationism,” that is, right action is what a well intentioned person chooses to do in particular circumstances? Is it better simply to assert that choice is only a moral mechanism that aims to achieve the best results, that is, a consequentialist ethic?

Readings for the FOURTH CLASS: OCTOBER 13

EXAMPLES OF CONSEQUENTIALIST ARGUMENT: MAXIMIZING HUMAN WELFARE. In Jonsen, Topic 5, Organ Transplantation; Topic 8, Research with Humans; Topic 9 Genetics; Topic 11 Cloning. Are there cases in which the appropriate ethical argumentation centers on deciding how to improve and sustain some state of human welfare? How is that state to be defined? How is “maximization” compatible with the rights of individuals?

Readings for the FIFTH CLASS: OCTOBER 20

JUSTICE: CAN IT BE VIEWED AS DEONTOLOGY PLUS

CONSEQUENTIALISM? In Jonsen, Topics 3, Autonomy and Topic 12, Health Care System. What is justice? Is the moral principle of justice compatible with the principle of autonomy? How does justice apply to sickness and health, health care? Is there a Right to health care? What are Rights?

NO CLASS ON OCTOBER 27. HOWEVER READ THE MATERIAL BELOW. WE WILL DISCUSS ON NOVEMBER 3.

NEUROETHICS. In Jonsen, Topic 10, Neuroscience. How are moral responses, choices, judgments, attitudes, emotions related to the brain? Is Morality anything more than the responses of the human neural system to various stimuli? If moral choices and behavior are processes of the physical neuropsychological system, how do we deal with determinism? Is there Free Will (without which morality is implausible)?

Readings for the SEVENTH CLASS (MAKEUP WEEK) NOVEMBER 10.

MORAL RELATIVISM. In Jonsen, Topic 13, Cultural Bioethics. Is it possible to demonstrate that any moral principles are universal, across all cultures? Is morality, or some aspects of it, innate? Is Morality anything more than the customs of place and time,

with penalties for aberration? If so, should all practices be tolerated (except perhaps when they impinge on our own values?).