MNSES
Ethical Theories, Environmental Ethics, and Animal Rights

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Three branches of ethics

- Metaethics
- Normative ethics
- Applied ethics
Metaethics

• The study of moral concepts and language
• Is morality subjective or objective?
• Is moral knowledge possible, and if so how?
• Does moral facts exist? If so, what kind of facts
The sceptic

- "Ethics is a matter of taste" ("Beauty is in the eye of the beholder")
- "What’s right for you isn’t right for me"
- "Morality is a fiction"
- "Morality is relative"
- "Moral progress is impossible"
Normative ethics

• What actions are right and wrong from a moral point of view?
• How can we justify moral claims?
• What values are important?
• How should we live?
Ethical Theories

• Consequentialism
• Deontology
• Virtue ethics
Applied ethics

- Normative ethics applied to:
  - Environmental ethics
  - Animal ethics
  - Bioethics
  - Climate ethics
  - Military ethics
  - Computer ethics
  - Research ethics etc....
Consequentialism

• Consequentialism: we ought to do whatever maximizes good consequences. It doesn’t matter what kind of thing we do.

• According to this view whether or not an action is right or wrong depends *solely* on the consequences of that action.
Consequences for whom?

Just for myself?
For everyone, except myself?
For all humans

Standard answer:

• an action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable to everyone able to experience what is valuable (e.g. pleasure and pain) including the agent.
What are good consequences?

• Consequentialism start with an account of what is valuable: (every kind of happiness, some kind of happiness, justice)
• An action is morally right only if it maximizes what is valuable.
• Consequentialist theories can look very different depending on on their account of value
Utilitarianism

• Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism, with a specific account of value.
• Classic Utilitarianism endorses Hedonism: only pleasure is intrinsically good and pain intrinsically bad. Thus, we should maximize pleasure and prevent pain.
• Hedonists often take pleasure in a very broad sense, including physical pleasure, happiness, contentment & well-being.
• On this account, the so called instrumental goods such as friendship, knowledge, freedom, health, honesty are only valuable because of the pleasure we derive from them.
Are all pleasure valuable?
• Perhaps some *kinds of happiness or* pleasures are better than others
• Intellectual pleasures, finishing a project, gaining insight are better than base pleasures
• “It is better to be a dissatisfied Socrates than a satisfied fool” John Stuart Mill
The experience machine!
The Experience Machine:

- Imagine that I have a machine that I could plug you into for the rest of your life. This machine would give you experiences of whatever kind you thought most pleasant, most valuable or enjoyable (writing a great novel, travelling around the world, having a successful pop-star career, bringing about world peace, etc.). You would not know you were on the machine, and there is no worry about its breaking down or whatever.
- Would you plug yourself into it? [Yes/No. Why?]
Two versions of consequentialism

- **Act (direct) consequentialism**: An action is morally right if that action leads directly to the best consequences.

- The act consequentialist decision procedure:
  - on each occasion the agent should decide what to do by calculating what act will produce the most good.
Act consequentialism: Too permissive?

- Transplant [Foot 1966, Thomson 1976]:
- Imagine that each of five patients in a hospital will die without an organ transplant. The patient in Room 1 needs a heart, the patient in Room 2 needs a liver, the patient in Room 3 needs a kidney, and so on. The person in Room 6 is in the hospital for routine tests. Luckily (for them, not for him!), his tissue is compatible with the other five patients, and a specialist doctor is available to transplant his organs into the other five. This operation would save their lives, while killing the “donor”. There is no other way to save any of the other five patients. The organ recipients will emerge healthy. The source of the organs will remain secret. The doctor won't be caught or punished for cutting up the “donor”. The doctor knows all of this to a high degree of probability.
- Is it morally right for the doctor to kill the patient in Room 6 to save five other patients?
Or too demanding?

• If act- consequentialism is true:
• What are morally allowed to spend money on?
• What are you morally allowed to spend your time on?
Or counterproductive?

• The act consequentialist decision procedure:
  – on each occasion the agent should decide what to do by calculating what act will produce the most good.
• It is very difficult and time consuming to figure out what the best consequences of any given action are.
• The act consequentialist decision procedure might not lead to the best consequences!
Rule consequentialism

- Rule (indirect) consequentialism: An action is morally right if it is based on the *rule* that would lead to the best consequences if it was followed.

The rule consequentialist action procedure:
On each occasion, the agent should decide what to do by applying rules, whose acceptance would produce the most good.
E.g. "Don’t lie", Don’t harm others etc.
Problems for rule-consequentialism

• Collapse into act-consequentialism?
• Don’t lie, steal etc, exept where it leads to best consequences?

• Incoherence?
• Should we follow a general rule, even if it would lead to better consequences if we break it?
Deontology

- Non-consequentialism: some kinds of action (such as killing or torturing the innocent) are wrong in themselves (and should not be done), and not just wrong because they have bad consequences.

- Deontology: an ethical theory that endorses Non-Consequentialism. Whether or not an action is right or wrong does not depend or only depends partially on the consequences of that action (an action might be right or wrong in itself). This means that according to deontology, an act can be considered right even if it produces bad consequences.
• Individuals have rights
• These rights correspond to duties
Deontological contraints

• A duty not harm *anyone*.
• A duty not to lie, not to kill innocent people, torture.
• These prohibitions constrain what we can do to any person (not only those close to use), independent of the results.
• Some acts are good and bad in themselves.
• Some acts are ruled out in advance
How stringent are these constraint

• Kant (Kantian Deontology): absolute or exceptionless – we should not lie or kill no matter what
• Ross (Rossian Deontology): pro tanto – we should not lie or kill unless there are very good reasons to do so (overriding reasons).
Agent neutral vs Agent relative

- Consequentialism is typically an *agent-neutral* theory
- Each of us have a reason to promote everybody’s good

- Deontology is typically an *agent-relative* theory.
- Not only are we permitted to do more for those close to us, but we are often *required* to put their interest first.
• You are out for a swim when you discover two children, unknown to you, screaming for help.
• In the opposite direction you also discover that your own child is screaming for help.
• You only have time to swim in one direction.
options

• Am I permitted to care more about my own welfare than about the welfare of others?

• Act utilitarianism says *no*: we have impersonal reasons to try to fix the world (maximise the good)

• Deontology typically says *yes*: I have personal reasons to care more about myself and my family than about others (strangers).
Supererogation

• When have I done *enough* by way of helping others?

• Act consequentialism: you will never come that far; there is no point at which you are permitted (or have the option) to do no more. (Remember the demandingness objection)

• This leaves out *supererogation* (acting beyond duty)

• Deontology: there comes a point, perhaps hard to determine, at which you have an option not to do more. But if you make an extra sacrifice, we admire and praise you for it – it is supererogatory.
Positive and negative duties

• Positive duties: duties to help other people
• Negative duties: duties not harm other people

• Deontology typically take our negative duties to be stricter.
• Doing vs. allowing.
Deontology and intention

• Fon many deontological theories the *intention* of the agent can contribute to determine whether an act is permissible or not.

• Even if two actions have exactly the same consequences, one might be permissible and one impermissible depending on the intention.
Doctrine of double effect

• The doctrine of double effect: It is always impermissible to *intend* harm, but harm can sometimes be permissible as an *foreseen* side effect of an action that is necessary to achieve some proportionate good

• Consider examples from war: we will often foresee that a military attack will lead to collateral damage. But collateral damage is not what we intend to achieve with the attack.
• **Tactical bomber**: A bomber drops a bomb on a munitions factory in order to secure his side a significant military advantage. The bomber knows that fifty non-combatants in a nearby children’s hospital will be killed as side-effect of the blast.

• **Terror bomber**: A bomber drops a bomb on a children’s hospital in order to kill fifty non-combatant. This will terrorise the local munitions workers into quitting their jobs, thus securing a significant military advantage.
Animal Ethics

• Moral status: the status a being has if we as moral agents have direct moral duties with regard to it.

• Negative duties not to harm.
• Positive duties to promote well-being.
Morally relevant differences

• If we are to treat animals different than humans, we need to find morally relevant differences between humans and animals

• What are the candidates?
• Philosophers emphasize different properties as morally relevant for moral status:
  • Kant: being a person, with rationality and free will.
  • Regan: being a subject-for-a-life, with self-consciousness, memory, an emotional life etc.
  • Singer: being sentient, with consciousness.
Peter Singer

• Inspired by Jeremy Bentham’s classical utilitarianism.
• Singer’s argument: moral status is ascribed to all sentient animals.
• Sentient animals have an interest in enjoying pleasure and avoiding pain, and we should take this into consideration when making decisions that affect their interests and well-being.
• Implications for vegetarianism, animal experimentation, etc.
Two principles

• 1. ”Equal consideration of interest”
• 2. ”Principle of utility”
The principle of equal consideration of interest

If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that the suffering be counted equally with the like suffering – in so far as rough comparisons can be made – of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. This is why the limit of sentience...is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary way. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin or colour? (Singer 1993:57-58).
The principle of equal consideration of interest

• Bentham on the principle of equal consideration of interest: each should count for one, and no one for more than one.
• This implies that the interests of animals affected by our actions count morally, and that their interests should be given the same weight as any other animal or human.
The principle of utility

• Singer is a utilitarian and he judges actions as right or wrong on the basis of their consequences, and by comparing the value of different consequences.
• The principle of utility.
• How to compare different outcomes?
• Difficult to compare joys and pains across species.
The principle of utility

• The moral mathematics is quite straightforward in the case of our treatment of animals: our praxis of using animals harms their interests more than it benefit us.

• Compare the human pleasure in eating chicken with the harm imposed on chicken in the production of meat.

• Singer: if we ask these questions, and apply the principle of equal consideration of interest, it becomes obvious that our current treatment of animals in most cases is morally wrong.
• Has developed an animal ethics inspired by Immanuel Kant.
• A Case for Animal Rights.
• Criticizes utilitarian theories (according to which individual’s interests should count equally).
• Critique of utilitarianism:
• Regards individuals as means to ends, and not as ends in themselves.
• According to utilitarianism:
  - individuals (animals and humans) are valuable to the extent that they contribute to making the world a better place to be.
  - Individuals are replaceable.
• The principle of equal consideration of interest takes interests as the ethically primary concern, and not the individuals with the interests.
• Regan thinks this is a mistake: the reason the interests matter is because the individuals matter.
• For Regan, interests are attached to *individuals*, and this has moral importance.
• Postulate of Inherent Value: individuals have *an inherent value* that is independent of their experiences or their value for others.
• Inherent value is ascribed *to individuals* on the basis of *certain characteristics*.
• Inherent value does not come in degrees.
Being subject-for-a-life presupposes: “beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and ... of their being the object of anyone else's interests” (The Case for Animal Rights, s 243)
• The principle of respect: we ought morally to treat beings with inherent value with the respect they are due as a matter of justice.
• It is impermissible to treat beings with inherent value merely as means to our ends.
• We have both negative and positive duties towards beings with inherent value.
Singer or Regan?

• Both Singer and Regan draw quite radical implications from their respective theories.
• Vegetarianism, animal experimentation, etc.
• While Singer’s theory probably includes more animals than Regan’s theory, the latter’s account is more stringent and gives better moral protection for the animals in question.
Issues in animal ethics

• What is permissible use of animals for human purposes?
• Do animals have rights, and if so, what are the implications of this for our treatment of animals?
• How do we weigh the interests of animals against the interests of humans?
Is it morally permissible to eat meat?
Is it morally permissible to eat meat the nice way?
• Many object to industrial farming. But some animals are being treated far better
• Suppose the animals live a good life and are killed painlessly.
• Would it then be permissible to eat them?
• All farming animals live short lifes
• But these animals would not have existed if not for the fact that they would be eaten
• However, consider a similar practice for humans.
• What is the morally relevant difference?
Is it permissible to use animals for research?
If so, what kind of animals
If so what kind of research
Wild animal suffering and human intervention

Arthur Schopenhauer

"One simple test of whether the pleasures of the world outweighs the pain... is to consider the feelings of an animal devouring another with the feelings of the animal being devoured”

(On the suffering of the world)
Should we eliminate predation?

Jeff McMahan

- Suppose we had the means to exterminate carnivours: wolfes, lions etc.
- Predation causes enormous amount of suffering
• Obvious counterarguments:
• We don’t have the ability
• It would be counterproductive
• But suppose we could do it an a way that would not be counterproductive?
The species vs individual

• What is the value of the species, as opposed to the individual?
• Does the existence species have a inherent value?
• Is this value irreplacable?
• Would the world be a worse place if we made the elefant extinct, but cloned the mammut?