

Phil 4830: Moral motivation

I. Two views about moral motivation:

A. Humean view:

1. 'Sentiment' determines ends.
 - Sympathy: when we see others having an experience, we have a similar, fainter idea in our minds.
 - This causes us to approve of actions that promote utility. (Hume is a utilitarian)
2. Reason determines appropriate means to our ends (e.g., whether an action promotes utility).
3. Hence, rational action =
 - Action that is likely to achieve agent's ultimate ends, given agent's beliefs.
 - Ultimate ends cannot be rationally criticized [except possibly for consistency & achievability]

B. Rationalist view:

1. Some beliefs are motivational, incl. moral beliefs.
2. Ends are subject to evaluation by reason.
3. Rational action =
Action that is likely to achieve *rational* goals.

II. A Humean argument against moral realism:

1. All motivation depends upon desires. No action can be motivated solely by belief. (the Humean Theory of Motivation)
2. Moral values (i.e., the attitude of accepting a norm) are inherently motivating. (Motivational Internalism)
3. Therefore, (a) moral values are *not* just beliefs; (b) moral values involve desires.
4. If realism is true, the moral values are just beliefs.
5. So, realism is not true.

III. Against the rationalist view: Hume's five arguments?

- I. When you look at actions, you don't see any moral properties.
 - Example: ingratitude. Where is the moral property?
- II. We make moral judgements *after* all the facts are already known.
 - Also: we excuse people for ignorance of non-moral facts, but not for having incorrect moral values.
- III. Moral value is a lot like beauty, which is subjective.
- IV. Inanimate objects can stand in the same relations as humans can. Thus:

- If a tree over-tops and destroys its parent, this is not wrong.
 - But if a person kills his parent, it is.
 - If morality is objective, then both cases should be equally wrong.
 - This is explained by Hume's theory, b/c people don't feel emotions towards trees.
- V. All moral values depend upon some ends-in-themselves.
- One cannot prove the ends-in-themselves to be good.
 - Therefore, moral values can't be justified by reason.

IV. Butchvarov says:

Q: *Why be moral?* Why should I do what I should do?

- 3 bad interpretations of this:
 1. Why should I sacrifice my good for the sake of others? (the egoist's challenge)

This is not the question. [Why? Because this is a question as to the content of morality?]
 2. When what I know I ought to do conflicts with my inclinations: demanding a reason for doing what I know I ought to do.

This is not a reasonable question. All reasons have already been given. Not the job of ethics to force people to actually act on good reasons. Compare: not the job of logic to force people to be logical.
 3. There are two senses of "should".
 - a) Second "should" is moral; first "should" is prudential. (dealt with in (1))
 - b) Second "should" is moral; first has something to do with what I am motivated to do. (dealt with under (2))
 - c) "what I should do" means "what it is generally believed that I should do". This is "irrelevant". [Because it is a question as to the content of morality?]
- Correct interpretation: it is questioning a tautology. "Should" is used morally both times.
 - We have free will: after recognizing what we should do, we don't have to do it. Maybe this gives point to the question.
 - No: this is confusing "what should I do" with "what will I do". People need not always do as they (know they) should.
 - But moral knowledge always produces some motivation. But this is not because of anti-realism.

Analogy: People are disposed towards true beliefs. Some propositions compel belief (for all rational beings). Similarly, some ends compel desire.
- Interpretation Butchvarov does not consider: Why is it rational to be moral?

Phil 4830:

Against Humean theories of moral motivation

- Does morality derive from *all* desires, or only some particular kind of desire?
 - All desires: Not a plausible theory. Consider: hate, jealousy, lust, vengeance
 - Some kinds of desires: There is nothing particularly interesting about morality; no reason to focus on just this one kind of desire.
- Humean theory has two aspects:
 - a) Normative (theory of rationality)
 - b) Psychological (theory of intentional action)Both are objectionable. 3 objections:

A. The uninterestingness of morality. (against Humean theory of rationality)

- Nothing special about moral reasons as opposed to other desires.
- No reason to act morally if morality conflicts with other (strong) desires.
 - Ex.: Peter Singer's claims about morality
 - So, being moral is often irrational.
- Ethics per se is uninteresting. Makes as much sense to devote a field of study to figuring out how to satisfy our desire for vengeance, power, etc.

B. We distinguish moral requirements from personal preferences. (against Humean psychology)

1. *Moral praise/blame*: is not like sharing/not sharing personal preferences.
 - Is it because moral values are *stronger* than (other) personal preferences?
2. *Punishment*: We only punish people for immoral actions (not actions we merely don't prefer).
3. *Guilt*: We don't feel guilty for merely failing to satisfy our own personal preferences.
4. *Inclination and duty*: We feel conflicts between inclination and duty. We distinguish these from conflicts among inclinations. Why?

C. Hume can't account for prudence, or *any* rational criticism of action.

- In Humean theory of rationality, what desires give reasons for action:
 - 1) Desires the agent has at the time?
 - 2) Desires the agent doesn't have but will have later?Answer: (1).
- Desires have degrees of strength. Strength of desires \propto strength of reasons.
- What strength-of-desire determines the strength of the reasons for action:
 - 1) The present strengths of the agent's desires?

2) The strength of the agent's desires at a later time?

Answer: (1).

- So, the rational action is whatever you *now* most want to do.
 - Imprudent/weak-willed action is rational. What's supposed to be wrong with imprudent acts is that the subject's desires *later* are less well-satisfied. But later desires are irrelevant.
 - Nor should you think it is irrational because it is against the agent's *interests*. Why: this is not the Humean theory of rationality.
 - All action is rational (with the possible exception of strong-willed actions--which, however, might be impossible).

D. Humean view implies determinism?

- B/c we always do whatever our desires most push us towards. Can't do something we have no motive to do; also can't act on a weaker desire instead of a stronger one.
- Corollary: can't blame anyone for anything.
- Corollary: all actions are rational.
- *But*: Hume is a compatibilist, so this is all ok. (*Enquiry VIII*)

Phil 4830:

Sterling's motivational rationalism

Sterling's Thesis: There are no non-moral reasons for action. One ought rationally to pursue E iff one is justified in believing that E is good.

Two main premises:

1. S's desiring E synthetically entails that S quasi-believes that E is good.
 - What is a quasi-belief?
 - Other, similar mental states uncontroversially synthetically entail quasi-beliefs. *Examples:* Fear, anger, hope
3. It is irrational to intentionally act on a quasi-belief that one is justified in believing is false.¹
 - Compare to irrationality of acting on *beliefs*.
 - Compare cases of non-moral quasi-beliefs.

Consider 8 possible cases:

S desire situation	S moral belief situation	Rational action
1. desires E	justified in believing E is good	Pursue E
2. desires E	justified in believing E is bad	Do not pursue E
3. desires E	justified in believing E is neutral	Optional
4. desires E	no justified belief	Optional
5. does <i>not</i> desire E	justified in believing E is good	Pursue E
6. does <i>not</i> desire E	justified in believing E is bad	Do not pursue E
7. does <i>not</i> desire E	justified in believing E is neutral	Optional
8. does <i>not</i> desire E	no justified belief	Optional

- Note that the third column is filled in in accordance with Sterling's Thesis. ST is true iff the third column is correct.
- Think about each of these cases to judge what seems rational. Cases of particular interest:

¹Sterling also lists (2. Good and bad exist, and we know of them through intuition.), but this is inessential to the argument.

Case 2: Why is it irrational to pursue E?

- See premises (1) and (3).

Case 3: Why not pursue E?

- See premises (1) and (3) again.
- Further defense:
 - Pleasure/desire-satisfaction is good.
 - Hence, in order for S to be justified in believing E is value-neutral, S must know of some disadvantage that counter-balances this good.
 - In such a case, it seems S is not rationally required to pursue E.

Case 5: Why should he pursue E?

- In not desiring E, S has a quasi-belief that E isn't good. But he is justified in believing that this quasi-belief is false. Refraining from pursuing E would be acting on this quasi-belief, and he should not act on a quasi-belief that he is justified in thinking is false.

Phil 4830

The Argument from Weakness of the Will

What is weakness of the will?

- Conflict between morality and inclination, agent acts against what he thinks he should do.
- Also: Conflict between prudence and inclination, agent acts against prudence.

Questions:

1. Why is weakness of will irrational?
 2. Why is it a form of “weakness”?
 3. Does the agent have free will? Can he be blamed for his choice?
- Claim: Humeans cannot answer these questions plausibly.

The Humean Account: Must hold that weakness of will is rational, or impossible.

A. The conflict between morality and inclination:

- There are 3 possibilities: (a) The agent does not desire the (putative) moral good. (b) The agent desires the moral good, but *less* than he desires the other end. (c) The agent desires the moral good *more* than he desires the other end.
- In case (a), the agent would be irrational to act morally.
- In case (b), the agent would be irrational to act morally.
- In case (c), the agent would have to act morally.

B. The conflict between prudence and inclination:

- What counts is the agent's *present desires*.
- Again, 3 possibilities: (a) The agent does not now desire his future good. (b) The agent now desires the future good, but *less* than he desires the immediate good. (c) The agent now desires the future good *more* than he desires the immediate good.
- In case (a), the agent would be irrational to pursue the future good.
- In case (b), the agent would be irrational to pursue the future good.
- In case (c), the agent would have to pursue the future good.

C. General point: on the Humean account, the agent's intentional acts are determined. He has to act on his strongest desires.

- It seems that no one can be blamed for anything, since (a) he lacks free will, and (b) anyway, his action was rational.

- D. No sense to calling it a form of 'weakness.' Agents always choose what they want. How is that "weak"?
- The Humean also has no account of what it is for one person to be "more strong-willed" than another. (He's less disposed to do what he wants??)

The Rationalist-Intuitionist Account:

- In moral motivation, reason becomes motivational. Reason endorses certain ends.
- A. In the conflict between morality and inclination:
- Weakness of will is irrational, since it puts ends *not* endorsed by reason before ends endorsed by reason.
- B. In the conflict between prudence and inclination:
- Reason judges a certain future good or satisfaction to be greater than some immediate good.
 - But the agent *desires* the immediate good more.
 - Weakness of will is irrational, since the agent acts on the desire, against reason. (Compare Sterling's view: the agent acts on a quasi-belief that he is justified in believing is false.)
- C. Why is it a form of "weakness"?
- Physical weakness manifests when an agent has difficulty performing the physical actions he wants to perform.
 - (Somewhat) analogously, weakness of *will* manifests when the agent has difficulty *willing* the actions that he most fundamentally evaluates as choiceworthy.
 - This analogy requires the notion that the weakwilled actions are irrational.
 - Also seems to require that the agent is somehow 'more identified' with the moral/prudential end than with the present inclination. Contrast: the 'evil' agent.
- D. How is it that both the 'weak-willed' and the 'strong-willed' action are possible?
- This requires the 'incommensurability' of the motivations. If motivations merely differ in strength, you have the Humean's problem.
 - On the rationalist-intuitionist view, motivations differ *in kind*, not (merely) in strength. (Belief vs. desire.)
 - Hence, the nature of the motivations does not causally determine the agent's choice.
 - One can make sense of the idea of having *more* or *less* strength of will: To have more strength of will is to be disposed to override stronger desires.

Phil 4830

Moral Psychology

Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory:

The stages of moral development:

Level 1: Egoistic orientation

Type 1: Oriented toward avoiding punishment

Type 2: Naively egoistic

Level 2: Oriented to conventional order and others' expectations

Type 3: Orientation to approval of others

Type 4: Respect for authority & social order

Level 3: Oriented towards general rules

Type 5: Contractual, legalistic orientation

Type 6: Conscience or principle orientation

Kohlberg's methods:

- Uses moral dilemmas, in which two moral principles/values conflict.
Ex.: A man's wife needs a medicine to save his life. He doesn't have enough money to buy it, and the doctor won't give it to him. Should he break into the office and steal it?
- Interviews different-age children, adolescents, and adults.
- Kohlberg interprets responses, looking for patterns, selecting out parts of responses that seem to fit with patterns. He classifies different subjects as belonging to different types.
- The levels above roughly correspond to what people say at different ages.

From Self Psychology to Moral Philosophy:

Hypothesis about moral motivation (from Prescott Lecky): People motivated by self-consistency / to construct a coherent conception of one's own personality.

- Why Johnny can't spell
- Why be moral

Cognitive dissonance experiment.

Rival explanations:

- Cognitive dissonance
- Self-perception
- Self-enhancement
- Self-verification
 - Some evidence: self-attribution of emotion

Velleman's theory

- Structure of intentional action: motive -> intention -> action
- Agent forms belief about his emotions/attitudes.
- Then thinks of what action would be consistent with these emotions/attitudes. This thought is the 'intention.'
- Moral motivation: if the agent thinks of himself as 'honest', etc., then he is motivated to act in the way honest people act. Follows Lecky's theory.