

Ethics

Deontological normative ethics:

-Kant: Monistic Deontology a.k.a. categorical imperative; Do what will benefit the most amount of people, act out of duty

Problems with Kant's theory: The Categorical Imperative does not give a way to resolve conflicts of duties. "Lying is wrong" could also mean "Never lie" and Universal and Absolute Principles may be confused

Ethical relativism:

-The Problem of Relativism-What one society considers Right, another Society considers Wrong. Therefore, RIGHT AND WRONG are RELATIVE to a PARTICULAR SOCIETY.

Problems with relativism:

(1) Confusing "harmless conventions" (The British drive on the left side of the road) with "harmful practices" (Clitorectomy is customary among the Somali).

(2) Even if "moralities" may differ from society to society, it need not follow that Morality Itself is relative

(3) the ethical relativist has a hard time explaining how radical moral change can occur *within* a certain society (as with slavery or women's suffrage in the United States).

-Cultural relativism: x is considered right in Society y at time t" and "x is considered wrong in Society z at time t (factual), Moralities are relative (empirical); follows sociological facts

-Normative relativism: What is considered right in Society x at time t IS right for that Society (factual), Morality Itself is Relative (empirical); goes beyond sociological facts

Ethical egoism:

-a normative theory that states that our actions ought to be done from the perspective of self-interest

Problems: One of the problems with this position is that it might not be in one's self-interest to have everyone act from the perspective of self-interest

Utilitarianism:

-A normative ethical theory that places the decision between right and wrong solely on the outcomes (consequences) of choosing one action/policy over other actions/policies

-Jeremy Bentham:

(1) Recognizes the fundamental role of pain and pleasure in human life
(2) approves or disapproves of an action on the basis of the amount of pain or pleasure brought about i.e, consequences

- (3) equates good with pleasure and evil with pain
- (4) asserts that pleasure and pain are capable of quantification

-John Stuart Mill:

- (1) It is not the quantity of pleasure, but the quality of happiness that is central to utilitarianism
- (2) The calculus is unreasonable -- qualities cannot be quantified (there is a distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures)
- (3) Utilitarianism refers to "the Greatest Happiness Principle" -- it seeks to promote the capability of achieving happiness (higher pleasures) for the most amount of people (this is its "extent").

-Act Utilitarianism: The right act is then defined as the one which brings about the best results (or the least amount of bad results)

-Problems: It is possible to justify immoral acts using this theory: Suppose you could end a regional war by torturing children whose fathers are enemy soldiers, thus revealing the hide outs of the fathers.

-Rule Utilitarianism: The principle of utility is used to determine the validity of rules of conduct (moral principles). Right and wrong are defined as following or breaking rules

-Problems: It is possible to generate "unjust rules" according to the principle of utility. For example, slavery in Greece might be right if it led to an overall achievement of cultivated happiness at the expense of some mistreated individuals.