

Ethical Theories and Moral Principles

Search for General Moral Principles

- Ethical discussions often aim to uncover increasingly general moral principles to explain various cases.
- The ultimate goal is to identify a single principle that can comprehensively explain moral phenomena.
- Justifying moral beliefs often involves referencing fundamental principles like not imposing unnecessary harm or telling the truth.
- Moral philosophers seek to develop comprehensive theories that unify and order ethical thoughts.
- The pursuit of a single, overarching principle is common in various fields like physics, psychology, and philosophy.

Importance of Ethical Theories

- Core ethical beliefs lead to the development of ethical theories.
- Moral philosophy involves tracing the connections between basic moral views and more complex theories.
- Testing these theories against curiosity and critical thinking helps evaluate their validity and applicability.
- Exploring general ethical theories is crucial for understanding and justifying personal moral views.
- Ethical theories provide a framework for analyzing and resolving moral dilemmas.

Role of Moral Reasoning

- Moral reasoning, akin to other forms of reasoning, involves presenting reasons to support a conclusion.
- Arguments in ethics consist of premises (reasons) that lead to a specific conclusion.
- Good moral reasoning requires avoiding false beliefs and ensuring logical rigor.
- The quality of moral arguments is essential for reaching accurate and justifiable conclusions.
- Effective moral reasoning involves both arriving at the truth and providing sound justifications for one's views.

- Understanding and applying logical reasoning principles enhance the quality of moral arguments.

Understanding Logical Arguments

Validity vs. Soundness

- Valid arguments are logically flawless and have a true conclusion if all premises are true.
- Sound arguments are both valid and have all true premises, setting the gold standard for good reasoning.

"Sound arguments are the gold standard of good reasoning, ensuring that if all premises are true, the conclusion must also be true."

Importance of Truth and Logic

- Truth and logic are essential in constructing strong arguments in philosophy and other fields.
- Arguments should be both logically watertight (valid) and have all true premises to be considered sound.
- The combination of logic and truth leads to sound arguments, ensuring the validity of the conclusion.

"What we want in philosophy, and in all other areas of inquiry, are arguments that are logically watertight (valid) and have all true premises (sound arguments)."

Flaws in Moral Arguments

- Some moral arguments rely on false premises, invalid reasoning, or both.
- Invalid arguments lack proper support between premises and conclusions, leading to unsound reasoning.
- The presence of a false premise or invalid logic can render an argument unsound, even if the conclusion is true.

"Bad arguments may contain true conclusions, as even true claims can be supported by poor reasoning."

Evaluating Moral Arguments

Analysis of an Argument for Meat Eating

- The argument justifying meat eating based on animal behavior is reconstructed and evaluated.
- The original argument is found to be invalid due to inadequate support between premise and conclusion.
- A modified version with an underlying assumption is presented to create a logically perfect argument.

"The Argument for Meat Eating, like many other invalid arguments, can be modified to achieve a logically perfect form by addressing underlying assumptions."

Critique of the Meat Eating Argument

- The modified argument is still unsound due to a false premise, highlighting flaws in the reasoning.
- Reasons such as human choice, survival needs, and moral guidance from animals are provided to refute the argument.
- The analysis does not disprove the conclusion but shows the argument's unsoundness in justifying meat eating.

"Meat eating may be morally acceptable, but the argument presented fails to provide a sound justification for it."

- **Competitors' Approaches:** Hedonism rejects one-size-fits-all models, advocating for individualized pursuits of happiness.

Personal Authority and Well-Being

- **Individual Autonomy:** Hedonism grants individuals significant influence over defining a good life.
- **Personal Choice and Happiness:** Individuals have input into their well-being based on personal preferences.
- **Critique of External Influence:** Hedonism supports resistance against external dictates on how to live, emphasizing personal happiness.

Core Tenets and Principles of Hedonism

Misery vs. Happiness in Well-Being

- **Impact of Misery:** Hedonists argue that misery detracts from a good life, emphasizing the importance of happiness.
- **Well-Being Assessment:** Evaluating well-being based on happiness levels rather than external achievements.
- **Comparison of Lives:** Illustrating the significance of happiness in enhancing one's welfare.

Intrinsic Value of Happiness

- **Fundamental Belief:** Happiness is considered intrinsically beneficial in hedonistic philosophy.
- **Explanation of Value:** Happiness directly improves welfare, while sadness undermines it.
- **Importance of Happiness:** Happiness is a fundamental aspect of well-being, influencing decision-making and value assessment.

Justification of Happiness as an End

- **Instrumental vs. Intrinsic Goods:** Hedonism distinguishes between happiness as an end in itself and as a means to other ends.
- **Value of Happiness:** Being happy is inherently valuable, not contingent on leading to other outcomes.

- **John Stuart Mill's Hedonism:** Emphasizes intellectual and artistic pleasures over physical pleasures.

Concept Comparisons

Concept	Intrinsic Value	Instrumental Value
Definition	Valuable for its own sake	Valuable as a means to something else
Example	Happiness	Money
Importance	Determines the goodness of life directly	Contributes to the goodness of life indirectly

Details to Note

- Hedonism is the view that happiness is the combination of pleasure and the absence of pain.
- Happiness, according to hedonists, is attitudinal pleasure, not just physical pleasure.
- Hedonism traces its origins back to ancient Greek philosophers like Epicurus and John Stuart Mill.
- Hedonism explains that there are many paths to happiness, allowing for flexibility in defining a good life.

Main Ideas/Plot Points

- Hedonism defines happiness as the key to a good life, emphasizing pleasure and the absence of pain.
- The philosophy of hedonism has evolved over time, with different thinkers like Epicurus and John Stuart Mill contributing to its development.
- Hedonism offers a flexible approach to defining a good life, acknowledging various sources of happiness.

Key Terms/Concepts

- **Hedonism:** The ethical theory that pleasure (or happiness) is the ultimate good and the proper aim of action. It suggests that happiness is necessary and sufficient for a good life.
- **Instrumental Goods:** Things that are valuable because of the good things they bring about.
- **Intrinsically Valuable:** Things that are worth pursuing for their own sake, valuable in their own right.

- Examples: Weight loss, academic success, collecting items of interest.

"If there is always a reason to get what you want, and getting what you want makes you better off, then pursuing self-interest is always justified."

Knowledge of the Good

Clarity on Determining What is Good

- Desire satisfaction theory simplifies knowing what is good: Understand desires and how to fulfill them.
- Challenges in practice: Difficulty in determining methods to fulfill desires, resolving conflicting desires.
- Theory explains why it can be hard to improve well-being and offers clear guidance when desires are known.

"If you want to make yourself better off, clarify your desires and pursue them effectively."

QUICK REFERENCE.

Key People

- **Russ Shafer-Landau**: Philosopher from the University of Wisconsin-Madison who discusses the Desire Satisfaction Theory in relation to human welfare.

Fundamental Theories

- **Desire Satisfaction Theory**: Emphasizes that individual well-being is determined by the satisfaction of desires, distinguishing between intrinsically and instrumentally good aspects.

Key Events

- **Publication of Desire Satisfaction Theory**: The development and discussion of the Desire Satisfaction Theory in the context of human welfare and the good life.

Seminal Studies

- **Comparison of Desire Satisfaction Theory and Hedonism**: Studies exploring the differences between the Desire Satisfaction Theory and Hedonism in determining what constitutes a good life.

- Example: Medication that is necessary for health but not wanted
- Discussing the implications for well-being and personal growth

Informed Desires and Well-Being

- Understanding the significance of desires being 'informed'
- Case study: Essena O'Neill's experience with social media and uninformed desires
- Analyzing how uninformed desires may impact our overall well-being

Desire Fulfillment and Satisfaction

- Examining whether fulfillment of desires without awareness affects well-being
- Delving into the role of awareness and satisfaction in desire fulfillment
- Considering the psychological impact of fulfilled desires

Challenges to Desire Satisfaction Theorists

- Exploring the phenomenon of feeling disappointed after achieving desired outcomes
- Strategies desire satisfaction theorists may employ to address such challenges
- Critically evaluating the theory in light of real life examples

Objective Values and the Good Life

- Debating the dependence of the good life on objective values
- Identifying items with objective value that contribute to a fulfilling life
- Reflecting on the implications of objective values in personal fulfillment

Cases for Critical Reflection

Social Media Influence

- Analyzing Essena O'Neill's experience with social media and its impact on well-being
- Research findings on the negative effects of excessive social media use
- Discussing distorted perceptions of a good life through social media

Morality and Religion

Religious Belief and Moral Motivation

- Popular argument: Atheism may hinder moral understanding and motivation.
- Religious belief is often seen as a source of moral guidance and motivation.
- Fear of God and desire for a happy afterlife are cited as motivators for moral behavior.
- Conscientiousness in religious individuals may stem from the fear of divine punishment or hope for rewards.
- However, being conscientious does not always equate to moral goodness.
- Religious principles must be morally sound to lead to ethical behavior.

- Applying ethical theories to real-world scenarios for deeper insights.
- Example: Evaluating the implications of moral decisions in challenging situations.
- Historical Context: Case studies provide practical insights into ethical theories.

QUICK REFERENCE.

Key People

- **Winston Churchill:** British Prime Minister during World War II, known for his leadership during the war, including controversial decisions like the bombing of German cities.
- **Jack Kevorkian:** Nicknamed 'Dr. Death,' a medical pathologist who advocated for euthanasia and assisted in the deaths of terminally ill patients.
- **Thomas Aquinas:** Influential exponent of natural law theory, merging Aristotelian and Christian views to argue for morality based on human nature.

Key Events

- **Terror-Bombing in World War II:** British policy of targeting German cities during World War II, resulting in significant civilian casualties and raising ethical questions about the morality of such actions.
- **Dr. Jack Kevorkian's Assisted Suicides:** Series of assisted suicides performed by Dr. Kevorkian in the 1990s, sparking debates on euthanasia and the role of physicians in end-of-life decisions.

Seminal Studies

- **Psychopathy and Business Success:** Studies suggesting that individuals with psychopathic traits can excel in certain professions, raising questions about the relationship between psychopathy and success.
- **Ethical Dilemmas in War:** Examination of wartime decisions like terror-bombing, highlighting the complexities of ethical decision-making in times of conflict.
- **Euthanasia Debates:** Discussions surrounding euthanasia, including cases like Dr. Kevorkian's assisted suicides, exploring the moral implications of end-of-life care.

Key Institutions/Organizations

- **Radio Relations:** London-based media agency that controversially advertised a job opening for a 'Psychopathic New Business Media Sales Executive Superstar,' sparking discussions on psychopathy and success in business.

Facts to Memorize

- Psychopathic behaviors can be advantageous in certain professions.

- The bombing of German cities during WWII aimed to destroy civilian morale.
- Euthanasia is a controversial topic with ethical implications for doctors and patients.

Problem-Solving Steps

Problem-Solving Steps for Ethical Dilemmas:

1. **Identify the Ethical Issue:** Determine the moral dilemma at hand, such as the decision to assist in euthanasia.
2. **Consider Different Perspectives:** Evaluate various viewpoints, like the arguments for and against psychopathic behaviors in certain professions.
3. **Apply Ethical Theories:** Utilize ethical frameworks like natural law theory to analyze the situation.
4. **Evaluate Consequences:** Assess the potential outcomes of different courses of action, such as the impact of terror-bombing on civilian populations.
5. **Make a Decision:** Based on ethical reasoning and considerations, make a decision on how to proceed in the given scenario.

Key Terms/Concepts

- **Natural Law Theory:** A theory that posits moral laws are derived from nature and the natural order of things, suggesting that actions are right when they are natural and wrong when they are unnatural.
- **Psychopathy:** A personality disorder characterized by traits such as lack of empathy, superficial charm, and narcissism, often associated with antisocial behavior.
- **Human Nature:** The essence of being human, encompassing innate traits, behaviors, and characteristics that define humanity.
- **Euthanasia:** The act of intentionally ending a patient's life to relieve suffering, often a subject of ethical and moral debate.
- **Moral Agents:** Individuals who bear responsibility for their actions and are capable of making moral judgments and decisions.

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Psychological Egoism: Altruism vs. Self-Interest.

Introduction to Psychological Egoism

Definition and Overview

- Psychological egoism posits that human beings are ultimately motivated by self-interest.
- It suggests that all actions, even seemingly altruistic ones, are driven by a desire for personal gain.
- The theory does not deny the existence of various motivations but argues that they all stem from a deeper self-benefiting motive.

- The argument that fulfilling one's desires equates to self-interest is refuted by examples of individuals deeply wanting to help others.
- Merely deriving pleasure from actions does not necessarily indicate self-interest as the ultimate motive.
- Doubts are raised about the premise that all actions are driven by self-interest, highlighting the complexity of human motivations.
- The argument's second premise is criticized for assuming that expecting personal benefit implies aiming solely for self-interest.

The Argument from Expected Benefit

- The Argument from Expected Benefit posits that individuals always expect personal gain from their actions.
- It suggests that expecting personal benefit implies a constant aim to promote self-interest.
- Examples of pessimists and individuals acting against personal benefit challenge the universality of this argument.
- The argument faces criticism for overlooking cases where individuals act without expecting personal gain.
- The premise that expecting benefit equates to aiming for self-interest is deemed implausible.
- The argument is further questioned for assuming that personal benefit is always the underlying motive for actions.

Two Egoistic Strategies

- Despite challenges to psychological egoism, two strategies are proposed to counter the evidence of altruism.
- One strategy involves appealing to individuals' guilty conscience as a driving force for actions.
- Examples of individuals risking their lives to oppose oppressive regimes are used to support the idea that conscience can override self-interest.
- The strategy aims to show that moral obligations and values can motivate actions beyond self-interest.
- By highlighting the role of guilt and moral principles, egoists attempt to downplay altruistic behaviors as exceptions rather than the norm.
- The strategy seeks to emphasize the internal conflict individuals face when choosing between self-interest and moral duty.

- The argument combines predictions of harm with utilitarian principles of minimizing harm or maximizing happiness.
- It warns against short-sighted decisions that may lead to significant long-term harm.

Application and Critique

- Slippery slope arguments are commonly used in debates on controversial practices to caution against potential long-term harms.
- Critics argue that even if a practice has short-term benefits, the long-term consequences may outweigh them.
- The argument emphasizes the importance of choosing options that minimize harm and maximize overall well-being.
- An example includes opposing voluntary active euthanasia based on the prediction of negative consequences in the future.
- Critics of slippery slope arguments question the validity of predicting long-term outcomes and the moral conservatism inherent in preserving the status quo.

QUICK REFERENCE.

Key People

- **John Wesley:** English religious thinker and founder of the Methodist Church, known for promoting a philosophy of doing good and altruism.
- **G. E. Moore:** English philosopher who advocated for consequentialism and believed that what is right is whatever produces the best.
- **Jeremy Bentham:** Philosopher who introduced utilitarianism and emphasized the importance of maximizing overall well-being.

Fundamental Theories

- **Act Utilitarianism:** A form of utilitarianism that states an action is morally required if it maximizes overall well-being in a specific situation.
- **Principle of Utility:** The ultimate moral standard in utilitarianism, focusing on creating the greatest overall balance of happiness over misery.
- **Argument from Marginal Cases:** A utilitarian argument that asserts the moral equality of animals and marginal humans based on their capacity to suffer.

- The measurement of well-being poses a significant challenge for utilitarianism, as quantifying well-being based on desire satisfaction, or a pluralistic view raises complexities.
- The example of desire satisfaction theory highlights the issue of whether all desires should hold equal weight in determining well-being, as superficial desires being fulfilled may not equate to overall well-being.
- Pluralism in well-being, which includes factors like knowledge, virtue, love, happiness, and friendship, complicates the measurement of personal welfare, as combining these diverse elements into an overall measure proves difficult.

Challenges in Maximizing Well-Being

- Utilitarianism faces dilemmas when happiness and autonomy, both considered intrinsically valuable, conflict in decision-making.
- The example of a patient being kept unaware of a terminal illness to prevent depression illustrates the clash between respecting autonomy and ensuring happiness.
- John Stuart Mill's emphasis on maximizing the quality, not just the quantity, of pleasures introduces complexities in decision-making, especially when faced with conflicting options.
- The Argument from Value Measurement questions utilitarianism's validity by highlighting the absence of a precise unit of measurement to determine the value of actions' outcomes.
- The argument suggests that utilitarians should acknowledge the lack of a universal unit of measurement, casting doubt on the validity of utilitarianism.

Critiques of Utilitarianism

Lack of Precise Measurement

- Utilitarianism relies on maximizing well-being but lacks a precise unit of measurement for happiness or well-being.
- Comparison with measurable attributes like height, speed, and wealth makes the absence of a clear unit of measurement evident.
- Despite the lack of precise measurement, clear cases exist where some actions clearly produce more overall benefit than others.
- Examples like a grandmother caring for orphaned grandchildren versus a friendly card game highlight the imprecise yet evident measurement of benefits.

Absolute Moral Duties and Kant's Views

Kant's Stance on Absolute Duties

- Kant believed certain actions, like lying, are never permitted.
- Case study: The inquiring murderer and the moral dilemma.
- Kant's emphasis on moral considerations outweighs other demands.
- Critique of absolute moral duties and conflicts between duties.
- The challenge of defending absolute moral duties in Kant's philosophy.

Universalizability of Maxims

- Kant's reliance on maxims to determine the morality of actions.
- The importance of universalizable maxims in Kantian ethics.
- Example: Lying to the inquiring murderer and universalizable maxims.
- Critique of Kant's assumption on universalizable maxims.
- Difficulty in determining absolute moral duties in Kant's framework.

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- While not all moral rules are absolute, examples of absolute rules include prohibitions against killing innocent people, rape, and torture.
- Moral absolutism does not claim that every moral rule is absolute, only that some are.
- Popular examples of absolute rules include those that forbid deliberately killing an innocent person, raping someone, or torturing a captive.

Case Studies and Examples

- In situations like thwarting a violent attacker by hitting them or lying to an inquiring murderer, breaking certain moral rules may be permissible.
- The debate on moral absolutism often revolves around extreme cases like torture for extracting information to prevent catastrophic events.
- Absolute rules like prohibiting torture are challenged in scenarios where the lives of many innocent people are at stake.
- The Argument from Disaster Prevention questions the existence of absolute moral rules by emphasizing the necessity of breaking rules to prevent catastrophes.
- Critics of absolutism argue that in rare cases, actions like torture, rape, or killing may be morally justifiable to prevent disastrous outcomes.

Historical References

'Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz has offered a controversial defense of torture under specific conditions.' - Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge (2003)

- References to real-world examples and scholarly debates provide insights into the practical implications of moral absolutism.

Definition and Challenges of Moral Absolutism

- Moral absolutism asserts the existence of absolute moral rules that are universally binding.
- Challenges arise when absolute rules conflict, leading to moral contradictions.
- Example: Conflict between the absolute rules of keeping promises and not harming innocent people can lead to moral dilemmas and contradictions.
- The Argument from Contradiction posits that if absolute rules conflict, the theory is false.

Moral Absolutism

The Challenge to Absolute Moral Rules

- Cases like those presented challenge the idea of an absolute ban on killing the innocent.
- The story of Rabbi Efrati's brother highlights the consequences of adhering strictly to such rules.
- The Argument from Irrationality questions the rationality of absolute moral rules when perfect obedience can lead to negative outcomes.
- Absolutists defend the ban on killing innocents by emphasizing the importance of following the rule, even if it may result in unintended consequences.
- The fundamental rationale for absolute moral rules is to prohibit certain actions, not solely to protect innocent life.
- Absolutists argue that the purpose of such bans is to forbid individuals from acting in specific ways, rather than solely to prevent harm.

Defense of Absolute Moral Rules

- Absolutists reject the notion that the primary goal of absolute rules is to protect innocent life.
- The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing (DDA) asserts that it is morally worse to do harm than to allow harm to occur.
- Absolutists maintain that absolute moral requirements apply to actions taken, not merely to preventing certain behaviors.
- The DDA justifies why it is crucial to refrain from committing evil acts, even if allowing harm to occur may lead to greater consequences.
- The DDA helps navigate moral dilemmas where individuals must choose between committing atrocities or allowing others to do so.
- It explains the ethical dilemma faced by Nazi officers who believed that staying in their positions could mitigate greater harm, despite aiding an evil cause.

The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing

Principles of the DDA

- The DDA posits that it is morally preferable to allow harm to occur than to actively cause harm.

Critiques and Challenges to the DDA

- **Challenge 1:** Cases where the DDA's distinction between doing and allowing seems morally insignificant.
- **Challenge 2:** Difficulty in consistently drawing the line between actions that constitute doing versus allowing.
- **Ethical Experiments:** Thought experiments to isolate variables and test moral implications.
- **Importance of Distinguishing Actions:** Absolutists' need to differentiate between harmful actions and omissions.
- **Defending the Absolutist Position:** Addressing objections to the irrationality of moral absolutism.

Defending Absolutism and Moral Rules

- **Moral Absolutism:** Arguing for the prohibition of certain harms regardless of outcomes.
- **Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE):** Examining how intentional harms challenge consequentialism.
- **Justification for Moral Rules:** Exploring reasons behind absolute rules against deliberate harm.
- **Challenges to Absolutism:** Addressing contradictions, defending moral rules, and the importance of intentions in ethical decision-making.
- **Fate of Absolutism:** Hinging on successful defense of the DDE and DDA.

Testability	Open to experimental verification	Double-slit experiment in QM
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Ethical Decision Making in Morality

- Moral decision-making involves balancing conflicting duties and exercising judgment.
- Easy moral cases have obvious solutions, while difficult cases require careful consideration.
- Example: Ethical dilemmas where options respect some duties but violate others.
- Historical Context: Ethical dilemmas have been debated by philosophers for centuries.

"Sometimes it is just obvious that one theory is better or worse than another. But in close cases, scientists have no alternative but to use their judgment."

Case	Description	Example
Easy moral cases	Clear-cut moral solutions	Helping someone in need
Difficult moral cases	Conflicting duties require judgment	Choosing between honesty and loyalty

Ethical Particularism

Rejection of Prima Facie Duties

- Particularists reject moral absolutism and the existence of prima facie duties.
- Prima facie duties claim certain features are always morally important, which particularists deny.
- Example: Critiquing Ross's view on promise-keeping and moral absolutes.
- Historical Context: Ethical particularism challenges traditional moral frameworks.

Concept	Description	Example
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Process of Moral Education

- Moral education involves learning dos and don'ts initially, akin to apprenticeship in other fields.
- Children start with simple, absolute rules and gradually learn when exceptions are necessary.
- Experience, guidance, and understanding help children appreciate the nuances of moral decision-making.
- Successful moral education leads to the development of moral artists who can navigate moral complexities.
- Rules in moral education evolve from strict obedience to nuanced understanding through trial and error.

Virtue Ethics and Moral Education

The Development of Virtue

- Children are initially taught simple rules to guide their behavior, but as they mature, they learn to appreciate exceptions through experience and guidance.
- Successful education aims to cultivate independent thinkers who can navigate moral complexities without relying solely on rigid rules.
- The rejection of a simple moral litmus test by virtue ethicists acknowledges the nuanced nature of morality and the varying degrees of moral wisdom among individuals.
- Gradual transition from following basic rules to critically examining and applying them in different contexts is essential for moral growth.
- Exceptions to moral rules are recognized as individuals gain experience and understanding, highlighting the importance of context in ethical decision-making.

The Nature of Virtue

- Virtue ethics focuses on developing admirable character traits to become better individuals.
- Virtues, such as courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom, enable individuals to pursue good.
- Virtues go beyond habits, requiring a deep understanding of why certain actions are morally right.

- Critics argue that tragic dilemmas undermine the moral validity of virtue ethics.

"Tragic dilemmas highlight the difficulty in applying virtue ethics to extreme situations."

Moral Guidance Criticisms

- Critics claim virtue ethics lacks practical guidance in complex moral puzzles.
- Virtue ethics advises following virtuous traits like temperance and courage.
- Moral conflicts arise when virtues conflict, posing challenges for ethical decision-making.
- Virtue ethicists address conflicts by considering the virtues and vices involved.

"Virtue ethics can provide guidance by advising actions based on virtuous traits."

Understanding Virtue Ethics

Principles of Virtue Ethics

- Virtue ethics focuses on acting based on moral rules derived from virtues and vices.
- Virtues include temperance, loyalty, modesty, generosity, compassion, and courage.
- Vices to avoid greed, envy, malice, unfairness, and short temper.
- Virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of individual virtues in guiding moral behavior.
- Moral conflict arises when virtues conflict with each other, requiring individuals to balance conflicting virtues.
- Example: Dilemma of revealing a friend's spouse's infidelity balancing honesty with respecting privacy.

Resolving Moral Conflicts in Virtue Ethics

- Virtue ethicists provide limited guidance on resolving conflicts, emphasizing individual judgment.
- Balancing virtues against each other requires personal reflection and consideration of the situation.
- Virtue ethics rejects the idea of a universal moral guidebook or precise rules for every situation.
- Individuals must navigate moral complexities through wisdom, experience, and ethical reflection.

- Moral education plays a key role in refining moral discernment and selecting appropriate role models.

Moral Wisdom and Role Model Selection

- Moral insight in choosing role models improves with increased moral wisdom and experience.
- Winston Churchill's example illustrates how personal biases can cloud judgment in recognizing moral exemplars.
- Moral education is a continuous process that shapes individuals' ability to identify virtuous role models.
- Virtue ethicists, like other moral theorists, face challenges in resolving disputes about moral wisdom and role model selection.
- The process of gaining moral knowledge and identifying role models is complex and requires ongoing moral development.

Moral Conflict and Contradiction

Challenges in Virtue Ethics

- Moral conflicts in virtue ethics can lead to contradictions in ethical decision-making.
- Disagreements among virtuous individuals can result in conflicting actions in the same situation.
- Wise individuals may interpret moral dilemmas differently, leading to contradictory outcomes.
- Resolving contradictions in virtue ethics requires addressing differences in virtuous perspectives.
- The theory of virtue ethics faces challenges in reconciling conflicting virtuous actions.

QUICK REFERENCE.

Key People

- **Aristotle:** Ancient Greek philosopher whose Nicomachean Ethics laid the foundation for virtue ethics.

Rooted in the idea of living a good life through virtuous behavior.	Rooted in the idea of achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
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Important Quotes

"Virtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue."

Explanation: This quote highlights the intrinsic satisfaction and joy that virtuous actions bring to those who value virtue.

"I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion."

Explanation: This quote by Winston Churchill illustrates how personal biases and prejudices can cloud moral judgment and perception of others.

Key Terms/Concepts

- **Virtue Ethics:** An ethical theory that focuses on the character of individuals and emphasizes the importance of developing virtuous traits to lead a good life.
- **Moral Duty:** The obligation to act in a certain way based on ethical principles or rules.
- **Character:** The moral and ethical qualities of an individual that influence their behavior and decisions.
- **Tragic Dilemmas:** Situations where all available choices lead to negative outcomes, presenting moral challenges.
- **Moral Conflict:** The clash between different moral principles or values that make decision-making complex.
- **Moral Exemplars:** Individuals who serve as role models for ethical behavior and embody virtuous traits.

- Moral choices within close relationships are central to the ethics of care.

Understanding Ethics of Care

Comparison with Other Ethical Theories

- **Ethical Egoism vs. Care Ethics:** Care ethics values sacrificing personal interests for the well-being of loved ones, unlike ethical egoism which prioritizes self-interest.
- **Kantianism vs. Care Ethics:** While Kantianism emphasizes justice, care ethics focuses on nurturing relationships over standing on rights and fairness.
- **Contractarian Theories vs. Care Ethics:** Unlike contractarian views that are conditional on mutual benefit, care ethics emphasizes unconditional care and sacrifice.
- **Utilitarianism vs. Care Ethics:** Utilitarianism promotes impartial benevolence, whereas care ethics prioritizes care for loved ones over others.
- **Partiality in Care Ethics:** Care ethics advocates for partiality towards loved ones, emphasizing that love and care cannot be distributed equally to everyone.

Key Features of Ethics of Care

- **Importance of Emotions:** Care involves a network of emotions like sympathy, empathy, and love, guiding individuals to understand and tend to the needs of others.
- **Role of Emotions in Moral Motivation:** Emotions play a central role in moral motivation and discovery within care ethics, contrasting with utilitarian and Kantian views.
- **Connection to Virtue Ethics:** Care ethics aligns with virtue ethics by emphasizing not just actions but also the manner in which actions are carried out.
- **Rejection of Unification:** Care ethics rejects the idea of a single supreme moral rule governing all actions, highlighting the complexity and individuality of moral duties.
- **Challenges of Moral Decision-Making:** Care ethics acknowledges the complexity of moral decision-making, especially in conflicting situations within relationships, requiring a nuanced understanding of moral duties.

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CHAPTER 19.

The Status of Morality

Doubts about Objective Morality

- Doubts about morality often stem from uncertainty about what is right or wrong.
- Another type of doubt questions the existence of objective moral standards, which can undermine confidence in morality.

- Objective moral standards apply universally, regardless of belief, indifference, or desire satisfaction.
- While there are millions of objective non-moral truths, the existence of objective moral truths is uncertain.
- Ethical objectivism asserts that some moral standards are objectively correct, and some moral claims are objectively true.

Moral Nihilism and Ethical Relativism

- **Moral Nihilism:** Believes there are no moral truths at all, viewing morality as a human construct based on emotions.
- **Ethical Relativism:** Argues that some moral standards are correct relative to individuals or societies, rejecting objective universal moral principles.
- Ethical relativism is divided into two categories: cultural relativism and ethical subjectivism.
- **Cultural Relativism:** Moral standards are relative to cultures or societies.
- **Ethical Subjectivism:** Moral standards are those endorsed by each individual.
- Both moral nihilism and ethical relativism oppose ethical objectivity but differ in their views on moral truths.

Two Kinds of Ethical Relativism—and Their Attractions

Ethical Subjectivism

- Acts are deemed morally acceptable based on personal approval or adherence to individual commitments.
- Personal conviction is considered the ultimate measure of morality in ethical subjectivism.
- Each person's moral standards are equally plausible in ethical subjectivism.
- There is no superior moral code to judge the accuracy of individual moral outlooks.
- Subjectivism asserts that there are right answers in ethics relative to each person's values.

Cultural Relativism

- The correct moral standards are determined by the guiding ideals of society in cultural relativism.

Implications of Ethical Subjectivism and Cultural Relativism

- Ethical subjectivism and cultural relativism offer a middle ground between moral nihilism and ethical objectivism.
- Legitimate moral standards exist, but their legitimacy is contingent on individual or societal support.
- Subjectivists and relativists differ in their views on cultural relativism, with subjectivists questioning the moral correctness of societal norms.
- Cultural relativism suggests that deeply held societal beliefs are morally justified, even if they clash with universal moral principles.
- The case of honor killings highlights the ethical dilemmas posed by cultural relativism, where cultural practices may condone morally abhorrent actions.

Critiques of Ethical Subjectivism and Cultural Relativism

- Subjectivists and relativists face challenges in justifying morally abhorrent practices endorsed by societies.
- Cultural relativism can lead to moral infallibility within societies, where deeply ingrained beliefs are considered morally correct.
- Subjectivism posits that individual commitments are morally infallible, potentially legitimizing prejudiced or ignorant moral beliefs.
- The origins of moral beliefs, whether societal or individual, are deemed irrelevant by relativism, leading to the acceptance of morally questionable principles.
- Ethical subjectivism promotes moral equivalence, suggesting that all moral views are equally valid, regardless of their content.

Ethical Subjectivism vs. Cultural Relativism

Ethical Subjectivism

- According to ethical subjectivism, moral judgments are based on individual feelings and commitments.
- Implies that the moral outlooks of individuals like Hitler or Stalin are as plausible as those of a Nobel Peace laureate.
- Poses a threat to tolerance as intolerant outlooks are considered equally valid.
- Raises questions about the worthiness of personal commitments and the value of moral judgments.

- This reinterpretation eliminates contradictions but implies that moral disagreements are based on misunderstandings of individual commitments.
- Subjectivism's solution to contradiction raises issues of accusing individuals of misunderstanding their moral claims and eliminates the possibility of genuine moral disagreement.

Moral Subjectivism

Understanding Moral Subjectivism

- Moral subjectivism asserts that moral judgments are expressions of personal approval or disapproval.
- It suggests that when individuals make moral claims, they are essentially stating their own attitudes towards certain actions.
- This view implies that moral disagreements are not genuine disagreements but merely differences in personal preferences.
- Subjectivism faces a dilemma as it struggles to explain the existence of moral disagreement.
- The example of a dispute over meat-eating illustrates how subjectivism translates moral judgments into personal approval or disapproval, eliminating genuine disagreement.

Critique of Moral Subjectivism

- Subjectivism leads to contradictions when taken at face value, making it untenable as a moral theory.
- By reducing moral claims to expressions of personal attitudes, subjectivism eliminates the possibility of genuine moral disagreement.
- Serious moral debates involve more than just reporting personal outlooks; they entail substantive disagreements on moral issues.
- The inability of subjectivism to account for moral disagreement weakens its credibility as a moral theory.
- The dilemma faced by subjectivism highlights the limitations of reducing moral judgments to individual attitudes.

- The moral rightness of an act is determined by whether an ideal observer, fully informed and rational, would favor it.
- Ideal observer views aim to eliminate errors in moral thinking, such as ignorance, emotional bias, and irrationality.
- These views suggest that moral progress occurs when individual and societal views align with those of ideal observers.

Challenges of Ideal Observer Views

- Disagreement among ideal observers poses a significant challenge, as conflicting choices may lead to contradictions.
- The theory proposes that an action is morally required or forbidden only if all ideal observers unanimously agree on it.
- A fundamental issue arises when ideal observers might endorse morally questionable actions, such as killing the mentally ill or approving of racism.
- The problem parallels the dilemma faced by divine command theory, where actions are deemed right solely based on approval from a higher authority.
- Subjectivism, cultural relativism, and ideal observer theories share a common structure where actions derive their moral status from individual or societal approval, raising questions about the foundations of morality.

QUICK REFERENCE.

Key People

- **Russ Shafer-Landau:** Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, known for his work on metaethics and ethical relativism.

Key Criticisms of Ethical Relativism

- **Moral Infallibility:** Subjectivism and relativism suggest that moral standards are never wrong, leading to moral contradictions and lack of moral progress.
- **Moral Equivalence:** The theories imply that all moral views are equally valid, undermining the concept of moral superiority or progress.
- **Questioning Own Commitments:** Individuals may question the moral standards of their society or personal beliefs, challenging the infallibility of these standards.
- **Moral Progress:** The inability of subjectivism and relativism to explain genuine moral progress or improvement in moral beliefs over time.

- Expressivism is more complex than error theory.
- Error theory questions the existence of moral features in the world.
- It asserts that moral judgments lack truth and knowledge.

Comparison to Atheism

"The error theory is to morality as atheism is to religion."

- Both deny the truth of widely accepted worldviews.
- Error theorists aim to reveal a fundamental mistake in moral views.
- Atheists and error theorists challenge the existence of core beliefs in religion and morality.
- Both require convincing arguments to support their views.

Error Theory

Theory and Its Attractions

- Error theory questions the legitimacy of morality.
- It claims there are no moral features in the world.
- Moral judgments are deemed untrue due to the absence of moral facts.
- Error theory suggests there is no moral knowledge.
- Sincere moral judgments are said to always fail in describing moral qualities.

Fundamental Claims of Error Theory

Claim	Description
No moral features	The world lacks moral qualities like good or bad.
No true moral judgments	Moral claims lack truth due to the absence of moral facts.
Absence of moral knowledge	Without moral truth, there can be no moral knowledge.

- They aim to retain confidence in morality while avoiding issues of cultural relativism and ethical subjectivism.
- Expressivism resolves contradictions and explains moral disagreement as clashes of emotions or personal commitments.
- Unlike error theorists, expressivists reject ethical objectivity but seek to maintain faith in morality.
- Expressivism simplifies the understanding of moral judgments by focusing on emotional expressions rather than objective truths.

Expressivism's Main Attractions

- **Handling Contradictions:** By asserting that no moral claim is true or false, expressivism eliminates moral contradictions.
- **Explaining Moral Disagreement:** Views moral disagreement as a clash of emotions or personal commitments rather than conflicting truths.
- **Simplicity:** Similar to error theory, expressivism views the world based on scientific facts without adding moral values as an extra layer of reality.
- **Reliable Motivation:** Moral judgments reliably motivate action by expressing desires, cares, commitments, and emotions.
- **Contrast with Beliefs:** Expressivists differentiate moral judgments from beliefs by highlighting their motivational nature.

Logical Challenges to Expressivism

- **Possibility of Logical Argumentation:** Expressivism's denial of moral claims being true raises concerns about the feasibility of logical moral argumentation.
- **Example Argument:** Analyzing an argument about the immorality of torture to illustrate the logical challenges faced by expressivism.
- **Comparison with Classic Argument:** Contrasting a moral argument with a classic logical argument to highlight the logical structure.
- **Incompatibility with Logical Validity:** Expressivism's stance on moral claims being neither true nor false conflicts with the principles of logical validity.
- **Implications for Moral Reasoning:** Expressivism struggles to explain how moral claims, if not true, can logically support other claims.

Critique of the Argument

- Distinction between the right to an opinion and the merit of that opinion.
- Examples illustrating the fallacy in equating rights to opinion plausibility.
- Rejection of premise 1 due to the confusion between rights and opinion merit.

Moral Objectivity Supports Dogmatism

Argument from Dogmatism

- Link between objective moral standards and acceptance of dogmatism.
- Dogmatism is characterized by closed-mindedness and unwavering confidence in one's opinions.
- Rejection of dogmatism is unacceptable.
- Ethical objectivism does not inherently promote a dogmatic attitude.
- Falsehood of the argument's premise regarding the acceptability of dogmatism.

Neutrality of Ethical Objectivism

- Ethical objectivism focuses on the status of moral claims, not on closed-mindedness.
- Objectivity in moral claims does not dictate the breadth of accepting competing ideas.
- Clarification on the nature of ethical objectivism and its stance on moral correctness.

Understanding Ethical Objectivism

Ethical Objectivism Overview

- Ethical objectivism pertains to the status of moral claims, asserting that the correct moral code is objectively true.
- It emphasizes that moral truth, not being subjective, may be challenging to discern, promoting humility and open-mindedness.
- Analogies with scientists' attitudes towards objective truths highlight the need for a similar approach in ethics.
- Objectivism denies individual or societal authority in determining right and wrong, discouraging dogmatism.

- The Argument from Disagreement suggests that persistent disagreement negates objective truth in morals.
- Disagreement in ethics can stem from factors like lack of information, personal bias, or flawed reasoning.
- Deep disagreement does not negate the existence of objective moral truths.
- Disagreements in ethics are compatible with the concept of moral objectivity.

Atheism and Moral Objectivity

The Argument from Atheism

- Ivan Karamazov's claim 'if God is dead, then everything is permitted' questions the basis of morality without a divine authority.
- Some atheists argue that morality depends on the existence of God for objectivity.
- The Argument from Atheism posits that morality can only be objective if God exists.
- If premise 1 is true and God does not exist, then morality cannot be considered objective.
- The assumption that laws require lawmakers is central to the argument from atheism.
- Atheists challenge the notion that objective laws, including moral laws, necessitate a divine lawmaker.

The Argument from Atheism and Moral Laws

Explanation of Moral Laws

- Atheists question the need for an author for moral laws, similar to other objective laws.
- The Argument from Atheism lacks persuasiveness as it assumes religious believers are wrong.
- The premise that laws require lawmakers is flawed and not universally accepted.

Absence of Categorical Reasons in Moral Objectivity

- Moral duties are perceived to inherently provide reasons for compliance, irrespective of personal desires.
- Philosophical debate on the existence of categorical reasons challenges ethical objectivism.

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Ethical Theories and Concepts