

## **Ethics Study Guide**

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### **Basic Points about Arguments**

#### *Argument Vocabulary*

- Argument: a chain or reasoning designed to prove something
  - Consists of one or more premises
  - Has a conclusion
  - Says the conclusion follows from the premises
- Valid: conclusion follows from the premises
- Sound: the argument must be valid AND the premises must be true

#### *Example*

- All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Thus, Socrates is mortal.
- The first two statements are the premises and the third statement is the conclusion (it follows from the premises)

#### *Drawing conclusions*

- “Following from the premises” means a logical relationship exists between them
- The conclusion follows from the premises if it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false simultaneously

- The conclusion of an argument may follow the premises even if they aren't true
  - Example: all people from Georgia are famous. Jimmy Carter is from Georgia.  
Thus, Jimmy Carter is famous.
    - It is not true that all people from Georgia are famous but the conclusion is still true.
    - The argument is valid but not sound

### *Moral skepticism*

- Moral skepticism: the idea that there is no such thing as an objective moral truth
  - There is no one truth
  - Morality is subjective
  - Morality is only a matter of opinion and no one has a better opinion
  - Values exist only in our minds
- The Cultural Differences Argument: different cultures have different ideas concerning right and wrong
  - Example: In Eskimo societies, infanticide is thought to be morally acceptable. In other societies, it is not. Thus, infanticide is neither objectively right nor wrong. It's just a matter of opinion that varies by culture.
  - To determine soundness, we have to ask if the premises are true and if the conclusion follows from them.
    - The premises concern what people believe.
    - The conclusions go beyond beliefs.

- The argument tries to derive the skeptical conclusion about morality from a certain set of facts, namely, the facts about cultural disagreements.
  - Suggests conclusion might be derived from a different set of facts
- One might suggest that it's unfair to compare morality with facts
  - but morality is different since you can't prove it
  - This objection says that if infanticide is objectively right or wrong, it should be possible to prove that infanticide is right or wrong. Since we can't, we cannot determine it's morality.
- The Provability Argument: if there were any such thing as objective truth in ethics, we should be able to prove that some moral opinions are true and others are false...but we can't prove which are true and false so there is no such thing as an objective truth ethics
  - It is valid (the conclusion follows)...but are the premises true?
  - Two reasons it seems better than it is:
    - There is a tendency to focus attention only on the most difficult moral issues (such as abortion)
    - It's easy to confuse two matters that are very different: proving an opinion to be correct and persuading someone to accept your proof

### *Conclusion*

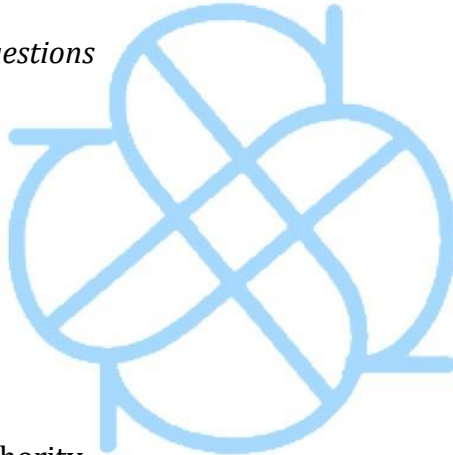
- Arguments are offered to provide support for a theory/idea
- A philosophical theory may be regarded as acceptable only if there are sound arguments in its favor

- An argument is sound if the premises are true and the conclusion follows logically from them
- In evaluating an argument, we ask two questions: Are the premises true and does the conclusion follow from them?
- If an argument is unsound, it doesn't mean the conclusion is false, just that the argument doesn't support it.

### **Intro to Moral Reasoning by Tom Regan**

#### *Ways not to Answer Moral Questions*

- Personal preferences
- Moral judgements
- Feelings
- Statistics
- Appeal to a Moral Authority



#### *The ideal moral judgement*

- Conceptual clarity
  - Ex: the abortion debate balances on whether or not the fetus is a person so the concept of "person" must be analyzed
- Information (knowledge of the world and the setting in which a situation arises)
  - Ex: in the debate over capital punishment, some say they should execute to avoid the prisoners being released on parole

- Rationality (the ability to recognize the connection between different ideas and to understand connections between statements)
  - Ex: if the sky is blue and all blue things are good, then the sky must be good
- Impartiality (objectivity)
  - Ex: if a parent has a favorite, they might receive better treatment
- Coolness (not being in a state of high emotions)
  - Ex: a very emotionally charged person will be more likely to make a bad moral decision
- Correct moral principles (must declare how all rational, free beings ought to act)
  - Ex: a judgement has to be based on the correct/most reasonable moral principle

### *Normative ethics*

- Going beyond the methods in meta-ethics and determining what the correct moral principles are
- What principles should all free, rational beings out to be guided by?
- Unless the normative ethical philosopher states the correct moral principles, they cannot reach the right decision
- Consequentialist theories: looking at the results of an action to appraise the morality
  - One common characteristic of right actions lead people to make them and end up with good results
  - Aka teleological theories (from Greek work telos meaning end)
  - Three types of normative ethical theories

- Ethical egoism: moral appraisal by one's actions' consequences to themselves
- Ethical altruism: moral appraisal by the affects of one's actions on everyone but themselves
- Utilitarianism: moral appraisal by overall impact of one's actions (most good for the most number of people)
- The problem of injustice: consequentialism doesn't account for basic convictions about justice (to treat someone unjustly harms them and it is because of this that consequentialism doesn't really work)
- Nonconsequentialism: normative ethical theories that are not based on good vs evil results
  - Aka deontological theories (Greek word deon means duty)
  - Extreme version: intrinsic good and evil of consequences don't matter at all when determining right and wrong
  - Moderate version: intrinsic good and evil are relevant to determining morality but not the only factor

### *Basic Moral Rights vs Correlative Moral Rights*

- Basic moral rights: rights that do not stem from a basic moral principle
  - Don't follow the Principle of Utility (acting based on what brings the most happiness to everyone)
  - Utilitarianists would say that rights are not basic, but correlated with duties
- Correlative moral rights: rights that stem from other rights/principles

- Ex: my right to not have Ryan ruin my books is correlated to Ryan's duty not to steal them or mess them up

### *Legal Rights vs Moral Rights*

- Moral rights (if they exist) are universal, equal, and inalienable (can't be transferred)
  - Moral justice demands everyone honor moral rights
- Legal rights are specific to the country
  - Legal justice requires respect of legal rights

### *Rights*

- Some say rights are an individual's entitlement to be treated in certain ways
- Some say rights are valid claims an individual can make to have one's interests/welfare taken into account
- A right involves the idea of a justified constraint upon how others may act
  - If Beth has a right to x, then others are constrained not to interfere with her pursuit/possession of x as long as x doesn't interfere with anyone's rights
- One role of the Principle of Utility
  - When rights of innocent people conflict, it comes into play
  - Trolley problem
  - Even if there are basic moral rights and even if utilitarianism can account for them, one could believe both:
    - Basic moral rights
    - That the Principle of Utility should play some role in right vs wrong

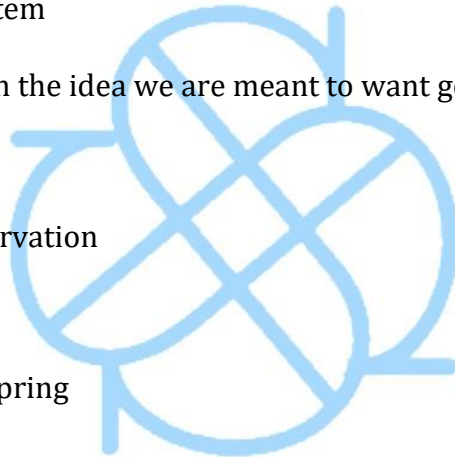
## Utilitarianism Notes

- Utilitarianism: focuses on the results/consequences of our actions...regardless of intentions
  - Actions should be measured by happiness/positivity that results
  - Good consequences = good actions
- Agreed with Kant that moral theory should apply equally to everyone
- Disagreed with Kant about grounded it in something intuitive... specifically the primal desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain
  - Considered hedonistic because good = pleasant
  - Not egoistic because it is “other-regarding” and encourages us to pursue happiness for us and others
- Principle of Utility: we ought to pursue the most good for the greatest number of people
  - Even if you have to sacrifice your own happiness (you are not extra special)
- Make decisions OBJECTIVELY, from the position of a benevolent, disinterested spectator
- Sometimes the world sucks but if you can fix it, you should
- Act Utilitarianism/Classical Utilitarianism: choose the action that benefits the most people
  - Killing one to save 5 acts in accordance
- Rule Utilitarianism: we ought to live by rules that lead to the greatest good for the greatest number. Think long term on a long scale
- Founded by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill

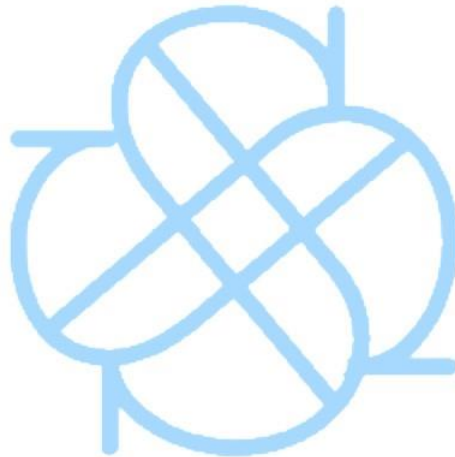


## Natural Law Theory Notes

- Thomas Aquinas thought being a good person was part of God's plan for us but not everyone knew God
  - Then he was like...God wouldn't have made expectations without a way to meet them! We are pre-loaded with abilities
  - God is awesome and he made you so you're awesome but like, don't forget that
  - God created the world according to natural laws, predictable and life-sustaining system
- Natural Law: based on the idea we are meant to want good things
- Seven basic goods:
  - Life/self preservation
  - Reproduction
  - Educating offspring
  - Seek God
  - Live in society (socialize)
  - Avoid offense (avoiding shame and guilt)
  - Shun ignorance (we are natural know-ers)
- How natural laws work
  - My life is valuable
  - Your life is like mine
  - Your life is thus valuable
  - I shouldn't kill you



- Killing goes against natural law
- For each prohibition (negative law, “do not \_\_\_\_”), there is a positive injunction (a positive law)
- Critique: if this is supposed to be so intuitive, why is there so much bad?
  - Aquinas says intuition (we try what we think is good but it’s not) and emotion (we are emotional and it overpowers our reason)
  - The theory is weakened if you don't believe in God.



## Kantianism

### *The basics:*

- Non-consequentialist (not about results) aka deontologist
- Absolute objective law called the Categorical Imperative
- It's your intentions, not your actions

### *Categorical imperative:*

- Categorical Imperative: morality is derived from judgement, a non-negotiable universal law
  - Universality: only do it if you think other people could do it too (and if many did!)
  - Every human being must be treated as an end, not a means to an end
    - Don't use others to get something for yourself
    - Includes not lying
  - Act as though you are the moral authority of the universe
  - Categorical imperatives are imperatives that have nothing to do with our desires, and that are not contingent. Kant says the moral law is the same for all of us, and binding on all of us, regardless of our own personal interests and desires.

### *Imperatives:*

- Command either hypothetically or categorically

- Hypothetical commands express “the practical necessity of some possible actions as a means to achieving”
  - Hypothetical = good as a means to something else
  - Problematic practical principle = an action is good for a theoretical or possible purpose
  - Assertoric principle: an action is good for a purpose that is present
- Categorical commands represent an action as being objectively necessary in and of itself
  - Categorical = good in and of itself
  - Commands immediate action and not about something that can be resulted from it
  - Doesn't matter what will results from the conduct or what will happen during it
  - It is about the form and the principle that causes the action  
(INTENTIONS)
- Every practical law represents something as good and necessary
- The categorical imperative (an action is necessary without reference to an end) is an apodictic practical principle
  - Apodictic: expressing or of the nature of necessary truth or absolute certainty
- Every science has a practical segment in which:
  - Some purpose is set forth as a problem
  - Imperatives are offered saying how that purpose can be achieved

- The imperative of morality:
  - Volition according to these three principles is plainly distinguished by these imperatives:
    - Rules of skill
      - Technical, relevant to arts and skills
    - Advice of prudence
      - Involves a necessity that can hold only under a condition
      - Pragmatic (relevant to wellbeing)
    - Commands/laws of morality
      - Law means unconditional necessity
      - Commands are laws that must be obeyed even if you don't want to
      - Relevant to any free conduct whatsoever
- Act as though the maxim of your actions were to become, through your own will, a universal law of nature
- Treat humanity as an end never just a means.

*Understanding the constraint of will that imperatives place:*

- If someone wills an end and if he has reason, he then wills any steps that are necessary for achieving that end
  - When I will x, I must have (as part of that act of will) considered:
    - The means to x
    - The consequences of x

- The imperative extracts from willing x
  - The actions necessary to achieve x
- Happiness is hard to pin down so that even though each person wants it, they can't give details of what they want
  - This is because the elements of the concept of happiness are empirical
    - Empirical: drawn from experience
  - The completed idea of happiness requires the thought of an absolute whole: well-being now and later

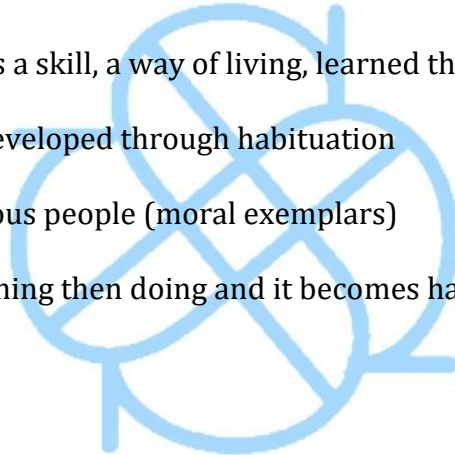
### *Universality*

- By universality, Kant is suggesting you should only do something if you are okay with other people doing it too.
- A practical example would be cheating on tests. Some people cheat on, say, the SAT and don't think much of it, but imagine if everyone cheated. The curve would go up and your score percentile would be the same as it was in the original setting. If everyone did it, it would negatively impact you and thus, you are negatively impacting others, even if it's just a very small way. It would be morally wrong to do so.
- Similar to the golden rule but intended to be thought of on a wider scale

## Virtue Theory

- A virtuous person:
  - Always knows what to say
  - Diffuses tension
  - Delivers tough news with grace
  - Confident not arrogant
  - Brazen but not reckless
  - Generous but not extravagant
- Aristotle believed that virtuous people were rare
- Virtue theory: an ethical theory that emphasizes an individual's character rather than following a set of rules
  - If we can focus on being good people, the right actions will follow effortlessly
  - Become a good person and you'll do good
- Virtue theory reflects the idea that humans have a fixed nature
- Eudaimonia: a life well-lived, human flourishing (a life of striving and success, full of happiness and satisfaction)
  - Never done improving
  - Lots of failures and disappointments
  - Sweet pleasure of accomplishing a lot and working hard
  - Honing your strengths and working on your weaknesses
- Proper functioning: everything has a function and is good to the extent that it fulfills its function and bad to the extent that it doesn't
  - Ex: a knife is supposed to cut so if it's dull, it's a bad knife

- Aristotle said we are built with a drive to be virtuous (doing the right thing at the right time the right way etc)
  - No need to be specific because if you are virtuous you know what to do (good judgement and morality)
- Golden mean: the right action is the midpoint between extremes (between excess and deficiency)
  - Ex: not arrogant but not insecure...just confident
  - Ex: courage is the mid-point between cowardice and recklessness
  - Depends on the situation
- Aristotle said virtue is a skill, a way of living, learned through experience
  - Character is developed through habituation
  - Emulate virtuous people (moral exemplars)
  - Learn by watching then doing and it becomes habit





## **Contractarianism**

### *Thomas Hobbes's Ideas:*

- State of Nature: a time with no rules to govern us
  - Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish
  - Freedom without security
  - Rule by fear and aggression
  - Rational people would trade freedom for safety
- Contracts are shared agreements
  - the only way out of the state of nature
  - contracts lead to morality
- Morality isn't primitive or natural, it just emerges when rational people are together
  - Rational people find benefits in cooperation and civil living
- War of all against all- the state of being that would exist in the state of nature

### *The basics:*

- Right acts are those that don't violate the free rational agreements we've made
- Trading freedom for safety and benefits of cooperation
- We are bound by implicit contracts
  - Ex: rules we are forced to follow but never agreed to (like the law)
- We reap benefits from the system so we have to pay in (taxes, following rules, accepting consequences)
- Rights imply obligations
- No morality until we make it up, morality only exists once we agree to it

### *Tucker*

- Prisoner's dilemma: two prisoners are offered to rat out the other and get off free or stay silent stay silent and risk getting a bigger sentence if ratted out
- Cooperation pays only when you trust the other parties

### *Defection*

- Defection: breaking the contract you're in to look after your own interests
  - Defection is more common amongst strangers

### *Contract Rules*

- Contractors must benefit from the system
- Contractors must be free
- People can change the laws and morality if they agree to
- It is your duty to fill your obligations

### *Notes from Hobbes himself*

- "The weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others:
- Felicity: intense happiness
- If any two people want the same thing and can't both have it, they become enemies
- If another person stands in the way of a desire, the desiring person will likely will recruit to destroy

- The principle causes of quarrel
  - Competition
    - Acting for gain
  - Diffidence (insecurity, disbelief in self)
    - Acting for security
  - Glory
    - Acting for reputation
- The uses of violence
  - Making yourself master of another person's women, kids, and property
  - To defend your family and property
  - Against a sign of undervalue
- Out of civil states, there is always War of Everyone against Everyone
  - Without a common power, humans are every man for themselves
  - Men live without security beyond their own strength and invention
  - Sucky life lol
- Passion that incline men to peace
  - Fear of death
  - Desire of things that are needed for commodious living
  - Hope of attainment
  - Laws of Nature: articles of peace upon which men agree
- Naturally every man has right to everything
  - The condition of man is a condition of war and everyone is governed by their own reason

- Thus, every man has a right to everything (even someone else's body??)
- No security for any man living in regular nature
- Commonwealth
  - Common wealth: the multitude united under one person
  - The only way to erect such a common power that can provide order and defense is to make it appealing
  - Concentrate power on one man or on a group of men (reduces wills, increases safety and order)
  - Everyone agrees to submit their wills and judgement to this common power
- All rights are derived from said commonwealth
  - You are the author of your own punishment via agreement
  - It's unjust for a man to do anything for which he may be punished by his own authority
  - You can't just leave the commonwealth
  - You can't transfer your place to another person
  - Bound to your agreements and position

*Hopefully this helped! Good luck with ethics!*