

Ethics and Moral Psychology

Jeff Maynes

Johns Hopkins University

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Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Character
- 3 Reason
- 4 Intuition
- 5 Evolution
- 6 Conclusion

Is-Ought

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- Ethical arguments thus require a normative premise in order to be valid. That normative premise itself cannot be justified based on descriptive premises.
- The Autonomy Thesis: Psychology is irrelevant to normative ethics.

Ought-Can

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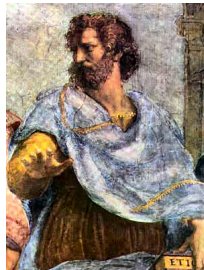
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- Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism: Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing and behavior proscribed are possible, or perceived to be possible, for creatures like us (Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personhood*).
- Yet, there is something right about the naturalistic fallacy. The big question is how to conceive of the relationship between moral psychology and normative ethics.

Virtue Ethics

- Not asking 'what should I do?' but rather, 'who should I be?'
- The right kind of person is one who possess the right virtues. Virtues are understood as stable dispositions to behave. A courageous person is one who will tend to behave courageously.
- Examples of virtues: courage, kindness, friendliness, loyalty.
- Originates with Aristotle, but the line of thought has been popular in contemporary work, especially following Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy."



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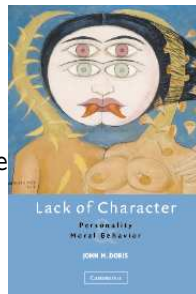
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Do we lack character?

- John Doris argues that this work reveals that our dispositions to behave depend largely on the context in which we act.
- That is, virtues do not satisfy the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism.
- Does not, however, purport to show that nobody is virtuous in Aristotle's sense.



Kant and the Importance of Reason

- Virtues can be corrupted by someone putting to immoral ends.
- Only a good will, which directs the virtues, can be unconditionally good.
- The will is good when the agent acts for the right *reasons*, namely, that the action is consistent with the Categorical Imperative.

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- Even if you adjust the story to account for every objection subjects offer, they continue to insist that the action is still wrong.
- The result is what Haidt calls, dumbfounding. The subjects cannot explain *why* it is wrong, and recognize that they cannot. Yet, they never give up the belief that it would be wrong.

Social Intuitionism



The view that moral justification comes *after* moral beliefs. We come to a moral conclusion and then provide a *post hoc* justification for it. If so, do these reasons hold any moral weight?

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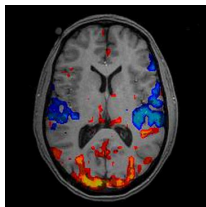
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- Moral philosophers often try to elicit moral intuitions (quick judgments) about hypothetical cases in order to see if a proposed moral theory handles these cases.
- The classic example is the Trolley Case, and its variants.
- Other examples include Thomson's violinist, William's lorry driver and Rachels' drowning cousin.

Neuroscience



- Two different trolley cases = two different intuitions.
- Josh Greene does fMRI studies of subjects evaluating the two cases and argues that one case (switch) activates broadly cognitive areas of the brain, and another (fat man) activates emotional areas.
- The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul? That the Kantian intuition is emotion based!
- Which intuition matters?

Debunking Arguments

- In his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche tries to trace the history of Christian morality, arguing that it was a political move to take power from the strong and give it to the weak.
- The aim of this explanation is to debunk the Christian moral system by showing that it is not rooted in an adequate justification (such as knowledge of the good.)
- Parallels to discussions of intuition as well - showing that an intuition is based on irrelevant cognitive processes, biases or heuristics.

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- Reciprocal Relations (fairness and cheating).
- How does altruism evolve?

Illustrations from Game Theory

- **Prisoner's Dilemma:** A and B have been arrested, and each has two options - rat out the other, or stay quiet. If A rats out B and B keeps quiet, A is free and B gets 10 years (and vice versa). If both rat out the other, they each get 10 years. If both keep quiet, they each get 3 years. What is the best strategy?

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- These cases reveal some of the issues here, if cheating in an altruistic society is the best strategy, why are we not all cheaters?

Concluding Questions

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