

Why be Moral?

Why be Moral?

- Why bother worrying about being a moral person?
- Should one be a moral person for its own sake, for the sake of being moral?
- Should one be a moral person for the consequences?
- Are the consequences of being good alone justification for morality?

Morality and Dieting

- Is being moral like going on a diet?
- Dieting is unpleasurable because it deprives us of things we enjoy, of pleasures.
- Is acting morally unpleasurable?
- Do we act morally, like we diet, because we think there are beneficial consequences?

Glaucon's Challenge

- Glaucon wonders if being moral really can be or should be pursued for its own sake.
- Glaucon argues that being just or moral is pursued only for the consequences it brings:
 - it results in society's approval with resulting rewards, and
 - avoids society's disapproval and punishments

Glaucon's Ring Bearer

- Ring-bearer analogy intended to support the thesis that being moral is an unpleasant, but self-serving pursuit motivated by results
- Is Glaucon right, would most people act in this manner? Would they be unjust and immoral if they knew they could get away with it?

Perfectly Unjust vs. Perfectly Just

- The Perfectly Unjust person has a flawless reputation in society
- The Perfectly Just person is misunderstood and maligned by society
- In this scenario, what's the point of being moral? If the appearance of being moral brings more benefit than really being moral, why be moral?
- Wouldn't the Perfectly Just person be happier if they adopted the Perfectly Unjust person's strategy?
- If being moral should be pursued for its own sake, then what good is it?

Society's Morality and Personal Morality

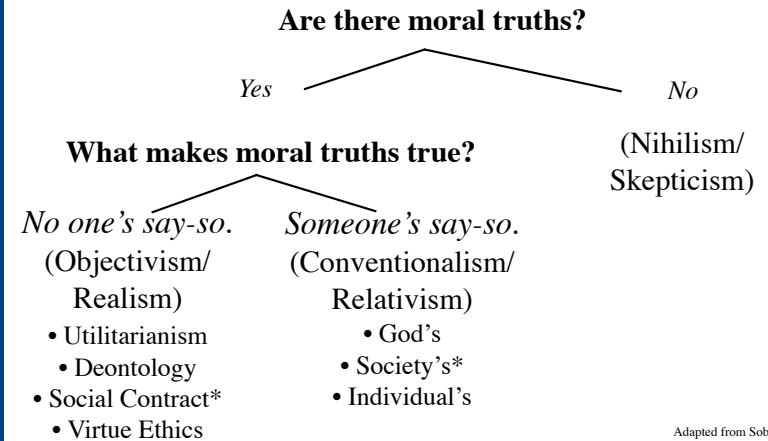
- Society's Morality
 - Why does society need to be moral?
 - Are there benefits to society being moral?
- Personal Morality
 - Why should one be moral?
 - Can one convince another to be moral for its own sake?
 - How does one acquire a "moral point of view"?
 - If one says that being moral for its own sake makes one a better person, isn't one saying there are benefits to being moral? Isn't this just Glaucon's point?

Self Interest

- Glaucon argues that one should pursue one's immediate, narrow interests
- Seems that being moral for its own sake requires that we look beyond these immediate, narrow self-interests
- Living the good life. How do we get there from here?

Are There Ethical Truths?

The Ethical Playing Field



There are No Ethical Truths

- Ethical Nihilism says that there are no ethical truths.
- Ethical Nihilism is also known as
 - Ethical Skepticism: one cannot know whether there are ethical truths, or
 - Ethical Subjectivism: all there is to ethics is one's feelings and attitudes

Is Ethics Nothing But One's Emotive Responses?

- Emotivism: moral language does not express facts. Rather, moral language is (i) intended to influence behavior, and (ii) express one's attitude.
 - i. When one says, "Don't commit abortion" one is trying to influence another's behavior. This utterance is a command, not a statement of fact.
 - ii. When one says, "Don't commit abortion" one is expressing one's attitude "Boo abortion!"

Emotivism: No Moral Facts

- Emotivism denies that moral statements express a fact, even about the one who is uttering the moral statement. Rather, one is saying something equivalent to “Abortion, yech!”
- Emotivism says agents disagree in their attitudes, not about their attitudes
 - X and Y may agree about their attitudes: that is, X is for abortion and Y against. But, X and Y may disagree in their attitudes.
 - X and Y disagree in their attitudes, and that’s all

Emotivism: Influencing Moral Opinion

- Emotivism says that anything that influences behavior counts as a reason.
- But, not all things that influence behavior count as reasons:
 - Suppose I tell you X is a bad person. Seeing that I have not convinced you, suppose I tell you that X is gay, knowing that you think homosexuality is a perversion of character. Now, you think X is bad. I’ve influenced your opinion.
 - But, does one’s sexual preference have anything to do with whether one is a good or bad person?
 - Not all things that influence behavior can count as moral reasons. So, Emotivism seems mistaken.

Are There Ethical Truths?

- Suppose I claim, “Abortion is wrong.” You might ask, “Why do you think that?”
- In asking the question you are seeking reasons to justify my claim. You are asking for some justification beyond my personal preference or attitude.
- Emotivism says that anything that influences one’s moral opinion can count as a reason.
- What are we really asking for when we seek reasons? Are we merely seeking to have our opinions influenced? Or, are we seeking answers, the truth, or a foundation upon which to build a true and consistent set of beliefs?

Nature of Ethics

- Focus on reasons.
- Ethical truths not necessarily like scientific truths. It’s not clear there is a definitive, testable fact of the matter.
- Rather, truth in ethics
 - is a conclusion backed by reasons, and/or
 - is reducible to some quantifiable consequences

Proof in Ethics

- How does one go about proving ethical truths?
- Suppose you think that a test I give is unfair.
 - Fairness is an ethical notion.
 - How would you go about proving that it was unfair?

Proof in Ethics

- To prove an ethical truth, one offers reasons.
- X is immoral because he lies. Why is lying bad?
 - Further reasons can be given in support of the unethical nature of lying
 - For example, lying violates trust, etc.
- Proving ethical truths requires appeal to good reasons and principles for why those reasons are important