

Argument and Philosophical Methodology:

Argument

A set of at least two claims, one of which is the conclusion. Any other claims in the set are premises.

Valid Argument

An argument in which it is impossible for all of the premises to be true and the conclusion false. If all the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true.

Invalid Argument

An argument intended to be deductive but with premises that fail to guarantee that the conclusion could be false even if all the premises are true

Sound Argument

A valid argument in which all the premises are true

Unsound Argument

An argument which either contains a false premise, or is logically invalid, or both

Moral Argument

An argument in support of a substantive moral claim

Thought Experiment

An example developed to prove or disprove a particular claim or argument or to persuade us of the plausibility of a thesis.

Counter Example

An example that is intended to counter a given claim or argument

Reflective Equilibrium

The essential end-point of a process of philosophical deliberation. It involves the going back and forth between principles and what they imply about specific cases to attain a state of coherence or consistency about the moral principles we accept and our considered beliefs.

Normative Ethics

A part of ethics concerned, in large part, with general theoretical questions such as what makes acts morally right or wrong, which states of affairs are desirable, or undesirable; what constitutes a good life for the person who leads it; which character traits are virtuous and which are vicious; and, most generally, how one ought to live.

Metaethics

Descriptive Ethics

A part of ethics which seeks to describe what is the case rather than what ought to be the case; for instance, it seeks to describe what people actually believe about particular moral issues. Descriptive ethics also is concerned with question of why people believe what they believe about ethics, and how they come to hold their particular moral beliefs and attitudes.

Ethical (Cultural) Relativism:

Definition of Ethical Relativism

The view that there is no objective truth in ethics. Instead, it is suggested that moral truths are simply relative to a given individual or group.

Explain two objections to Ethical Relativism

Relativist denies that there are specific standards for right and wrong.

- 1) Goes against the common sense view that people can be mistaken for their moral judgement.
- 2) Cannot objectively compare one set of moral beliefs to another (example: Gandhi and Hitler had different moral beliefs, but one was not objectively better or worse than the other.)

Explain two arguments for Ethical Relativism

- 1) Tolerance for other's beliefs and cultures. Notice! Cultural relativism is wrong, but things are not objectively right to wrong, so what gives?
- 2) Puzzlement about how ethical claims could possibly be objectively true (not subject to empirical verification)

Discuss difficulties for these two arguments

Utilitarianism

An ethical theory that takes many forms, but in its classical formulation, as articulated by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, is the view that right actions laws, or policies promote the greatest amount of pleasure, or the least amount of pain, for all concerned.

Consequentialism

The view that the right act is entirely determined by its consequences, which are the promotion of the greatest amount of good and the least amount of bad.

Hedonism

The view that according to which the sole ultimate good is pleasure and the sole ultimate bad is pain.

Definition of Equal Consideration

The principle that no one's good is to be counted as more important than anyone else's

Situational Ethic

The view that whether an act is right or wrong will depend on the particular situation.

Examples of how utilitarianism challenges traditional moral values

- Mercy killing. Wrong in the sense that it is never moral to take an innocent life, but utilitarianism does not think so.

Objections to Hedonism (experience machine, and how not all pleasures are good)

Experience machine - person who lives his/her life in an experience machine would have the best life ever, but this life is not best (false belief, inactivity, meaningless relationships). Therefore, hedonism must be false.

Not all pleasures are good.

Objections to Consequentialism (justice objection, promises objection)

1) Justice objection - the idea that utilitarianism must be false because it implies that it is sometimes morally right to violate norms of justice (individual rights)

Example: The nurse who lies to her dying patient so as to obtain his organs to save another person's life. Such an act seems unjust, yet is morally right according to utilitarianism.

2) Promises objection - between keeping one's promise or breaking it so that just a little more good would result, the right thing to do would be to keep one's promise, but utilitarianism implies one should break one's promise.

Objections to Equal Consideration (too demanding objection)

Too demanding - We have special concerns for those we have relationships with (family, friends), but if utilitarianism is correct we couldn't justify helping a friend simply b/c he's a friend

Utilitarian replies to the justice and too demanding objections

To justice - "non-hedonistic utilitarianism" - what is good is the satisfaction of people's preferences. Or, the counterexamples (like the nurse and the organ theft) are too fanciful.

- to “too demanding”, if a person were to do everything required by strict utilitarianism, then they’d probably crumble psychologically and that would be worse for everyone, hence rule utilitarianism.

Rule Utilitarianism

The ethical theory that says the right action is the one that is according to a set of rules that maximizes happiness and minimizes unhappiness if consistently followed.

Objections to Rule Utilitarianism

It merely collapses into act utilitarianism. Example: choosing b/w “don’t respect people’s rights” or always respect peoples rights”. Second one does most good, but then if we add a third option “respect people’s rights unless violating them promotes the most good.” The only rule you need to follow is “do what will produce the greatest good.” And thats just act utilitarianism.

Kant’s Ethics

Deontology

A category of ethical theory that sees right action as doing one’s duty

Kant’s conception of a Good will

If one does an act out of respect for morality - out of respect for a categorical imperative - then one is said to have a good will, and one’s act has moral worth

Categorical imperative

A command that states what one ought to do regardless of one’s desires or goals. For Kant, these imperatives are the rules of morality. Kant has, however a particular principle called the categorical imperative. It comes in several forms, included the universal laws version and the humanity version.

Hypothetical imperative

A command that states what one ought to do given the presence of a desire or goal.

Universal Law Version of the Categorical Imperative Test

Kan’t principle “Act only on those maxims that you can, at the same time, will as a universal law”

Contradiction in thought (conception)

A result pertaining to Kant’s universal law version of the categorical imperative. It occurs when one is notable to twill a maxim a universal law b/c the practice would be self-defeating or self-contradictory if everyone practiced it all the time. It signals the violation of a perfect duty.

Contradiction in willing

A result pertaining to Kan’t universal law version of the categorical imperative. Kant admits that one can conceive of a maxim as a universal law, but still not be able to will it b/c a contradiction will arise b/w the universal law and what a person will (later) want. It signals the violation of an imperfect duty.

Perfect Duty

According to Kant, a duty that must always be followed.

Imperfect Duty

According to Kant, a duty that one must sometimes follow, but which need not be followed all the time (example: the duty to be charitable)

Humanity Version of the Categorical Imperative

Kant's principle that one must treat humanity, whether in one's own person or that of another, always as an end and never merely as a means.

Kant's Distinction between Rational Beings and Thing

Rational beings can freely set goals for themselves and then determine the various means to accomplish those goals (hypothetical imperatives), and also can recognize and choose to follow moral rules (categorical imperatives). A thing is, simply, not a rational being.

Difficulties with the Universal Law Test

-The difficulty of identifying the maxim behind one's action. A person who carefully describes his acts according to the "right" maxims can do whatever he wants.

-Too strict. There are morally permissible actions that the test deems wrong. (example choosing not to have children. Totally permissible, but if willed as a universal law, humanity ends).

Difficulties with the Humanity Test

-Doesn't cover all moral obligations. Tells us how to act towards rational beings, but not non-rational ones. Examples: animal torture, the mentally handicapped.

-The claim that one is never to treat rational beings as a means is problematic.

Pluralistic Deontology:

W.D. Ross's view that morality consists of many conditional duties that will sometimes conflict. In cases of conflict one must study the situation carefully and try to reach a considered judgement about which duties are most pressing in that situation. Whatever the strongest duties recommend in that situation constitutes the right thing to do in that situation.

Why Ross thinks that utilitarianism and Kantianism are too simple

Utilitarianism - there's more to an action than what produces the best outcomes (factors like promise-keeping, justice, obligations based on special relationships)

Kantianism - moral rules need to allow for some flexibility. Keeping promises, not lying seem absolute, but think about hiding jews from nazis etc.

Prima facie duties

(Should be understood as conditional duties) intuitional, or "on the face of it" actions, that are self-evidently moral.

Duties, all things considered

The duty that is most pressing after all prima facie duties are weighed in a situation, according to W.D. Ross pluralistic deontology.

Two difficulties with Ross' theory

- 1) Self-evident moral principles cannot be analogous with principles like math and geometry (example: someone with a concept of a triangle cannot deny that it has three sides, but someone with a concept of altruism can deny that one has a prima facie duty to be altruistic.)
- 2) Too little guidance when it comes to determining our actions, all things considered. Normative ethical theory is to be action-guiding (giving people a clear mechanism by which to be moral), but Ross's theory lacks this.

Social Contract Theory

A type of ethical theory that takes a hypothetical agreement among a group of people under special constraints to be the sources of the correct moral rules. Social contractarians differ in the details of their theory, but they share the fundamental belief that justified moral rules are the ones that rational individuals would agree to for their own benefit.

Conception of Moral Rules (According to Social Contract Theory)

Justified moral rules are the ones that rational individuals would agree to for their own benefit.

State of Nature

A hypothetical time and place where there is no organized society, no recognized social rules, in which everyone is free to do as he or she pleases. This concept is a central part of social contract theory.

4 Conditions of the state of nature that make it a state of war (According to Hobbes)

- 1) People are self-interested
- 2) People live with the intention of obtaining a better life
- 3) People need basic goods (food, shelter, etc.), but these are all scarce in a state of nature
- 4) People in a state of nature are of roughly equal power

Advantages of Social Contract Theory

- Does a good job of explaining some moral rules (i.e. ones that everyone agrees upon in society)
- Explains why some of our most important moral rules are justified (example: murder and violence, keeping promises and telling the truth)
- Explains immortality of racism and sexism; people in a state of nature would not agree to rules that discriminate against them.

Two Objections to Social Contract Theory

Incomplete - doesn't explain all aspects of morality. Example: Can't explain morality towards non-human animals. Morality is prior to the contract - Can't explain morality towards non-human animals.

Morality is prior to the contract - Can't explain immoral actions in a state of nature (rape, withholding food from children) b/c no contracts have been formed. Their actions are only just/unjust.

Original Position

John Rawl's conception of a hypothetical situation from which people are to choose the principles of justice to regulate major social institutions. Unlike Rawls, Warren uses the original position to generate all moral rules. In the original position, people are equally powerful, equally intelligent, self-interested, and ignorant of their own advantages and disadvantages in the real world.

Veil of Ignorance

A central feature of the original position, a barrier that prevents people from knowing any particular facts about themselves. For instance, they do not know their race, gender, class, natural abilities, religious convictions, specific values, goals in life, and so forth.

Reasoning toward the principles of justice from the original position

The principle of maximin - suggests that those in the original position, since they do not know where they fall in society, will choose the option that is best for the worst-off people.

The Principle of Justice

(Maximum equal basic liberty; Fair equality of opportunity)

Objections to Rawls's Theory

- Won't apply to all moral issues (Example: what one owes to friends, what it is to lead a virtuous life, non-rational beings)
- Is the OP a fair position from which to make moral decisions?

-Assumes that people in the OP will choose the difference principle.

Virtue

A character trait needed for being a good person and living well. These traits include the moral virtues; e.g. courage, honesty, industriousness, trustworthiness, compassion, and loyalty. These are deep and stable character traits that dispose those who possess them take certain actions and to have certain feelings. Honest people, for instance, are disposed to act honestly and to feel disapproval toward persons who are dishonest.

Eudaimonia

A greek term roughly translated as “flourishing” or happiness”

Doctrine of the Mean

Aristotle’s doctrine that the virtues exist as a mean b/w two extremes - one of excess and one of deficiency.

Difficulties for Virtue Theory

- Not a comprehensive doctrine: ethics is concerned with more than just the matters of character.
- Unclear how useful it is when facing tough ethical choices (example: would a virtuous person who has young children divorce out of an unhappy marriage). The same virtue can point in different directions.
- When decisions are murky, it has to rely on other moral theories

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