

some major ethical theories
handout two:
deontology and justice

the basics of Kantian Deontology:

teleological vs. deontological

Teleological theories are goal oriented: a morally right act is one that brings about goodness

Deontological theories are not goal oriented. They are duty-based: rightness or wrongness of an act not explained in terms of its consequences, but its own features.

acting *according to duty* .vs. acting *for the sake of duty*: the case of the two kidney donors.

S has a **perfect duty** to perform act of type T =df. whenever an opportunity arises to perform act of type T, then S is *always* obligated to perform that action.

S has an **imperfect duty** to perform an act of type T =df. while S is not required to perform an act of type T every time the opportunity arises, S is obligated to *sometimes* perform that action.

A **maxim** is a rule of the following form: Whenever I am in circumstances _____, then I will act like this _____.

The Categorical Imperative:

Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

Kant's Ethical Theory:

CI: An act token A is morally right if and only if the maxim M that the agent invokes in performing A is such that the agent could consistently will that M become a universal law.

Problems for Kant's Ethical Theory:

The multiple maxims objection:

1. If CI is a practical theory, then there will never be an instance when an act abides in more than one maxim.
2. It's not the case that there will never be an instance when an act abides in more than one maxim.
3. Therefore, It's not the case that CI is a practical theory.

The inconsistent maxims objections:

1. If CI is true, then it is possible that one and the same act is both morally right and morally wrong.
2. It is not possible that one and the same act is both morally right and morally wrong.
3. Therefore CI is not true.

A problem specific to medical ethics:

We are required to treat people only as ends. This is because Kant describes a person as possessing an autonomous self-regulating will, but who counts as a rational being? a person? prisoners? the retarded? vegetables? fetuses? We need answers to these questions before we can even think about applying Kant's ethical theory to cases involving these types of beings.

the basics of Ross' Formalism

X is a **Right-Making Characteristic (RMC)**: X is positively normatively relevant; that it provides a moral reason for doing acts that have it; that having it gives any act a moral "plus".

Ross's List of Right-Making Characteristics (RMCs):

1. Promise keeping
2. Reparation
3. Gratitude
4. Justice
5. Beneficence
6. Self-improvement
7. Nonmaleficence

X is a **Wrong-Making Characteristic (WMC)**: X is negatively morally relevant; X provides a moral reason for not doing acts that have it; having X gives any act a moral "minus"

A list of Wrong-Making Characteristics (WMCs):

1. Promise breaking
2. Failure to repay debts
3. Ingratitude
4. Injustice
5. Non-beneficence
6. Self-destruction
7. Maleficence

An assumption: for every act token, and every RMC (and every WMC), there is a number between 0 and 10 indicating the extent to which that act token is prima facie right (or prima facie wrong) in virtue of that characteristic.

The **net prima facie rightness** of an act token A =_{df} the result of subtracting the total prima facie wrongness that A has from the total of prima facie rightness that A has.

Ross's Theory:

RT: An act token, A, is morally right if and only if A maximizes net prima facie rightness.

A sample calculation using RT:

Act token a1 (Dad keeps promise to daughter, spends money on daughter's operation):

<u>Right making characteristics</u>	<u>Amount of pf rightness</u>
1. Promise keeping	10
2. Reparation	0
3. Gratitude	3
4. Justice	5
5. Beneficence	3
6. Self-improvement	0
7. Nonmaleficence	0
<u>Total pf rightness:</u>	21

<u>Wrong making characteristics</u>	<u>Amount of pf wrongness</u>
1. Promise breaking	0
2. Failure to repay debts	0
3. Ingratitude	0
4. Injustice	2
5. Maleficence	0
6. Self-destruction	0
7. Non-beneficence	9
<u>Total pf wrongness:</u>	11
<u>Net pf rightness of a1:</u>	+10

Act token a2 (Dad breaks promise to daughter, spends money on stranger's operation):

<u>Right making characteristics</u>	<u>Amount of pf rightness</u>
1. Promise keeping	0
2. Reparation	0
3. Gratitude	0
4. Justice	5
5. Beneficence	10
6. Self-improvement	0
7. Nonmaleficence	0
<u>Total pf rightness:</u>	15

<u>Wrong making characteristics</u>	<u>Amount of wrongness</u>
1. Promise breaking	10
2. Failure to repay debts	3
3. Ingratitude	3
4. Injustice	5
5. Maleficence	0
6. Self-destruction	0
7. Non-beneficence	9
<u>Total pf wrongness:</u>	30
<u>Net pf Rightness of a2:</u>	-15

<u>Alternatives</u>	<u>Net pf Rightness</u>
a1: Dad spends money on daughter's operation	+10
a2: Dad spends money on stranger's operation	-15

A problem for Ross's theory:

1. If RT is true, then it is impossible for us to have moral disagreements.
2. It's not the case that it is impossible for us to have moral disagreements.
3. Therefore, RT is false.

Rawls' Theory of Justice

Principles of Justice: blueprints for society.

If we had such principles, we could use them to resolve conflicts of competing interests within a society.

Principles of Justice should be formed: a hypothetical device called the *original position*.

how the **original position** is supposed to work: Imagine taking a group of people which represent all levels of class, gender, race, and intelligence within current society, and place them behind what Rawls calls the *veil of ignorance*. Under such a veil no one knows what their place in society is (or will be). Assume these people get along, and are rational, they are capable of a sense of justice, and will agree to the principles they adopt. Finally, assume that they all want what Rawls calls *primary goods*.

Examples of **primary goods**: rights, opportunities, powers, wealth.

the 2 principles of justice:

PJ1. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

PJ2. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to have the greatest benefit of the least advantaged... , and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality and opportunity.

a moral component to the theory: natural duties

1. the duty of justice—supporting and complying with our commonsense intuitions
2. the duty of helping others in need of jeopardy
3. the duty not to harm or injure others
4. the duty to keep our promises

Problems for Rawls' view:

1. Is the original position biased? If it is, then it undermines its own purpose. Some critics say that the bias is that there are morally relevant bits of knowledge are left out of the op. It is impossible to see how people could agree on anything when they are supposed to be completely ignorant of their desires and purposes.

2. How are the principles of justice different from the principle of utility? According to Rawls, the principles of justice apply only when liberty can be effectively established and maintained. When the situation is not like this, the principles of justice become broad general concepts rather than hard fast rules. In such a case, liberties of individuals can be restricted provided the restrictions will benefit everyone. But this just sounds like the principle of utility.