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In Defense of Kant

It can be an endless debate to discern simply the matter of what purpose morality has. However one sees the end of morality as, the metaphysics that define how we engage in choices, as moral agents, is of greater importance. This is what I believe is the principle concern that Kant's ethical theory approaches. Kant's Rationalist basis for engaging moral principles is a valid precursor for discerning the task of morality; furthermore, the lack of importance of other often used metrics e.g., happiness, pleasure, consequences, etc, as dismissed by Kant is afforded due to the valid, or consistent, nature of his metaphysics. For Kant, the end result of morality, what the good is, focuses on the will i.e., the will that goes according to the Categorical Imperative is a good will. I agree with this conception of "good" because reason is elemental, inherent, to all rational agents (by definition -- but shall apply to all humans particularly), and therefore a good will or a good rational agent is a good moral agent.

To start, let me address what I mean by "valid". If we look at the purpose of morality, we concern ourselves with the output, the end result or the conclusion of a moral system. Kant's theory does not necessarily state that output as an applied metric of moral worth. Instead, the Categorical Imperative concerns defining the possible maxims by which a moral system can be defined on. Thusly, the validity of Kant's theory or what it concerns itself with is limited because it doesn't attempt to reach the specifics. Consequently, in its derivation it also eliminates the importance of such metrics as happiness, consequences, etc.

If we generalize morality, we can say it is simply actions; more specifically, it is moral action. Given this, one is concerning themselves with choices that lead to said actions. This is a necessary distinction. If one does not have a choice, they are considered heteronymous and their actions are not a result of their choice i.e., they are moved by another's volition.[1] Since morality concerns itself with actions motivated by choices, and choices extend from an autonomous volition, then we can use autonomy as a basis for understanding the metaphysics of morality.

Besides the autonomy of the moral agent, what can be labeled free will, the other key ingredient in Kant's Categorical Imperative is the rationality of the moral agent. In this ethical formulation the moral and rational can be traded, as the moral agent is also a rational agent. The necessity of these two elements make the action from a free choice, and make the choice discerned rationally i.e., consistent with whatever principle it is based on. Therefore, these two factors are what bridge Kant's imperative as the defining scope of possible principles to the task of morality as the actions derived from an autonomous rational agent according to this metaphysical law.

Kant states, "everything in nature works according to laws."[2] For an autonomous rational agent, which will be referred to as a moral agent from now, it is along this line of reasoning i.e., the appeal to laws, that the agent ought to operate, less we say a moral agent is not a

[1] See 2nd section page 24, also 3rd section page 5
[2] See 2nd section page 5

natural thing; for which morality would consequently not be a natural thing. To elaborate, Kant speaks of that which is practical, as opposed to what is speculative. It is on the basis of practical reasoning that moral agents will discern their maxims.[3] This practical reasoning ties the moral agent as a natural being to the cause-effect nature of morality, just as everything in nature operates i.e., my choices cause an effect -- namely, action or the moral action as derived from a moral choice.

The last element of discrimination that pulls the moral agent into the Categorical Imperative is the relation between reason and inclination to that of volition. Dichotomizing the causes of my action they can either be from reason (which we shall assume ideally accurate or rational) or from inclination e.g., for the beneficial consequences, the instinctual drive for pleasure gratification, or in short, desires. These inclinations, by their very definition, can only be relative to the individual, or mutually agreed upon by others. However, that gives no requirement, no duty held within, no possibility for the required law the moral agent needs. Thus, we are left with reason, practical reasoning to give us Kant's imperative.[4]

The last conceptual link to tie a moral agent necessitated to practical reason as the requirement to a universal law, or duty, for one's volition to act in accordance with morality, we must discern two possible imperatives -- hypothetical or categorical. The latter is that maxim done by law, required of all that, shall I say, whom fit in the category. Thus, I can say a categorical imperative applies equally and consistently to all moral agents. A hypothetical imperative, by definition, applies relatively such as a conditional "if x is met, then z is done" as opposed to "for all y, z is done" where y is the moral agent. As before, this hypothetical imperative appeals to inclinations and not reason. Moral agents, as defined, require reason and likewise, a categorical imperative.[5]

Kant's Categorical Imperative follows from this practical reason purely i.e., a priori, as consistent to be the moral validity. In other words, a moral agent ought to be able to, a priori, discern a maxim that applies to her as a moral agent. Since it applies to a moral agent, she must then "will" it as a universal law for all moral agents. If it fails to apply to all moral agents, then it fails to be a categorical imperative and is derived from somewhere else e.g., as a hypothetical imperative or based in inclination. In short, "Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[6]

Under this assessment of Kant's Categorical Imperative it becomes clear that the often used moral metrics of pleasure, happiness, or other inclinations fail to live up to what a moral agent requires. The question, then, is whether or not this is even what morality requires. As stated in the outset, the universal basis of reason to derive and relate all stated previously is what Kant considers "good". Morality or ethics (ethos) is concerned ultimately with character. If this will or character is bad, then we have bad outcomes. Using this practical

[3] See 2nd section page 5
[4] Kant states the subjectivity inclinations in 2nd section page 15, also see 1st section pages 4 and 5 for more
[5] See 2nd section page 7
[6] See 2nd section page 11

reason, in accordance with the Categorical Imperative, directs the will, or character, to produce good outcomes ultimately.[7] Thus Kant's derivation is about will, but ultimately it produces a good will, for under the scope of maxims established, conceptually, by the Categorical Imperative, no ills ought to be produced.

Morality is a practical event where an agent's choice causes some kind of effect. The agent is a moral agent because they are also a rational agent, tied to all other agent's equally through their autonomy and reason. From the derivation assessed here, we can see a good will goes along with this practical reason e.g., the Categorical Imperative. By doing so, it ought to ultimately produce a moral outcome. Therefore, if morality is about good actions, it requires a good character (will) to direct them. Kant derives that for us.

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Kant, Immanuel, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* based on the translations by T. K. Abbott, Daniel Kolak, 1999.

[7] In the 1st section, page 1, Kant explains "these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good." Signifying the importance of a good will and the connection of will and character as positively related.

Hume, the Cultural Relativist

Hume puts forth an intricate argument for the moral foundation on sentiments. The superficial criticism is that it is simply a relative nature of "feelings" that guide us, with the benefit of some reason (as guided by the sentiments). Hume, however, attempts to dispel this belief, and claim an absolutism of the moral sentiments as not being individually or culturally relative. Hume fails to provide a sufficient claim for these moral sentiments, and only through generalizations and lack of empirical rigor does he boast the absolutism of these sentiments. Though his theory of ethics provides some important observations in human behavior, particularly in a social context, it is more speculative psychology than philosophy. Lacking 21st century knowledge, Hume's reliance on sentiments is oversimplified, generalized, and ultimately reduces to relativism.

To establish the main points of where Hume goes wrong, particularly in generalizations,[1] it would be instructive to distinguish the two sets of virtues Hume identifies. For Hume there exists a set of natural virtues and a set of artificial virtues. The natural virtues gain their name from the fact they exist, naturally, within the individual. Hume states, "The [virtues] ... are known in all languages, and universally express the highest merit which human nature is capable of attaining."[2] It is here we can begin to see where Hume oversteps the bounds of argument and asserts with absolute certainty on the nature of these virtues. Empirical in nature, Hume utilizes example and experience to base his claims, but a handful of examples, by no means, constitute a proof. Inductive logic may show that a, b, and c are all as he addresses, but it could very well be the rest of the examples are wholly different. Here we see the relativism creeping into his argument. Stating that simply the fact a society has words in their language to express these qualities does not make them absolute. Not inductively, less you exhaust the set of examples, nor does it work inherently i.e., language is relative -- one culture's virtue, whatever its label, can be another's vice! The artificial virtues, on the other hand, do not stem from a natural origin; inasmuch as this origin is not characteristic to the moral agent -- not natural. Instead, they are produced by the context of the interactions of agents. Here, with more inductive logic,[3] Hume establishes that the

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[1] In page 12 Hume is quoted as saying "Men are necessarily born in a family-society", the likes of which is ambiguous, to this author at least, yet draws a statement of necessity without substantiating it. What condition necessitates the requirement of man being born into a family-society? These kinds of generalizations are further noted on page 19 and 20 where he distinguishes the instinct of bird's nest building as being identical, and man in house building varies because of the unique quality of man. Not only do birds NOT build nests identically, but the generalization of a house given by Hume is that "all houses have a roof and walls, windows and chimneys" when, for a matter of fact, I barely lived in houses with chimneys! His vision is only qualified in the narrow scope of relativism he defines it through.

[2] See page 4

[3] From page 5 through 7 Hume presents a number of generalizations, as the others that have been noted in the body and these notes, where no substantiation of the claim is made. Claims of the beneficent man, to how society sees him, how his parents see him, and how his children are seen say nothing more than an idealized example he sees it as -- it is not an actuality, empirical or likewise. It is simply one man's opinion of what "is" without an explanation beyond something similar to "well, if you ask anyone they'll say the same thing." Boasting that claim alone says nothing since counter-examples do, in fact, exist beyond the experience of the world that one man has to substantiate them. He is not the authority.

utility, or the benefit derived from the event, is what constitutes its moral worth, along with the moral sentiments.

The characterizing difference between these virtues is their basis for valuation i.e., the artificial virtues are valued by their utility, and the natural virtues by their nature. To discuss further what is meant when I say "nature" I am referring to the quality Hume insists grounds these sentiments as absolute. Here, Hume refers to the sympathy we, as sentimental beings, are able to produce and sense. In an analogy of an extreme case of this concept, Hume points out that all actions would fall back upon the sympathy other's have for us, and that the measure of a moral action is then derived from our ability to sense, of one's self and others, how we or others might be affected by it.[4] This is not absolute since it is (i) imperfect to accurately sympathize, (ii) no two people sympathize the same way -- it is relative, completely! Hume speculates on this psychology, but modern psychology would tell a wholly different story. The utility is also conceived in a similar way; inasmuch as the moral sentiments play their role in gauging the relative hurt of an action to one's self or another person. Again, in his extreme example he points this out.[5] Utility, then, is simply the measure of what action is more moral, more benevolent, when weighing how much hurt it will take one person in contrast to how much good it will produce.

Justice is given a predominate role as one of the artificial or social virtues. The virtue of justice characterizes the theory of utility because it provides the clear example, to Hume, how it is socially dependent, and how it is necessary in non-ideal cases e.g., reality. Hume plays a thought experiment by giving two ideal extremes: on the one hand we have utopia, on the other absolute chaos. In both of these cases the social virtues e.g., justice, has no purpose and does not exist.[6] Therefore, justice is relative to when it is necessary, in a sense, to hold society together; thus, it is an important social virtue. If there were no need for it, we would function ideally off the natural virtues or in chaos. Given all this, there is not a time this is not culturally or socially relative; however, Hume insists, based on the moral sentiments that underlie utility, it holds the absolutism he insists those have.

The interesting quality, which also adds to a relativism of the virtue of justice, is among who it can qualify with. For Hume, it must be amongst equals.[7] The very notion he presents,

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[4] See page 9 where Hume states in a thought experiment of an extreme case where sympathy is most prevalent, "he is already prompted, by the strongest inclination, to seek my happiness ..."

[5] Also on page 9 Hume states that the man's good will extends by a sympathetic necessity to the limit whereas "except the hurt, he thereby receives, be greater than the benefit accruing me."

[6] On pages 8 through 10, Hume contrasts two extreme examples, in the first we see a perfect society where humanity has no need to labor. Because of this, no agreements or office need to be formed between people because no more benefit can be attained since this environment is most beneficial. On the other hand, a society in constant struggle will have no capability to form agreements or office between people, leading to an impossibility for justice to exist. Therefore, justice, in theory, can only be established where it can be useful.

[7] See pages 12 and 13, where Hume examines, conceptually, if there be "a species of creatures intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength ... they were incapable of all resistance" that

however, permits a dire mistake toward relativism for there is no qualification, no basis of sympathy or utility, which corresponds to who exactly would be part of this "in" group, who would be considered equal. Simply put, this claim can be used differently by different peoples, or cultures, to justify acts of exclusion and falls into a cultural relativism. Arguably, exclusions of perspective, of whether some group has the moral capabilities requisite in an agent to be equal can be considered e.g., per race, gender, etc. Though Hume offers insight into women's cultural status,[8] one could just as well, and some cultures certainly do, would claim the faculties of morals are not present. Baier would certainly disagree with this notion, but what objective basis determines it? Ultimately, Hume's theory of moral sentiments fails to deliver an objective organization of moral agents to the moral good. He is not entirely wrong, and his claims, though culturally relative, are normatively relevant in much of the world today.

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society or justice would have no prevalence because of the fact that "Our [interaction] with them could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality".

[8] Hume (page 12) examines, further, the conceptual place of equality as being cognizant with why people regard animals as they do -- as unequal. He's quoted "In many nations, the female sex are reduced to like slavery." But since the moral characteristic of equality is not foreign to women, "the insinuation, address and charms of [women] ... are commonly able to break the confederacy."

Straightening Aristotle's Circle

Aristotle redundantly explains his concept of happiness by living virtuously, and then appealing to an empirically virtuous person that is the happy person. In this act, some would claim he is begging the question. Aristotle does not beg the question in utilizing the virtuous person, for the empirical object is not the activity of happiness. Furthermore, the empirical nature of the virtuous person distinguishes itself from purely ideological, and gives us, essentially, a role model to characterize virtue. Given the criteria Aristotle lays out for happiness, the argument against there being such a role model is unfounded for claiming idealism when the virtuous need not be.

Firstly, we must address the issue of Aristotle's circle. Logically, if Aristotle has begged the question, then this means he has answered his question with the question and it has no justification. Whatever occurs between the antecedent that eventually leads back to the antecedent may be useful, but the antecedent in the prior is not the same as that which occurs in the consequence of his implication. Ultimately, Aristotle does not define happiness with happiness. Maybe parabolic, Aristotle's argument is not a circle.

Aristotle employs the concept of virtue as the means of excellence that lead a person to live their life, as they individually should, toward happiness. Happiness is easily defined as an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.[1] It is the virtue that calls upon itself, almost trivially thereafter. What is virtue? Virtue is that which the virtuous do. The solution Aristotle attempts for us to use is an empirical object to step away from an ideal in the prior sense, to the objective sense in the latter. Surely in the discourse of happiness, we cannot say Aristotle is equating a happy person to defining happiness -- one is a person, the other an activity, by his definition. That would be absurd. Likewise, we cannot say virtue is equated to a virtuous person. Analogously, we have other concepts like democracy. We do not say America, Briton or Germany is democracy, but they do characterize what we mean by democracy. In the examples we have empirical experiential evidence to talk about the qualities or characteristics of the concept discussed in the latter. Similarly, this is the approach Aristotle attempts.

Aristotle does not give us a name of who the virtuous person or persons might be. If he did, then we would have our example, contemporarily or historically, to reference and have our questions answered. That is not what he does; that is not virtue ethics. Instead, he goes on to explain that if we do not do as the virtuous person does, and only regard virtue in thought (as an idea only), then we are like a patient being told what to do by the doctor, but do none of them.[2] The doctor is a category of people. We do not need to appeal, when speaking of doctors, to a specific example -- just as Aristotle did not. In this appeal to understanding health from doctors we do not presume that any specific example is ideal and without flaw. Certainly some doctors are better than others, but we still appeal to them as examples of health. Likewise, a virtuous person is that person, even with flaw, that lives excellently. Just as we can look at figures, past or present, and find excellence in them to help model our actions and choices, this is what Aristotle was aiming at.

Provided we search for the "virtuous man" as a category, we still must concern ourselves with

[1] See Nicomachean Ethics: Book I Chapter 13.
[2] See Nicomachean Ethics: Book II Chapter 4.

what is in the category. Is it one, few or many people? Aristotle removes the many.[3] If we had one, Aristotle would name it. As Grene claims, we would also have to have a universal agreement on this person,[4] and we certainly can find two people who disagree. Aristotle claims this category is populated by "the wise" as if we simply know who they are. Grene addresses this as an implied premise,[5] and that can be said to be what it is. But does this invalidate the argument? No, because we all have people whom fill this category for us. Past or present, we have people we can claim are virtuous. Jesus of Nazareth, Martin Luther King and Gandhi are classic examples. This does not mean, however, they are ideal and without flaw. This criticism is flawed, and supposes that an objective example must be as pure as the ideal they characterize. Simply because MLK was not perfect does not mean all virtuosity he exemplified fails to exist. Instead, it is the few who exemplify the virtues that populate this category. To demonstrate, if we have two people, one who is virtuous, less one flaw, and another person who fills what the first is missing, then together they are the virtuous. This is the idea behind the virtuous person as a category of those who characterize virtue.

The criticism against this, as mentioned above, is that people cannot agree on who the virtuous are. This, also, does not necessarily refute the argument. Hursthouse points out that the virtuous need not agree on the conclusion.[6] It is not a question of what one or another virtuous person would do in the same situation e.g., it cannot be said "whether Socrates would have an abortion" or not, for obvious reasons.[7] Instead, we concern ourselves with the moral character; that is, if I am like this or that virtuous person, then how will I handle my situation. This is the ultimate goal of appealing to the virtuous person. It does not matter that one virtuous person would choose differently from another, or that this or that person cannot agree on who is virtuous. It matters that we strive for excellence to be virtuous, modeled after some virtuous, for we ourselves in doing so may very well be a model for others. Consequently, we then should never strive in vice, for ourselves or others, less we make virtue a lucky result whenever one feels like it, and that is not the virtuous character.

Therefore, Aristotle made useful the appeal to real-world examples of the virtuous applied. Today, it is not an entirely new idea as my analogy of other concepts made real demonstrates e.g., democratic states and democracy. The arguments that we cannot agree on who is virtuous or that even the virtuous wont agree does not change the fact the virtue is there. The only real quibble is over the concepts of virtue themselves, and this, Grene added, is lacking metaphysical substance.[8] However, Aristotle does not specifically neglect this. Instead, he acknowledges these concepts, but emphasizes the importance of not just philosophizing over Ideas,[9] but living them, and this is his aim -- living the concepts as those who are wise.

Notes

[3] See Nicomachean Ethics: Book I Chapter 4, precisely "the many do not give the same account as the wise."
[4] See Grene, page 133
[5] Ibid.
[6] See Hursthouse, page 229.
[7] Ibid, page 227.
[8] See Grene, page 133.
[9] See Nicomachean Ethics: Book I Chapter 6 and Book I Chapter 8 precisely "the state of mind may exist without producing any good result" and "to virtue belongs virtuous activity".

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Uniting History with Contemporary

Murder, war, theft and charity, these events are no less real today than they were in the time of the ancient Greeks. Modern justifications of why we go to war, or give to charity or what constitutes murder and theft have changed. These justifications, or the "why", are at the root of an ethical inquiry into what is morally right or wrong. What then, can a study of the history of ethics provide for contemporary thinkers? What it offers today is improved and alternative perceptions into contemporary and reoccurring moral issues. There is a difference between philosophies and methods of reasoning utilized today than that of Plato and Aristotle. MacIntyre addresses the idea that moral concepts are to be understood isolated, apart from their history.[1] While it is true there are issues today that did not exist in the time of the ancients e.g., science and technology, the fundamental problems that people face each day, however, are no less reoccurring than they were in the past. Contrasting the relation of the history of ethical thought to the methodology of ethical inquiry today, this analysis delivers a perspective of how modern and ancient ethical theories relate and diverge, and what benefit we can derive from the past that has substantial benefit to the issues of today.

A world apart, the ancient concepts of ethics can be seen in stark contrast to the view of the world today. In the prior, we have a perspective of ethical thought that permeates all life with the world given "as complete in itself."[2] Modern theories, instead, consist of "mechanism and organism;"[3] wherein the principles that existed in their entirety in the past are disassembled for an understanding of the mechanics involved in the processes of human behavior. This comparison can be understood in the division of study we have today. In modern schools we learn politics, arts, and theology as separate subjects. The past lacked such discrimination. Ancient philosophers investigated the world as an integrated whole where the subjects were united to a school of philosophy e.g., those of Aristotle or Pythagoras. Analogously, the specialization that Adam Smith taught current societies had not existed for the ancient world; while traditionally, guilds and artisans were knowledgeable with all aspects of their trade. Thus, in comparison, these two perspectives seem a world apart.

The relation between the old and new is not in how things are done or what they perceived -- the methods and concepts. The relation between these two worlds is united when an understanding of the history reveals that the specialization of studies today find their root in the ancient world itself. Sidgwick and Shaw express the relation between subjects of politics and psychology as being namely integrated with ethics.[4] The complete world of the ancients was broken apart only through the methodology that took centuries to come into common practice today. The separating of the whole into its related parts did not remove the benefit the ancient world provided when principles of justice and virtue existed as a whole beyond the requirement of methods and consequences. This is precisely when the understanding of

[1] See MacIntyre p. 1.
[2] See Shaw p. 307.
[3] Ibid.
[4] See Sidwich p. 2-5 and Shaw p. 314.

the ancient views can provide a service to modern thought. In the study of the mechanisms we can easily lose sight of the larger picture. For instance, ignoring principles of fairness or justice when we are only concerned with consequences may lead us into moral conflict in a world where we have abundance of resources yet people starve. The history of ethics can provide us an alternative from our preconceptions we may have difficulty diverging from; especially when we have all the quantitative evaluation to justify that preconception.

An example of how understanding old can benefit the new we can look at economics. Economics considers welfare programs on the basis of quantitative numbers, such as GNP per-capita, and if the end of meeting this criterion is met, then all is well i.e., we improved GNP per-capita thus the welfare or standard of living for the society is improved. However, some modern theorists are devising ways, by supplementing principle thought into this analysis, that the substantive means to getting those ends must be considered. This is an example of combining the perspective of traditional ethical thought into contemporary ethical problems to provide a way of evaluating things of normative consideration i.e., if individuals of a society have the substantive capabilities of choosing the market basket of things they value and have reason to value, then their welfare is being met regardless of the quantitative income they may hold. Nobel laureate Amaryta Sen explains this perspective as securing freedoms as both the substantive means and the principle ends to evaluating welfare and development.[5]

Why then is there such a division between the ancient and modern views of the world? Are they not wholly different and applied differently? I have addressed the division. It is analogous to a sand castle being broken apart, in either case it is still sand. We simply have decomposed the structure to understand the physics that made it work. Whether the world is whole or we understand it mechanically, the ethics therein are no less real in the past than they are today. Application, however, does not dictate ethics. MacIntyre explains that morals and society are not mutually exclusive; instead, they change together.[6] Society has changed greatly since the ancient Greeks, and likewise, our ethics have changed form as well. The ancient form still has its utility though. Just as the physical properties of sand gave the ancient sand castle its form and value, we can understand that our systematic approaches to ethics today are still joined with the ethics of the past. Shaw exemplifies this extensively in his value theory of ethics.[7] Without understanding the history, we lack a proper understanding of current methods. It is like having the physics of our substance (sand) without any structure, or having the sand castle without understanding the physics that make it stand. Shaw explains that ancient and modern alone fail to give us the complete understanding that together they can deliver.[8] Thus, we can see that there is a direct relation between the old and the new, and isolated each is not satisfactory in theory and in practice.

A world solved or a world full of questions, which is more complete? Neither provides the

[5] See reference section for Amartya Sen (1999). Sen covers an extensive analysis of a number of ethical theories including Utilitarianism, Rawl's theory of justice and Nozick's refute to Rawl, and how they are limited individually, but all have their perks. He also includes ancient Indian philosophy as a comparison to current ethical situations.
[6] See MacIntyre p. 1.
[7] See Shaw p. 312-13.
[8] See Shaw p. 309.

value needed in a comprehensive study of ethics. Therefore, a study of the history of ethics provides our current moral agents with the principle ends that our methodological approach to the world are reaching for and have lost in our decomposition of reality. The old and new are intimately entangled whether we are cognizant to that fact or not. Modern theories fall short conceptually and practically in providing an ethical outcome. With understanding of our ethical history and how it relates to our modern theories, we can produce methods with substantive means to achieving principle ends e.g., welfare economics. Lacking this historical understanding we are bound to our preconceptions and shortcomings existing today. With a complete view of ethics from then to now, modern moral agents are better equipped to enhance their lives and the ethical formulations of the future.

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Moral Principles as Weights and Measures

In a number of dialogues, Plato uses Socrates' voice to investigate the nature of morality. Specifically in *Euthyphro*, he evaluates the virtues of piety and justice. We are left with more questions than answers when he fails to derive a means to gauge and define the virtues. In *Crito*, however, Socrates provides a principle by which we may be able to measure moral conflicts, e.g., the question of piety brought up with Euthyphro. Using the principle of "do no harm", Plato offers an attempt to determine moral valuation that can provide a basis by which to arrive at moral agreements. Consequently, this moral principle may not be enough, and as the contemporary Martin Luther King Jr. shows, it may take more to engage diverse and complex moral dilemmas.

In *Euthyphro*, Plato dishes up a challenge to the view that what is virtuous is that which is loved by the Gods. Instead, through Socrates, the challenge to investigate the nature of virtue is brought up that the converse might be the truth i.e., the virtuous is loved by the Gods because it is virtuous. This argument ultimately derived full circle with no other answer than we don't know if something is virtuous because it is loved by the Gods, or it is loved by the Gods because it is virtuous, or maybe the Gods have no play in what is virtuous other than virtue may just be.[1]

The requirement that a virtue stands alone, not defined by the Gods' love or that their love (which can be claimed to consequently affect our world) is conditional on what is virtuous is of great necessity if we are to have something to measure moral dilemmas. The requirement of some kind of moral principle shows its face in another of Plato's dialogues. In *Crito*, Socrates challenges Crito that it would be unethical for him to escape jail and his punishment chosen by Athens -- that of death.[2] Socrates provides the claim that we should do no injury to others, even if evil is done to us. In essence, we should "do no harm."[3] Socrates argues through a metaphorical discussion with the state of Athens that essentially if he breaks the laws of that which provided for him all his life, he would harm the very foundation of this institution, and therefore must abide by his punishment.[4] Using this moral principle, he was able to gauge what the morally right thing to do was. It was, in fact, to take his punishment he was unable to avoid through his defense as described in *Apology*. With this one principle he was able to reach a moral agreement with Crito about whether to flee or not.

The question that follows is whether this moral principle can be useful in other cases than that which Socrates argued in the situation of his punishment decided by his peers. Can this moral principle provide agreement in the case of Socrates' dialogue with Euthyphro? Euthyphro was on his way to convict his father for having been impious for letting a killer die while his father went to consort with an oracle to learn what the Gods would have demanded. Euthyphro felt this was against the wishes of the Gods. Since it would not be

[1] See Euthyphro page 1
[2] See Crito page 3
[3] See Crito page 6 and 7.
[4] See Crito page 8, 9 and 10

loved by the Gods, it was unethical. Socrates showed clearly that the Gods could just as well not be involved in what is virtuous, because they quarrel over what is just or unjust themselves.[5] Instead, maybe what is virtuous is only loved by the Gods because it carries the value of being virtuous (in that case, pious or justice). A moral principle that stands as virtuous because it just is virtuous could be used, as Socrates analogizes, as a scale to solve a disagreement of weights.[6] In the case of the scale, we have something objective, a standard, by which to gauge the comparative weight of what is in disagreement. Likewise, a moral principle, a standard, can be used to gauge the comparative virtuosity of our choice to come to an agreement.

The singular principle of not doing evil to those who have wronged us, or in general, not doing injury or harm to others has its limitations. In Euthyphro's case, one could say he should not convict his father because it would cause injury to his father and the family. Even if his father was unjust, he should not be harmed for his injustice. However, one could argue about the consequences of his father's choice to allow the man to die on a principle of responsibility that his father had over the man, and that makes him required to be tried. Therefore, we may have a moral "weight" to compare moral choices to help in disputes, but the scale is only as good as its measures or standards that are used.

Martin Luther King Jr. offers an example of how principles can be used to gauge moral disputes. In his letter to the local clergy of Birmingham who told him to stop his non-violent protests, King argues that regardless of what the governance feels is right (and are responsible to uphold), and regardless of not doing harm, even if that government is doing evil to you, we all are responsible to justice itself, everywhere, to make sure injustice is stopped.[7] With this broader scope of principle, incorporating those of responsibility, harm and government, King makes a successful argument as to why he must stand up against the injustice of his time, and that the lack of action to make changes to the institutions that supports our civil laws is an act of apathy that is vicious in its own right.

Thusly, having a moral "object" in the guise of an ethical principle or standard provides moral agents some way to gauge whether some kind of choice or action or lack there of, is of a moral virtue. This resolution is only as good as the standard itself, and if those who use it corrupt it or use it inappropriately (as in the case of racial discrimination in Birmingham), then the standard is worthless. Martin Luther King Jr. fought against such inappropriate use, and fought to reshape the perspectives of all those of humankind who are concerned with justice, that we have our moral principles and they should be used, but they need to be polished with understanding and appreciation to keep it virtuous. Plato's presentation of this fact is young and in its infancy, but even then it could provide at least a basis by which to begin measuring.

References

[5] See Euthyphro page 7
[6] See Euthyphro page 7
[7] See King's Letter page 1.

Martin Luther King, *Letter from Birmingham jail*

Plato's Dialogs: *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, Based on the translation by Benjamin Jowett, with emendations by Daniel Kolak Copyright 1999.