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## I. Onwards toward moral absolutism

We've put aside nihilism and relativism.

For the remainder of the course, we adopt, at least tentatively, moral absolutism.

This means that we presume that there are morally correct answers to ethical questions.

It does not mean that everything that one might think is a moral question is in fact a moral question.

It should also not entail dogmatism.

Absolutists can agree with relativists that ethical behavior is determined by culture, and by oneself.

Now: How do we find out what the morally correct position is?

Are we led back to God?

Copleston argues that Divine Command Theory (DCT), on which God directly creates morality, is the only way out of the Rwanda/Nazi problem, the only way to justify a moral absolutist position.

Remember that Euthyphro identified piety with what is pleasing to the gods

And we recast this as:

$x$  is wrong  $\Leftrightarrow$  God hates  $x$

The question was, which causes the other?

Arthur rejects DCT, rejecting the necessity of religion as a foundation for ethics.

We have, with him, put God and religion aside, as well.

Arthur concludes that morality is social, requires education, can be found with reason.

Religion is a social construct, and has effect on morality, and vice versa.

But the influences on morality are broader.

We can still maintain a religious perspective, though, as in Natural Law, with God as divine discoverer.

So, we're all moral absolutists, and we know that we can search for morality in the world, independently of earthly, or otherworldly, rewards.

We try to balance our intuitions, our reason, our cultural and religious practices, and our moral theories.

How can we recognize a moral statement?

## II. Five features of an ethical statement (from Louis Pojman):

### 1. Prescriptivity (do or don't)

but it's not aesthetics (you should use more blue in that sky you're painting)

it's not law (you shouldn't make a right turn on red within the city limits)

it's not manners (you should tip 15% in restaurants)

it's not grammar (you should never end a sentence with a preposition)

### 2. Universalizability (holds for every one, not: every one should be treated equally)

### 3. Overridingness (over aesthetic, legal, etc.)

4. Publicity (secrecy defeats action-guiding role; doesn't mean we have to preach)

5. Practicability (ought implies can)

We need an ethical theory: a set of universal principles, valid for every one, that will tell you whether an action is right or wrong.

Examples of moral theories:

Divine Command theory (see Arthur article)

Utilitarianism (focuses on consequences)

Kantian deontology (focuses on intentions)

Egoism (Right=self-interest)

### III. Introduction to Utilitarianism

Greatest Happiness Principle: The right act is the act which produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Mill formulates it slightly differently, p 27.

There are really three clauses of the utilitarian creed:

1) Consequentialism: acts are judged by their consequences.

2) Hedonism: consequences are evaluated by the amount of total happiness they bring.

3) Egalitarianism: each person counts as one.

Be careful to distinguish utilitarianism from ethical egoism.

Ethical egoism says that the right act is the one which produces the greatest happiness for me.

Note that it seems to fulfill the 5 requirements of a moral theory:

Prescriptivity

Universality

Overridingness (happiness is the only consideration)

Publicity

Practicability (though this may be debated)

Utilitarianism is an Epicurean philosophy: happiness, pleasure is the ultimate end.

### IV. How do utilitarians measure happiness?

Jeremy Bentham provided seven ways to measure it:

Intensity;

Duration;

Certainty;

Propinquity (proximity);

Fecundity (capability to produce more, followed by similar feelings);

Purity (chance it has of not being followed by opposite sensations);

Extent.

We can talk about units of happiness (utils), but we must be careful to distinguish them from money.

Law of diminishing returns: more money is always more money, but not always more happiness.

Cold drink on a hot day, the first is great, the twelfth is not so good.

There may be a problem with quantifying happiness.

But economists do this all the time.

We'll let it slide, here.

V. How does utilitarianism work, in practice?

Imagine a world in which there are two people, John and Harriet, and each has 10 units of happiness.

Harriet wonders whether she should gather some flowers.

The new totals would be: John=10, Harriet=12

Total is now 22, so she should do it.

Another day, John=10, Harriet=10

John wonders if he should gather flowers for Harriet.

John doesn't like flowers, but Harriet does. John would prefer to go swimming.

The new totals would be:

John=9, Harriet=12.

The total increases to 21, so John should do it.

Notice the requirement of self-sacrifice.

Utilitarianism encourages working hard to get a raise, to provide better for ones family.

Or going out of the way for a stranger in dire need.

It's not too stringent, perhaps: don't lose more than is gained.