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Moral Simplicity of Ethical Giving



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Synonyms

[Charitable giving](#); [Consequentialism](#); [Decision theory](#); [Philanthropy](#); [Universalized principle](#)

Introduction

Uniformity in human actions and attitudes incumbent with *the ceteris paribus clause* of folk psychology lucidly transits moral thoughts into the domain of subject versus object-centric explorations. In *Zettel*, Wittgenstein argues, “Concepts with fixed limits would demand uniformity of behaviour, but where I am certain, someone else is uncertain. And that is the fact of nature.” (Wittgenstein 2007, 68). Reflecting on the moral principle of “ethical giving” revives a novel stance in modern moral philosophy. An “ethical giving” is a moral position that looks at giving from the context of harmonizing the changing demands of situations with normative ethical principles. Despite giving more prominence to the query of intuition, the chapter brings up the justification of normative moral principles pertaining

to their applications and purports. Human activities aimed at decision-making goals conducted by the moral compass are nothing but the sanction of certain ethical norms and rules. In this context, two principles, the *normative aspect* and the *perspective aspect* need to be expounded in parallel.

The *perspective-based* principle seeks practical guides to action, whereas the *normative aspect* principle looks for the concrete moral justification behind it. Normatively based moral decisions hinge on the probabilities and interests of agents that can sometimes lead towards a better choice. Thomas Nagel’s thought sounds more appealing, since his idea of practical conflict bends towards “...conflict between values which are incomparable for reasons apart from uncertainty about the facts.” (Nagel 2013, 128). Positions on moral personality and equality of justice collide with the conception of verities of the agents’ reason that cogitate a minimal aspect on the morally significant properties (range properties), which can hardly be possessed by all human beings equally. This argument sounds reasonable in light of Singer’s thought of “the principle of equal consideration of interests.” (Singer 2003, 21–22)

The concern of this section is deliberative about how an agent could balance the demand of moral situations and the spirit of the moral principle devoid of being close to the relative truth. The conception of the moral decision remains capricious in line with the agent’s mood, time, and situation. The germane queries are:

- (a) How could one get the *simpliciter* of moral balance in “ethical giving” or offering help to the poor, orphans, and so on, who need help from the agents and society?
- (b) Can we find any *universalized principle* in defense of ethical giving?

Entangling with Moral Values

If we look from a different angle, you may ask how we could try to influence one to make decisions by appealing to what one should do. Inspiring an individual to execute moral action seems a social function that makes claims upon moral sentiments. From this point on, norms inform the social endeavors as we persuade others to carry these out. Our personal moral exhortation (for instance, “Lalon doesn’t like the Valentine celebration”) cannot be a norm, since it has no social accords. Actually, norms are based on ethical principles that have been articulated and supported by a group of people. One can ask, “whether the values are entirely the result of a *manmade process* with some fact-centric experimental mode?” If we think so, then does it not follow that the culminating values from the fact would be a *situation centric* appeal?

Another interesting question is, if we take an anti-realist stand regarding the emptiness of objective reality, then the process of resistance leads us to the “subjective” way of understanding values. The concern is whether the subjective way of understanding value could mingle with universalized principles like “Always speak the truth,” “Always respect women,” and so on? This reflection is the specter of an added type of question-begging: how could we strive for “universalized moral principles?”

Moral values appear subjective because they can differ according to varied cultural backgrounds and the subject’s preferences. Moral values can also appear objective, as they are held by people across various cultures, and the poly-gonal belief-desire psychology is arguably universal. Suppose we adopt a liberal view on the idea of objectivity. In that case, we will notice that our subjective experiences influence our knowledge of the external world. Yet, it is undoubtedly objective as our knowledge of the external world is

open to “inter-subjective verification and agreement.” (Chakraborty 2018, 49–50). The principle of universalizability gets a strong position here. Singer writes:

...the universalisability of ethical judgments requires us to go beyond thinking only about our own interests, and leads us to take a point of view from which we must give equal consideration to the interests of all affected by our actions. (Singer 2003, 315)

One can opt for a non-universalizability principle and hinge on their interests, but the principle will collide with the Kantian advocacy “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” (Kant 1972, 84). This is apparent enough on the surface. We think the term “reason” is a universally and objectively valid principle similar to the concept of freedom. More specifically, we believe that morality cannot be subjective as it depends on the situation, and it also manipulates the communication process towards disagreement. But it would be a peculiar thesis if we argue that moral values draw from an objective set of natural principles, because without the conscious being, morality does not have any existence. Only the self-reflection or conscience of a human being can think and behave based on conscience. Moral values are an indispensable part of humans’ conscience that holds normative outlook.

In Rawls’ sense (Rawls 1999), people should not be restricted by others’ presumptions regarding what one should be worthy to act upon or think about. The Kantian view also opposes any kind of coercion against rational human thoughts and freedom. In Korsgaard’s words, “We are bound only by restrictions that spring from the requirement that everyone’s liberty or autonomous pursuit of her own conception of the good should be equally protected.” (Korsgaard 2018, 25)

Before taking care of the charge of analyzing the principle that a moral agent should give with the *provision* that their giving to the extent of *x-amount* must not affect somebody else’s interest or even the agent’s own interest, here a moral agent may prefer to stress the concept of moral

values that underpin the self-interest and the moral balance (impartiality) together.

Decision Theory and Consequentialism?

Decision theory advocates a reason-based underlying approach of an agent's moral choices that could turn out to be challenging in terms of some practical conflicts of values. The practical conflict emerges when the agents are aware of the distinction of the alternative courses. That is, they are assured about the facts or the consequences of their action that they prefer but are unable to bring together the decision into a single evaluative judgment. In the case of exceedingly balanced choices of different actions, it would be consequently uncomplicated to reach a decision from an arbitrary level, like choosing between Harvard University and Princeton University as an institution for pursuing a degree in philosophy. However, for one who advocates reason-based choices, where the act of reason becomes more pertinent, arbitrary choices look untenable.

But the conflict arises when we focus on the delineation of values. We both have an obligation and general rights together, and most people experience a conflict in determining these in a single judgment, like children who have a lot of responsibilities to their teachers and schools, but who also have the general right to think in their ways that often collides with their parents and teachers' consciences and policies. Besides, the intrinsic nature of value initiates the dominance of objective values based on utility or benefits that an agent preserves. But the commitments or the utility approaches of an agent should not go against the agent's self-interest. Similarly, one's decision should be underpinned not only by self-interest but by the interests of others as well. Still, the question that bothers one's mind is how a mode of decision could become absurd? Nagel argues,

For example: never infringe general rights, and undertake only those special obligations that cannot lead to the infringement of anyone's rights; maximize utility within the range of action left free by the constraint of rights and obligations; where utility would be equally served by various policies, determine the choice by reference to perfectionist ends; and finally, where this leaves anything unsettled, decide on grounds of personal commitment or

even simple preference. Such a method of decision is absurd, not because of the particular order chosen but because of its absoluteness. (Nagel 2013, 131)

So, here the absurdity of a particular decision depends on the unbalanced pursuit of probing absoluteness. It turns towards an unsteady circle as it has hinged unreason by prioritizing the hypothesis that a utility approach cannot prevail over an incurred obligation.

Consequentialism, another normative stand, supports normative properties depending on their consequences. Frank Jackson urges,

Consequentialism approaches the question of whether an action is right or wrong in terms of a comparison of the possible outcomes of the action with the possible outcomes of each available alternative to that action. The notion of a possible outcome of an action is interpreted so as to include the action itself and the comparison of the various outcomes is carried out in terms of a consequentialist value function. (Jackson 1991: 462)

The different variations of consequentialism like hedonism, universal consequentialism, act consequentialism (morality of an action depends on actual consequence), evaluative consequentialism (morality of an action relies on the value of the consequence) establish their claims in a logical-cum-ethical manner. It would be puzzling to execute all values in a single ground of judgment; so far, pluralistic values marginalize rigid individualistic values and advocate context-sensitive values in particular situations. Besides, a *utilitarian right* that maximizes respect for moral rights in Rawls' work *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1999) synchronizes the "justice of fairness" anchored in the constitutive idea of "original position" by underscoring impartiality for the individuals who have a reasonable conception of justice. Equality is not something that can be measured by an individual's external affairs and physical body. Rawls points out that all human beings are equally possessed of moral responsibility, a property that is undoubtedly related to the sense of justice or being concerned with the conception of moral appeals. Rawls writes:

I have said that the minimal requirements defining moral personality refer to a capacity and not to the realization of it. A being that has this capacity, whether or not it is yet developed, is to receive the

full protection of the principles of justice. (Rawls 1999, 445–446)

There may be some controversies, since it somehow minimally entertains the principle of equality, as does a choice for Amartya Sen's argumentation in support of Rawls' dictum. Sen writes:

Equal personal liberty is given priority over the demands of the second principle which relates to the equality of certain general opportunities and to equity in the distribution of general purpose resources. (Sen 2009, 59)

The notion of balance most concerns liberty, justice, and equal consideration. These are not only bound by others' interests in the stage of distributive equality apart from there being a personal sense (subjectivity), but difficult to find equality in an exact sense. An "egalitarian" approach vindicates *equality for something*, not from a definite ground, as one variable of equality may differ from the other variable of equality maintained by a non-egalitarian stance. Equality may conflict with the pervasive diversity of humans. Because of the focal variables that have some internal pluralities, it may lead towards inequality, as Sen admirably articulates in his book *Inequality Reexamined* (Sen 1992). This is perhaps to go too far, but a significant numbers of philosophers are inclined to concur with Sen to the extent that freedom submerges in rational control.

What matters for human beings is to dispose of giving more to a charity that nourishes the requirements of compassionate persons than to one that simply cites statistics or newspapers reports. No amount of moralizing is going to prevail over such an elemental, evolutionarily embedded retort. An agent would require a clever advertising campaign to maneuver our normal responses in the desired direction. If we mount moral giving as an agent's subjective choices instead of group choices, then the conception of ethical giving will mislay its universalized stance. The "universalized principle of ethical giving" indicts against any sorts of subjective etiquette.

This is a picture of ethical life that goes beyond personal interest by taking account of the interests of others. Although it seems inevitable that almost

all our moral conduct and decisions will be concerned about our own or others with whom we maintain good relations, living an ethical life always enshrines ethical conduct and moral decisions from an altruistic sense that goes towards humanity and global welfare. In an Aristotelian dictum, becoming virtuous is a constant practice of virtue and moral conduct like becoming a good *lyre-player* (Aristotle 2009, 11). Ethics is an inevitable part of human life and the choice of doing moral acts for humanity, in general, is a sort of ethical ramification of an individual's moral decisions that hinge on the ways they live and act in the world. Rationality and intelligence can facilitate us to resolve our moral ambiguities. We would not probe into here the idea of the good and its controversy on whether the concept of the good is an attributive or predictive adjective etc. One may be fascinated to revisit Williams' analysis on Aristotle's weakness on the good that is called the "Gauguin problem" (Williams 1972, 70–71).

To find out a moral *simpliciter* is doubtlessly a difficult task. We can partially relinquish it to the subject's moral conscience. On the face of it, considering personal connection should never be allowed; but if the giving is morally justified, then it must be done irrespective of whether the recipient is a friend or loved one or not. The spirit of all ethical principles is to promote the good; keeping this in mind only, the agent must respond to situational facts. And that is universalizable as it will apply in all relevantly similar situations. One criterion that sounds promising is the motivation or principle of the particular person who prefers to engage with some charitable works. A person who has a moral disposition in pursuing charity for self-interest or a person whose motivation is to do charity for the sake of charity itself or others interest without being deluded by any personal interest usually delineate a different valuation. Leaving aside some general opinions, if we prefer to draw out the moral standard of an agent's charity or moral acts, we need to refrain from the self-interest or personal profit of the particular donor. The foundation of the practical reason of doing something (i.e., charity) for poor or incapable persons, who require our attention and help,

should be guided by compassionate ground and more especially from the perspective of “Equal respect for conscience.” (Nussbaum 2013, 59–97)

The orientation of morality is a checkpoint that engenders the usual upshot of prudence for the subject and others in an integrated sense. But a completely synchronized human being is fully incorporated with the collisions of moral disciplines, and charity sounds more ambitious as Aristotelian depicted or the Bhagavad Gita cultivated. Human beings are the amalgam of self-interest and other-interest concerning sensibilities and moral obligations. They are neither static nor a determinate alliance of moral values even if it seems categorical and inescapable. Singer says, “If we are to make properly considered ultimate choices, we must first become more aware of the ethical ramifications of the way we live.” (Singer 1997, 201). Morality in the human sense is a sort of deliberative choice that one can practice and carry out in their wills within the sphere of moral rules and conducts maintained by the society or the world in a broader nuance. We should give the highest deliberate priority to the moral consideration that should be equally beneficial for us and the others of the world.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Normative Ethics](#)
 - ▶ [Rawls’ Theory of Justice](#)
 - ▶ [Sen, Amartya](#)
 - ▶ [Social Norms](#)
 - ▶ [Utilitarianism](#)
- ▶ [Altruism’s Moral Heuristics](#)
 - ▶ [Gift-Giving and Foundation Owned Businesses](#)
 - ▶ [Gifting and Influence in the Private Sector; Gifting and Influence in the Public Sector](#)
 - ▶ [Kant, Immanuel](#)
 - ▶ [Moral Decision-Making](#)
 - ▶ [Moral Relativism Versus Moral Objectivism](#)

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