

The Discourse of Universalism, Moral Relativism & Utilitarianism

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Abstract

The historian Herodotus gives the anecdote of Darius, King of Persia, who summoned the Greeks and asked them if they would be willing to eat the bodies of their dead fathers. They replied they would not for any money in the world. Later, Darius asked some Indians of the tribe called Callatae, (omitted), if they would ever consider burning the bodies, as was the custom among Greeks. "One can see by this what custom can do" writes Herodotus. He draws the conclusion that this story vindicates the view some acts may be right for some and wrong for others, depending on their individual conceptions of morality. The Sophists were also associated with relativistic thinking, notably Protagoras who asserts that "man is the measure of all things". However, this view was quite uncommon and moral relativism hardly flourished, as Plato and Aristotle both defended forms of moral absolutism. Ancient Greek philosophers acknowledged moral diversity, but more often under the form of moral scepticism, which states that there is no moral knowledge (rather than moral truth is relative to a culture).

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Chapter 1. Moral relativism: history and theory of moral relativism: Ancient Greece and Early Modern Era

The historian Herodotus gives the anecdote of Darius, King of Persia, who summoned the Greeks and asked them if they would be willing to eat the bodies of their dead fathers. They replied they would not for any money in the world. Later, Darius asked some Indians of the tribe called Callatiae, who do eat their dead parents' bodies, if they would ever consider burning the bodies, as was the custom among Greeks. "One can see by this what custom can do" writes Herodotus. He draws the conclusion that this story vindicates the view some acts may be right for some and wrong for others, depending on their individual conceptions of morality.

The Sophists were also associated with relativistic thinking, notably Protagoras who asserts that "man is the measure of all things". However, this view was quite uncommon and moral relativism hardly flourished, as Plato and Aristotle both defended forms of moral absolutism. Ancient Greek philosophers acknowledged moral diversity, but more often under the form of moral scepticism, which states that there is no moral knowledge (rather than moral truth is relative to a culture).

Spinoza, in the early Modern era, claims "good" and "evil" are not intrinsic values: "As far as good and evil are concerned, they indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another." According to the philosopher, the terms "good" and "evil" should be understood in an analogous manner to "healthy" and "unhealthy": their value depends on what is either good or bad for me.

John Hobbes (1588-1679), in 1651, argues rational beings devise morality to obtain mutual advantage to make social living possible. This view paves the way for moral relativism as it implies moral principles should be considered according to how well they serve their purpose, rather than being right or wrong.

Nietzsche's thought has a relativistic flavor. His famous sentence "God is dead" seems to imply it is no longer credible to believe in an objective justification for moral claims.

By stating that "there are no moral phenomena, only moral interpretations of phenomena", Nietzsche embraces a form of perspectivism (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 108).

These philosophers prepared the ground for moral relativism, which grew more important in the twentieth century due to discoveries in cultural anthropology. Edward Westermarck (1862-1939), a Finnish philosopher and anthropologist, was one of the first to formulate a detailed theory of moral relativism in his book "Ethics are Relative". Westermarck points out differences in belief among societies, which, according to him, prove there are no absolute beliefs. He argues for ethical relativism by claiming there is no empirical basis for objective standards in ethics.

Morals in a Post-Truth Era

Post truth politics are defined by a political culture in which debate is framed by appealing to emotions rather than details of policy. Factual rebuttals are ignored, truth is of secondary importance. In 2016, “post-truth” was chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries’ Word of the Year due to its prevalence in the context of that year’s Brexit referendum and U.S. presidential elections. Post-truth politics are dangerous as truth is not a priority anymore.

Post-truth politics have an impact on ethics: if all truth is relative, then all morality becomes relative as well, since the rejection of absolute truth leads to the elimination of absolute morality. If there is no truth, how can there be any moral truth? In his book *Moral Relativism*, social theorist and professor Steven Lukes explores the emergence of moral relativism and defends the necessity of moral judgement. According to Lukes, it seems that “there is a new explicitness about inventing and actually lying without embarrassment”[3].

ONE RULE TO, ERR... RULE THEM ALL

OK, enough foreplay. Here’s Kant’s Rule:5

Act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.

—Immanuel Kant

I know: what the actual f**?

OK, let’s back up for a second.

Kant believed that rationality was sacred. When I say rationality, I don’t mean like sudoku or chess grandmaster rationality. I mean rationality as the fact that we are the only known creatures in the universe that are able to make decisions, weigh options, and consider the moral implications of any and every action.

Basically: consciousness.

To Kant, the only thing that distinguishes us from the rest of the universe is our ability to process information and act consciously in the world. And this, to him, is special. Exceedingly special. For all we know, we are the only shot the universe has at intelligent self-organization. Therefore, we need to take it seriously. And, therefore, rationality and protecting conscious choice must be the basis for all of our moral reasoning.

Kant wrote that “without rationality, the universe would be a waste, in vain, and without purpose.” To Kant’s mind, without intelligence, and the freedom to exercise that intelligence, we might as well just all be a bunch of rocks. Nothing would matter.

Therefore, Kant believed that all morality is derived from the protection and promotion of rational consciousness in each individual.

So, how do you do that?

Well, Kant’s Rule above.

Let’s restate Kant’s Rule in more modern language to make it more easily digestible:

Each person must never be treated only as a means to some other end, but must also be treated as an end themselves.

If this version of Kant’s Rule makes sense to you, skip the following grey box. If you’re still confused about how a person can be a “means” or an “end” then this box will explain it further.

Let’s give Kant’s Rule the common-sense check.

Lying is wrong because you are misleading another person’s conscious behavior in order to achieve your own goal. You are therefore treating that person as a means to your own end. Therefore, lying is unethical.

Cheating is unethical for a similar reason. You are violating the expectations of other rational and sentient beings for your own personal aims. You are treating the rules and expectations agreed to with others as a means to your own personal end.

Violence, same deal: you are treating another person as a means to some greater political or personal end. Bad, reader. Bad!

Kant’s formulation checks all the boxes that we would expect from a theory of morality. But it also goes way beyond common-sense morality.

In fact, I will try to argue that Kant’s Rule plausibly extends to pretty much everything that we value as right and good today.

Ethical Relativism

Ethical relativism is not necessarily tied to the proposition that there is no objective way to evaluate and compare sets of ethics. However, this proposition is almost certainly true; ethics are defined subjectively and thus can only be evaluated subjectively. Relativism, ethical or otherwise, is in part a description of the consequences of the limitations of objective truth. Unfortunately, these limitations are highly obscure; objective truth hides from the lenses of our senses and can only be derived from rigorous logic. The other part of relativism is what to do once you’ve moved beyond the quite narrow limitations of

objectivity. We exist primarily on a subjective plane, and as such we must be comfortable in taking action without absolute, objective reasons for our actions.

Chapter 2. Universalism and Relativism

Moral universalism is another name for moral objectivism - the belief that right and wrong are always the same irrespective of culture, ideology, time period or, presumably, species. Many (often contradictory) cultures have claimed that their moral system is uniquely privileged in this way.

There are several varieties of moral relativism. They all hold that right and wrong are defined socially rather than derived from an external source or some unchanging intrinsic truth (even if cultures often make such claims).

Relativism asserts that no nominated kind of action is ever always moral or immoral. This position results from intellectual slovenliness or superficiality or just mindless ideology or rationalization/pseudo-justification of one's own behaviors.

Well, first of all, moral universalism isn't opposite to moral relativism. Even if every human being on the planet was somehow educated or forced to have and follow the same morals, that universal moral system would still be an expression of the cultural and ideological values of Homo sapiens in the 21 century (or whenever). If there are other intelligent social species, they'd have their own morality. And other points in history will be eternally different from the present. The future will be different again.

Chapter 3. Hume's Universalism

The modern controversy regarding the foundations of morality provides the framework within which Hume sets out his own complex and nuanced position. He treats at least five aspects of this controversy, both within the main text and then systematically in the four appendices and "A Dialogue." These five different aspects are : reason versus moral sense or sentiment ; self-interest versus benevolence ; convention and education versus natural dispositions ; ascription of responsibility on the basis of free will versus moral sentiments ; and the law of opinion versus moral universalism via the quarrel about the ancients and moderns. In section 1, Hume explicitly invokes as his main focus the reason versus sentiment aspect of the foundations controversy, and doing so serves in part as a means for setting out his methodology, which also differs from that in the Treatise. The earlier work focuses on the origin of moral sentiments, and the role of the principles of association in connecting ideas and impressions to produce new kinds of perceptions, such as beliefs, the indirect passions and the moral sentiments. The method of EPM, in contrast, sets aside the associationist account and instead analyzes common life views about the qualities comprising an agent's "personal merit." Hume begins with the social virtues, and provides evidence to show that we praise them for their utility.

Hume subtly makes a case against the selfish theorists here, suggesting that those suspicious of "magnificent claim to public and social desert," will be "less jealous" of our

approving the self-regarding “laudable” qualities. Hume here connects humanity with morality : he argues that the distinction our sentiment of humanity makes between useful and pernicious (as these affect happiness and misery) “is the same in all its parts, with the moral distinction” of virtuous and vicious (EPM 6.5). “The same endowments of the mind... are agreeable to the sentiment of morals and to that of humanity” ; “by all the rules of philosophy, therefore, we must conclude, that these sentiments are originally the same ; since... they are governed by the same laws, and are moved by the same objects” (EPM 6.5). The emphasis here highlights the connection of humanity with the useful and pernicious, suggesting that morality fundamentally has its origins in some kind of preference for the useful over the pernicious. Finally, in Section 9 of the work, Hume maintains that the sentiment of humanity, in allowing us to see ourselves as members in the party of humankind, thereby interests us approving of the useful and blaming the harmful. Thus the main claim about the principle or sentiment of humanity in sections 5, 6, and 9, is that it is the source of a moral response of praise or blame to traits considered as useful or pernicious to society.

Hume stresses that “the several species of merit” valued for the immediate pleasure they afford their possessor or others produce sentiments “of a kind similar” to those that do take into account the “views of utility or of future beneficial consequences.” “The same social sympathy with happiness or misery” produces each kind of sentiment.

Hume has several arguments in favor of his stance, some against reason and some for sentiment. He first attacks reason. If judgments about virtue and vice are formed by reason, he argues, then they come from the relations of ideas, as Clarke believed, or matters of fact. He begins by considering the relations of ideas: “Reason or science is nothing but the comparing of ideas, and the discovery of their relations; and if the same relations have different characters, it must evidently follow that those characters are not discovered merely by reason” (T 466).

Hume developed the doctrine about experience as a flow of impressions. The problem of existence and spirit in a relationship considered unsolvable. Ideas of doubt and skepticism are inherent his philosophy. One of the central places in his work occupied by causality problem. Even though there are many nuances to discuss concerning his personality-I am going to stress on: “Why he is considered empiricist? How his human understanding conceived from his position?”

The other foundation to which Hume refers is what he in the Treatise calls “present possession.” We are motivated, he says there, to accept “present possession” as

grounds for public authority, where we do not accept it on its own as a grounds for private property, because of the interest we have in “the preservation of peace, and the avoiding of all changes, which, however they may be easily produced in private affairs, are unavoidably attended with bloodshed and confusion where the public is interested. If Hume’s entire political theory was in fact based on his post- Pyrrhonian method, it would be strange for him not to say so in places such as this, where he takes up the issue of reform directly.

Chapter 4. Plato's Universalism

Plato's answer to this was that universals exist in a separate reality as special objects, distinct in kind, from the things of experience. This is Plato's famous theory of "Forms." Plato himself used the terms ἰδέα, *idéa*, and εἶδος, *eĩdos*, in Greek, which could mean the "look" of a thing, its form, or the kind or sort of a thing [Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1889, 1964, pp. 226 & 375]. Since Aristotle used the term *eĩdos* to mean something else and consistently used *idéa* to refer to Plato's theory, in the history of philosophy we usually see references to Plato's "theory of Ideas."

Although Aristotle said that Socrates had never separated the Forms from the objects of experience, which is probably true, some of Socrates's language suggests the direction of Plato's theory. Thus, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates, in asking for a definition of piety, says that he does not want to know about individual pious things, but about the "idea itself," so that he may "look upon it" and, using it "as a model [*parádeigma*, "paradigm" in English]," judge "that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not" [6e, G.M.A. Grube trans., Hackett, 1986]. Plato concludes that what we "look upon" as a model, and is not an object of experience, is some other kind of real object, which has an existence elsewhere. That "elsewhere" is the "World of Forms," to which we have only had access, as the Myth of Chariot in the *Phaedrus* says, before birth, and which we are now only remembering. Later, the Neoplatonists decided that we have access now, immediately and intuitively, to the Forms, but while this produces a rather different kind of theory, both epistemologically and metaphysically, it still posits universals as objects at a higher level of reality than the objects of experience (which partake of matter and evil).

Plato himself realized, as recounted in the *Parmenides*, that there were some problems and obscurities with his theory. Some of these could be dismissed as misunderstandings; others were more serious. Most important, however, was the nature of the connection between the objects of experience and the Forms. Individual objects "participate" in the Forms and derive their character, even, Plato says in the *Republic*, their existence, from the Forms, but it is never clear how this is supposed to work if the World of Forms is entirely separate from the world of experience that we have here. In the *Timaeus*, Plato has a Creator God, the "Demiurge," fashioning the world in the image of the Forms, but this cannot explain the on-going coming-into-being of subsequent objects that will "participate" themselves. Plato's own metaphorical language in describing the relationship, that empirical objects are "shadows" of the Forms, probably suggested the Neoplatonic solution that such objects are attenuated emanations of Being, like dim rays of sunlight at some distance from the source.

Whether we take Plato's theory or the Neoplatonic version, there is no doubt that Plato's kind of theory about universals is one of Realism: Universals have real existence, just as much so, if not more so, than the individual objects of experience.

Aristotle also had a Realistic theory of universals, but he tried to avoid the problems with Plato's theory by not separating the universals, as objects, from the objects of experience. He "immanentized" the Forms. This meant, of course, that there still were Forms; it was just a matter of where they existed. So Aristotle even used one of Plato's terms, *eĩdos*, to mean the abstract universal object within a particular object. This word is more familiar to

us in its Latin translation: species. In modern discussion, however, it is usually just called the "form" of the object. The Aristotelian "form" of an object, however, is not just what an object "looks" like. An individual object as an individual object is particular, not universal. The "form" of the object will be the complex of all its abstract features and properties. If the object looks red or looks round or looks ugly, then those features, as abstractions, belong to the "form." The individuality of the object cannot be due to any of those abstractions, which are universals, and so must be due to something else. To Aristotle that was the "matter" of the object. "Matter" confers individuality, "form" universality. Since everything that we can identify about an object, the kind of thing it is, what it is doing, where it is, etc., involves abstract properties, the "form" represents the actuality of an object. By contrast, the "matter" represents the potential or possibility of an object to have other properties.

These uses of "form" and "matter" are now rather different from what is familiar to us. Aristotelian "matter" is not something that we can see, so it is not what we usually mean by matter today. Similarly, Aristotelian "form" is not some superficial appearance of a fundamentally material object: It is the true actuality and existence of the object. This becomes clear when we note Aristotle's term for "actuality," which was ἐνέργεια, *enérgeia*, what has become the modern word "energy" -- with modern physics giving us a version of matter as "frozen energy." Similarly, the term for "potential" is familiar: δύναμις, *dýnamis* (e.g. "dynamic," "dyne"), which can also mean "power" and "strength."

The continuing dualism of Aristotle's theory emerges when we ask how the "forms" of things are known. An individual object Aristotle called a "primary substance" (where the Greek word for substance, οὐσία, might better be translated "essence" or "being"). The abstract "form" of an object, the universal in it, Aristotle called "secondary substance." So if what we see are individual things, the primary substances, how do we get to the universals? Aristotle postulated a certain mental function, "abstraction," by which the universal is comprehended or thought in the particular. This is the equivalent of understanding what is perceived, which means that we get to the meaning of the perception. The "form" of the thing becomes its meaning, its concept, in the mind. For Plato, in effect, the meaning of the world was only outside of it.

While the Aristotelian "form" of an object is its substance (the "substantial form") and its essence, not all abstract properties belong to the essence. The "essence" is what makes the thing what it is. Properties that are not essential to the thing are accidental, e.g. the color or the material of a chair. Thus the contrast between "substance and accident" or "essence and accident." Accidents, however, are also universals. A contrast may also be drawn between substance and "attribute." In this distinction, all properties, whether essential or accidental, belong to the substance, the thing that "stands under" (sub-stantia in Latin, *hypo-keímenon*, "lie under," in Greek) all the properties and, presumably, holds them together. Since the properties of the essence are thought together through the concepts produced by abstraction, the "substance" represents the principle of unity that connects them.

Concepts, or predicates, are always universals, which means that no individual can be defined, as an individual, by concepts. "Socrates," as the name of an individual, although

bringing to mind many properties, is not a property; and no matter how many properties we specify, "snub-nosed," "ugly," "clever," "condemned," etc., they conceivably could apply to some other individual. From that we have a principle, still echoed by Kant, that "[primary] substance is that which is always subject, never predicate." On the other hand, a theory that eliminates the equivalent of Aristotelian "matter," like that of Leibniz, must require that individuals as such imply a unique, perhaps infinite, number of properties. Leibniz's principle of the "identity of indiscernibles" thus postulates that individuals which cannot be distinguished from each other, i.e. have all the same discernible properties, must be the same individual.

One result of Aristotle's theory was a powerful explanation for natural growth. The "form" of a thing is not just what it looks like, it is the "final cause," the purpose of the thing, the *ἐντελέχεια*, "entelechy," the "end within," which is one of the causes of natural growth and change. Before the modern discovery of DNA, this was pretty much the only theory there was to account for the growth of living things from seeds or embryos into full grown forms. Nevertheless, it introduces some difficulties into Aristotle's theory: If the "form" is accessible to understanding by abstraction, then this cannot be the same "form" as the one that contains the adult oak tree in the acorn, since no one unfamiliar with oak trees can look at an acorn and see the full form of the tree. But if the entelechy cannot be perceived and abstracted, then it exists in the object in a way different from the external "form." But Aristotle's metaphysics makes no provision, any more than quantum mechanics, for a "hidden" internal "form." Neoplatonism took care of that by making the internal "form" transcendent, as in Plato, but this is then a fatal compromise with Aristotle's *prima facie* empiricism and with his move to "immanentize" Plato's Forms.

The problem of the universals, as defined by Porphyry, and taken over by Boethius, was called *prima quaestio* -- "the first problem". Great importance was attached to this problem because of the numerous trends and nuances implied by the solutions. We possess a complete classification of these solutions, made by a mediaeval logician, John of Salisbury (twelfth century), in his work *Metalogicus* (*Metalogicon*). In this work, the author enumerates 13 directions in the problem of the universals.

Metalogicus was a treatise on logic which the author himself confessed to have written (1159) from memory, after a rather long interruption of his studies of logic. His intention was to prove the usefulness of logic, opposing the attacks against this discipline by certain philosophers. The value of the work is that it is a vast source of information about the conceptions of the time.

Here are the 13 conceptions in the problem of the universals, such as given by John of Salisbury.

1) Roscelin's conception, in keeping with which the universals are mere words -- votes (nominalism).

2) Abelard's, and his disciples' conception, with whom the general concepts are reduced to sermons, predication being possible only in sermo (judgement), as the predicate of an object cannot be an object.

3) Another position upheld that the universal is intellectus (idea), or notio, such as Cicero (that is the Stoics) had seen it. Thinking cannot discriminate the particular and corporeal concrete from the sensation, but only the abstract, namely the general abstract, which is devoid of reality.

4) Walter of Mortaigne's position, who maintained the universals to be closely united with the individuals (res sensibiles), but to have a mode of existence -- status -- according to which way they are considered. It is the so-called theory of the status.

Walter of Mortaigne was a professor in Paris, and died as a bishop of Laon in 1174. His position is interesting because he professed, basically, a multiplicity of ontological status. The species and genera, up to the supreme genus, have different existential states. So, the status of the general, united to the individual, depends on the consideration of the individual as belonging to one or to another species. (This idea, of "the multiple states of the Being" originated with Aristotle. See the relevant chapter). The idea of multiple ontological states has appeared in contemporary logic since the establishment of the many-valued logics where the proposition can have more than two values, truth and falsehood. A close examination of Walter of Mortaigne's theories in this respect would certainly prove very interesting.

5) The platonic realism of Bernard of Chartres.

6) Gilbert of Poitiers' conception concerning the native forms - forma nativae.

Gilbert de la Porrée, bishop of Poitiers (1076-1154), is known also as Gilbertus Porretanus, or Pictaviensis (of Poitiers). His most important work on logic is *De sex principiis*, which played an important part later on. He started from the Platonic conception of ideas -- principles; these have copies -- the native forms -- which become multiple and distinct in the individuals. Comparing these forms, the intellect shapes by abstraction a unique form, the genus, or the species, which conforms with the divine idea. Therefore in Plato's existence he saw a special "subsistence" *subsistentia* -- the essence of the individual Plato, this "Platonicity" -- *Platonitas* --, his distinct form, a copy of the idea of man.

7) Gauslenus of Soissons' opinion, according to which the universal exist only in collections.

Gauslenus of Soissons (1125-1151), bishop of Soissons, held that the universal concept exists only in the collection of individuals belonging to the same class, and not in the individual. The author of the treatise *Metalogicus* wrote that "Gauslenus Suessionensis episcopus situated the universal in objects gathered in a collection" (*rebus in unum collectis*) and denied it with isolated individuals.

8) The so-called theory of "manners" -- maneries.

This conception, just like that of Gauslenus of Soissons, of the collections or of native forms, is to be found in a work, written in the Middle Ages, *De generibus et speciebus*. This conception is a nominalist variant, in keeping with which the thing -- res -- is mere word -- vox.

The term maneries means "way of treating" or "way of handling", and is the origin of the French "manière". The canonist Huguccio (d. 1212), author of *Summa Decretorum* defined, in this sense, the species (species) as being rerum maneries (the "manner" of things). In short, a thing is a word -- vox --, and genus is its manner -- maneries.

9) The opinion according to which the universals are abstract form similar to the mathematical forms.

10) The so-called ratio indifferentiae doctrine, in keeping with which one thing can be at the same time individual and universal, although there is nothing universal in things, but the universal is what is similar between them.

Charles de Rémusat in *Abélard* (2nd ed., Paris, 1855) supplied a few excerpts from *Abelard Glossulae super Porphyrium* which explain this ratio indifferentiae conception. What in Plato, or in Socrates, is non-differentiated, or similar, *indifferens vel consimile*. Certain things are mutually convening, or agreeing, that is similar in nature, such as animals, bodies, so they are both universal and particular -- universal in that they are several in a community of essential attribution, and particular in that each of them is different from the other.

11) William of Champeaux's (1070-1120) opinion, who held a rather strange realism, finally coming to a *theoria indifferentiae*.

12) The conception according to which the distinction between genus and individual lies merely in a particularity of existence, as the universal exists at the same time in several and in the particular object.

13) The conception of the unknown author of the above mentioned -- *De generibus et speciebus*, a sort of Platonism, the "theory of identity". According to it, the genus, mankind for instance, is unique and identical with all the individuals, which are only accidentally distinct." (pp. 62-66)

According to the Platonic tradition, universals transcend the spatio-temporal world; they exist outside of space and time; they are eternally and changeless; they are not material in the way (many) individuals are. Redness would continue to exist if all red particulars disappear. In contrast, Aristotelians argue that universals are immanent. They exist on the level of particulars only. Therefore, if all red objects disappear from the world the universal redness would vanish, too.

The metaphysical debate about universals is raging on. Are universals real? Are they necessary? If so, what is their nature? In language, predicates like 'is red' are used to describe objects. Is there anything in reality that matches the one-over-many concept enshrined in language and thought? Is commonality real or imagined? These questions touch upon the 'Problem of Universals' to which different philosophers proposed a range of compelling answers.

There is a solution to this epistemological problem, mathematical Platonist universalism (MPU): for any consistent collection of mathematical axioms, there are Platonic objects that satisfy these axioms. MPU looks to be a great solution to the epistemological problems surrounding mathematical Platonism. How did evolved creatures like us get lucky enough to have axioms of set theory or arithmetic that are actually true of the sets? It didn't take much luck: As soon as we had consistent axioms, it was guaranteed that there would be a plurality of objects that satisfied them, and if the axioms fit with our "set intuitions", we could call the members of any such plurality "sets" while if they fit with our "number intuitions", we could call them "natural numbers". And the difficult questions about whether things like the Axiom of Choice are true are also easily resolved: the Axiom of Choice is true of some pluralities of Platonic objects and is false of others, and unless we settle the matter by stipulation, no one of these pluralities is the sets. (The story here is somewhat similar to Joel Hamkins' set theoretic multiverse, but I don't know if Hamkins has the kind of far-reaching epistemological application in mind that I am thinking about.)

This story has a serious problem. It is surely only the consistent axioms that are satisfied by a plurality of objects. Axioms are consistent, by definition, provided that there is no proof of a contradiction from them. But proofs are themselves mathematical objects. In fact, we've learned from Goedel that proofs can be thought of as just numbers. (Just write your proof in ASCII, and encode it as a binary number.) Hence, a plurality of axioms is consistent if and only if there does not exist a number with a certain property, namely the property of encoding a proof of a contradiction from these axioms. But on MPU there is no unique plurality of mathematical objects deserving to be called "the numbers". So now MPU faces a very serious problem. It said that any consistent plurality of axioms is true of some plurality of Platonic objects, and there are no privileged pluralities of "numbers" or "sets". But consistency is itself defined by means of "the numbers". And the old epistemological problems for Platonism resurface at this level. How do we have access to "the numbers" and the axioms they satisfy so as to have reason to think that the facts about consistency of axioms are as we think they are?

One could try making the same move again. There is no privileged notion of consistency. There are many notions of consistency, and for any axioms that are consistent with respect to any notion of consistency there exists a plurality of Platonic satisfiers. But now this literally threatens incoherence. But unless we specify some boundaries on the notion of consistency, this is going to literally let square circles into Platonic universalism. And if we specify the boundaries, then epistemological problems that MPU was trying to solve will come back.

To Plato, the truth could only be found in the external objective world. Plato was a universalist. Meaning Plato believed that truth could only be found in external forms. Plato believed that “the truth” could be discovered.

For instance, a classic example of an external form is math. Universalists believe that math isn't created by humanity, but simply rediscovered by humanity. Math's abstract ideas exist in their own form in the external world. That external world exists without the individual, cultures, or history.

In contrast to universalism is relativism. Relativists believe that all knowledge including math exists in relation to individuals, cultures, and history. Also, relativists do not believe in external forms.

Therefore, if Plato quested for truth, he wouldn't search by way of humanity's perception of truth, but he would have sought out universal truths that he believed were out there. In fact, Plato would have sought out universal knowledge. Ultimate truth is a big truth that makes up everything. As a result, Plato was a materialist, reductionist, and, of course, universalist.

What is Plato saying about the truth in the allegory?

Plato says those who tell the truth will be hated. In your experience is this true?

What is the fourth possible definition of "hold for" in the philosophy of truth?

What is the highest level of reality truth for Plato?

What is truth and why is it important in philosophy?

Plato us telling us that only he and others like him know the truth because his insistence on his Theory of Forms.

Chapter 5. Problems with Rawls Theory

Advocates of strict equality argue that inequalities permitted by the Difference Principle are unacceptable even if they do benefit the least advantaged. The problem for these advocates is to explain in a satisfactory way why the relative position of the least advantaged is more important than their absolute position, and hence why society should be prevented from materially benefiting the least advantaged when this is possible. The most common explanation appeals to solidarity : that being materially equal is an important expression of the equality of persons. Another common explanation appeals to the power some may have over others, if they are better off materially. Rawls' response to this latter criticism appeals to the priority of his first principle: The inequalities consistent with the Difference Principle are only permitted so long as they do not result in unequal

liberty. So, for instance, power differentials resulting from unequal income are not permitted if they violate the first principle of equal liberty, even if they increase the material position of the least advantaged group.

2. The Utilitarian objection to the Difference Principle is that it does not maximize utility. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls uses Utilitarianism as the main theory for comparison with his own, and hence he responds at length to this Utilitarian objection and argues for his own theory in preference to Utilitarianism.

primary distributive principle on the grounds that it mostly ignores claims that people deserve certain economic benefits in light of their actions. Advocates of Desert-Based Principles argue that some may deserve a higher level of material goods because of their hard work or contributions even if their unequal rewards do not also function to improve the position of the least advantaged. They also argue that the Difference Principle ignores the explanations of how people come to be in the more or less advantaged groups, when such explanations are relevant to the fairness of these positions.

5. The Original Position and the Veil of Ignorance may exclude some morally relevant information. The theory excludes in order to promote rationality and is biased in favor of rationality.

6. Some criticize it for being similar to Utilitarianism in as much as these two principles could permit or demand inequalities and suffering in order to benefit the least well off.

7. Like Desert theorists, advocates of Resource-Based Principles criticize the Difference Principle on the basis that it is not 'ambition-sensitive' enough, i.e. it is not sensitive to the consequences of people's choices. They also argue that it is not adequately 'endowment-sensitive': it does not compensate people for natural inequalities (like handicaps or ill-health) over which people have no control.

8. There is also the difficulty in applying the theory to practice. It is difficult if not impossible for people to place themselves under the Veil of Ignorance in the Original Position in order to formulate what conduct would be required of them by the MAXI MIN Principle.

Chapter 6. ARISTOTLE'S "RELATIVISM"

Rational Soul: Only human beings and God (gods) have rational souls; only they can be considered persons, which, following Aristotle, Euro-American religion, law, and morality have defined as rational beings. The rational soul develops naturally out of the fusion of the sensitive and nutritive souls. Christian philosophers changed this: the rational soul is a

special creation of God in both human beings and angels. Angels would not have nutritive and sensitive souls since they don't have physical bodies. The Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas thought that the rational soul was infused by God late in pregnancy. He's most likely correct, because there is no high brain activity (like neocortical brain waves) until the third trimester. Study these slides from the fetal brain below. The brain on the left essentially cannot think because there are very few connections between the brain cells and the neocortex has not yet developed into its six layers.

Conclusion: The human function or virtue is to follow a rational principle, and the final human good is activity of the entire soul in accordance with reason.

There are three things in the soul which control human actions: sensation, desire, and reason. The first two reside in the sensitive soul and the latter in the rational soul. No moral action can originate in sensation; if it did, then animals would exhibit a moral sense. Moral action, then, must be a combination of intellect and character (i.e., development of right desires from the sensitive soul).

Later in his book Aristotle's three-part soul becomes a duality: The "irrational" (nutritive and the sensitive soul) and rational. We have no control, obviously, over the "nutritive" or involuntary functions of the body (for example, growing older; going gray). We do, however, have control over the "sensitive" soul; we can close our eyes so we can't see, plug our ears so we can't hear, etc. Of course sometimes our emotions get out of control: you can get so angry that you want to hit your friend, but if you are virtuous your reason will prevent you.

For more on the soul read this link.

THREE TYPES OF GOODS (Bk. I, Sec. 8)

1. Goods of the soul: virtues and eudaimonia
2. Goods of the body: good health, physique, good look
3. External goods: wealth, political power, handsome wife and children, friends.

A "quick burst" of happiness is not enough. Happiness has to last a whole life in order to say you had "true" happiness. Besides the "internal good" of virtue, one also needs the goods of the body: good health, good physique, and good looks. You also need the "external" goods: friends, wealth, political power, good birth, and handsome children. The Greeks and most of the ancients believed that deformed children should be "exposed"--left to die in a remote place.

TWO TYPES OF VIRTUE (Bk. II, Sec. 1) Note: arete, usually rendered as "virtue," is sometimes translated as "excellence" in your book

Intellectual Virtues: Understanding (nous), theoretical reason (sophia) and practical knowledge (phronesis). Philosophy as the love (philo "to love") of wisdom is based on this intellectual virtue. It is a virtue to pursue knowledge in all things. The objects of intellectual virtue are invariable, while those of moral virtue are variable. Again one sees a contrast with Plato, who would say that moral and intellectual virtue are the same, because theoretical knowledge is virtue. There is no mean in intellectual virtues, i.e., it is always better to have more knowledge than less.

Moral Virtues: Liberality or generosity, temperance or self-control--ultimately learning the mean in all things nonintellectual. Unlike intellectual virtue, moral virtue deals with the emotions and irrational part of the soul. Practical knowledge is the "bridge" between intellectual and moral knowledge. Intellectual virtues do not describe character; they are not "habits," but innate (you are born with them) and are drawn out and perfected by certain disciplines such as logic, mathematics, and geometry.

Chapter 7. Is Aristotle an ethical relativist?

Relativism comes in at this point, when for example anthropologists try to remain neutral and not criticise the ritual murder. They might say: All moral values depend on humans; and therefore no single group has a genuine right to call another barbaric or evil. In the long run, all cultural values have the same source and are therefore equal

So relativism is actually an extremely dubious intellectual position, because in effect it removes the concept of value from social living.

However, Aristotle wrote his Ethics with the wishes and fears of every human being in mind, no matter what their tribe or community. No person wants to be tortured, raped, murdered, enslaved etc. So here is a foundation for social virtues that Aristotle rightly thought would be universally acceptable.

So you see that the aim of Aristotle was not to allow inhumane behaviour (relativism), but to promote humane behaviour at the highest level that a society may reach. In the course of his thinking about ethics he understood that some principles apply to all human beings alike.

His concept of virtue is for a common good in every community. The highest human good is happiness. The goal of the Ethics is to determine how best to achieve happiness. A central part of this doctrine is the doctrine of the mean.

I believe that Aristotle developed something really fundamental for the benefit of mankind in society. His ethics are primarily designed to make people conscious of themselves in what they strive for--why they have certain goals and aspirations in life; and just as importantly, what kind of good and evil must be known to achieve these goals.

So in conclusion, Aristotle is nowhere near relativism in his doctrine. In fact I think he would call relativism itself an intellectual evil that stands in the way of making humans more humane.

Chapter 8. John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism

Mill argues that the highest moral principle is the following: "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they produce the reverse of happiness." As with Aristotle, Mill relies on happiness as the highest end that we seek, and he defines happiness both as pleasure gained and the absence or as little pain as possible. His definition, of course, is quite different from Aristotle, though like Aristotle, Mill holds happiness to be the highest end that we seek. Note that Mill's argument is not that we avoid pain at all time, such as when we experience pain when running, but rather that we weigh pleasures and pains, with the goal that pleasure should come out ahead. Mill also argues that there are different types of pleasure and Mill is quite clear that intellectual pleasures, such as the acquisition of knowledge, are higher forms of happiness than the animal-sensual pleasures. He notes that those who have experienced the two always choose the former over the latter. Important to Mill's utilitarian approach is that it assesses the results of an action; this is Mill's "consequentialism." In other words, the motivations of a person don't matter to Mill.

All that matters is the results, not the character of the person or their will. This of course distinguishes Mill greatly from both Kant and Aristotle. Mill distinguishes between the first principle of utility (quoted above) and secondary principles that aim for the highest good for everyone. Such secondary principles include not stealing and not lying. Mill says that most of our actions will be judged based upon these secondary principles and that we only need to look at the first principle of morality if we are weighing conflicting secondary principles, such as if we may need to steal in order to save a life.

Mill spends a lot of time in this chapter on the misunderstandings of utilitarian approach. Utility, he notes, often means in everyday language something opposed to pleasure, that is, to do something useful instead of for the pleasure it brings. As will become clear, this is certainly a misunderstanding of Mill's position. Where Aristotle thought eudaemonia (acting virtuously as the result of a decision resulting from correct deliberation) and Kant thought the good will were the ultimate ends, Mill argues that absence of pain and the experience of pleasure are the only things inherently good. Mill also argues that we shouldn't take pleasure in its narrow sense, as Aristotle and Kant had. For Mill, human beings experience higher pleasures once they are educated rightly to recognize and use their higher faculties. Utilitarianism doesn't just calculate the quantity of pleasure (in which, one assumes, base pleasures and intellectual pleasures would amount to the same thing) but also the quality of the pleasures involved.

How do we define a higher pleasure? It is a pleasure for which one would experience some amount of pain to have it, for example, the sense of pleasure one has when acting virtuously, or the sense of pleasure one experiences when doing well on an exam, after

studying for it. Each pleasure comes at some cost (pain), but is worth it for the higher value of the pleasure it provides. Mill's argument rests on what he says is "unquestionable," namely that people with access to both types of pleasures will surely choose the pleasures of the higher faculties, that people will choose to live up to their full human capacities than live an animal-like existence. Mill also argues that happiness, for him, does not mean satisfaction or contentment. He writes, in a famous passage, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their side of the question."

Chapter Three: The theme of this chapter is what would motivate us to follow utilitarian ethics? This is the most difficult ethical question of all. Whether one is Aristotelian, Kantian, or an egoist, etc., the most difficult task is to explain why one should follow the ethical theory. What would happen if one doesn't? It seems that in some cases, the ethical wrongdoer faces no other sanction than being, well, an ethical wrongdoer. But Mill wants to argue more, namely, that utilitarianism can show why we would want to be, well, utilitarian. In other words, he says that we should follow utilitarian ethics because it would provide the greatest pleasure and release from the most pain. For Mill, there are two types of motivations or sanctions that promote happiness: external and internal sanctions. The first arises from what society can do to you in the name of the happiness of the greatest number, such as punishing you for stealing or killing, which inflicts pain on others.

We could also face external sanctions from God and the honor (or dishonor) given to us by our fellow human beings. But utilitarianism would be rather weak if it simply argued that one should follow what is just because of internal sanctions; this would amount to arguing that one should simply follow the laws because of the punishments we face. But later, in chapter five (a part of the text, it is easy to tell, that was written separately), Mill is going to make clear that there are often unjust laws that we should not follow because of the harm it brings others. Internally, we have a conscience, an inner sense of duty guided by our own "natural" sympathy in the face of the pain of others as well as our natural need to protect ourselves. Over our lives, and a strong education would promote this, we experience pain and remorse when harming others, and experience pleasure when not doing so, or when helping others. This is the motivation for our ethical actions, according to Mill.

Chapter Four: Here, Mill provides his inductive proof for the principle of utility. He begins by saying that it is impossible to provide a direct proof for the foundational principle; rather he will show that general happiness is what people want since people actually desire it. It will be necessary, then, to show that people only desire happiness, and that all other "ends" are subservient to this larger end, an argument we have already seen in Aristotle. Mill argues that there may be those that argue that we want other things, such as virtue, intellect, and so on, but Mill says that these are good only insofar as they provide happiness. In other words, happiness is a "whole" with many parts, including virtue.

Mill is aware of the Kantian argument, namely that people often carry out virtuous actions without thought of such pleasures (this is what would be ethical in Kant's system). In the end of this chapter, he notes that there is a difference between the will and desire, which Kant distinguished as well, calling desires "inclinations." But Mill argues that inclinations

are what drive a “good will,” not “reason,” as Kant would say. If we want or will something that we no longer find pleasure in, it is only because we have grown accustomed to doing it. But that does not mean that originally we were not led by the desire for pleasure.

Chapter 9. Mill and Principle of Utility

Mill argues that happiness is the only thing we desire for itself. This means that it's the only thing for whose desirability in itself we have evidence. Someone might challenge Mill by saying that other things are valuable in themselves. On the surface, Mill's strategy is to agree that people “do desire things which, in common language, are ... distinguished from happiness” [10] for their own sakes. His chief example is being virtuous. However, he asserts, people only desire virtue for its own sake if they have incorporated it into their happiness. If virtue partially constitutes someone's happiness, then they desire it “as a part of their happiness.” Hence “there is in reality nothing desired except happiness.” [11] But now Mill may appear inconsistent. He defines ‘happiness’ as “pleasure, and the absence of

pain.” [12] How then, some of his critics have challenged, can virtue be part of our happiness? Virtue ≠ pleasure. [13] The key may be in Mill's account of how something like virtue can become part of our happiness. He explains how the experience of being treated better by others when we behave virtuously can cause us to form a mental association between virtue and pleasure. When people associate virtue with pleasure then the awareness or “consciousness” that they're virtuous becomes pleasurable for them. It might then be this pleasure—not virtue itself, strictly speaking—that they desire as an end. If this is his intention, then contrary to surface appearances Mill's really denying that some people desire to be virtuous for its own sake. But he's explaining why they seem to: for them, the connection between virtue and pleasure has become much closer than it is for people who only want to be virtuous so they'll be treated better. [14] Reading Mill this way still lets us say that he takes happiness to be the only thing we desire for itself, albeit at the cost of not taking his talk about virtue's becoming part of our happiness or our desiring it as an end entirely literally.

Mill would say that people who have formed this association have made money part of their happiness and that they desire it as such, although this is speaking rather loosely. Strictly speaking, Mill would say, even misers don't desire money for its own sake. What they desire for its own sake is the pleasure they get from the knowledge that they have money. It's this pleasure that is part of their happiness, not the money itself. The real point is just that money and happiness are much more closely connected for people like this than they are for people who simply regard money as a way to buy things.

Mill does think that there's one important difference between money and virtue in this regard. We should want people to form this association between pleasure and being virtuous. This will help to motivate them to act in ways that lead to an overall happier society. In contrast, this sort of association between pleasure and money is pathological. Society will be much happier if people simply regard money as a tool.

Chapter 10. Kant and Moral Theory

The opening passage of Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals* proclaims that "it is impossible to conceive of anything in the world, or indeed beyond it, that can be understood as good without qualification except for a good will." This is a clear and elegant statement of the theory of value that serves as the basis for Kant's ethical theory of respect for persons. The one thing that has intrinsic value, for Kant, is the autonomous good will of a person. That said, Kant does not understand the expression "good will" in the everyday sense. In everyday discourse we might speak of someone being a person of good will if they want to do good things. We take the philanthropist's desire to give to the less fortunate to be an example of good will in this everyday sense. On Kant's view, the person of good will wills good things, but out of a sense of moral duty, not just inclination.

Naturally generous philanthropists do not demonstrate their good will through their giving according to Kant, but selfish greedy persons do show their good will when they give to the poor out of a recognition of their moral duty to do so even though they'd really rather not. So it is our ability to recognize a moral duty and will to act in accordance with it that makes persons beings that have dignity and are therefore worthy of moral regard. On Kant's view, our free will, our moral autonomy, is our capacity to act according to duty as opposed to being a slave to our desires or inclinations. So free will, in the sense that is associated with moral responsibility, doesn't mean being free to do as you please without consequence. Rather, freedom comes with moral responsibility for the intentions we act on.

So, understanding the good will as the capacity to will and act out of duty or respect for moral law, we can see having this capacity as part of having a rational, autonomous will. As persons, we have a free or autonomous will in our capacity to weigh our desires against each other and against the rational constraints of morality and reach our own determination of the will. We are the originators and authors of the principles we act on. On Kant's view, our free will, our moral autonomy, is our capacity to act according to duty as opposed to being a slave to our desires or inclinations. So free will, in the sense that is associated with moral responsibility, doesn't mean being free to do as you please without consequence. Rather, freedom comes with moral responsibility for the intentions we act on. Having an autonomous good will with the capacity to act from moral duty is central to being a person in the moral sense and it is the basis, the metaphysical grounding, for an ethics of respect for persons. Now what it is to respect a person merits some further analysis.

Kant calls his fundamental moral principle the Categorical Imperative. An imperative is a command. The notion of a Categorical Imperative can be understood in contrast to that of a hypothetical imperative. A hypothetical imperative tells you what to do in order to achieve some goal. For instance, "if you want to get a good grade in calculus, work the assignments regularly." This claim tells you what to do in order to get a good grade in calculus. But it doesn't tell you what to do if you don't care about getting a good grade. What is distinctive about a Categorical Imperative is that it tells you how to act regardless of what end or goal you might desire. Kant holds that if there is a fundamental law of morality, it is a Categorical Imperative. Taking the fundamental principle of morality to be a Categorical

Imperative implies that moral reasons override other sorts of reasons. You might, for instance, think you have a self-interested reason to cheat on exam. But if morality is grounded in a Categorical Imperative, then your moral reason against cheating overrides your self-interested reason for cheating. If we think considerations of moral obligation trump self-interested considerations, Kant's idea that the fundamental law of morality is a Categorical Imperative accounts for this nicely.

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Here are two formulations of Kant's Categorical Imperative:

CIa: Always treat persons (including yourself) as ends in themselves, never merely as a means to an end.

CIb: Act only on that maxim that you can consistently will to be a universal law.

Kant takes these formulations to be different ways of expressing the same underlying principle of respect for persons. They certainly don't appear to be synonymous. But we might take them to express the same thing in that each formulation would guide one to act in the same way.

The formulation (CIa), tells us to treat individuals as ends in themselves. That is just to say that persons should be treated as beings that have intrinsic value. To say that persons have intrinsic value is to say that they have value independent of their usefulness for this or that purpose. (CIa) does not say that you can never use a person for your own purposes. But it tells us we should never use a person merely as a means to your own ends. What is the difference? We treat people as a means to our own ends in ways that are not morally problematic quite often. When I go to the post office, I treat the clerk as a means to my end of sending a letter. But I do not treat that person merely as a means to an end. I pursue my end of sending a letter through my interaction with the clerk only with the understanding that the clerk is acting autonomously in serving me. My interaction with the clerk is morally acceptable so long as the clerk is serving me voluntarily, or acting autonomously for his

own reasons. By contrast, we use people merely as a means to an end if we force them to do our will, or if we deceive them into doing our will. Coercion and deception are paradigm violations of the Categorical Imperative. In coercing or deceiving another person, we disrupt his or her autonomy and his or her will. This is what the Categorical Imperative forbids. Respecting persons requires refraining from violating their autonomy.