Knowledge and Ethics

What is morality?

Is it real?

Describe a situation in which you did something morally right or wrong.

Why was your action morally right/wrong?

How did you present your case on
why your action was morally right/wrong?

What ideas or principles
can we glean from this exercise?

Ethical Arguments

How are ethical arguments made?

- Presentation of facts

- Values

- Logic of argument

➢Are these sufficient?

Ethical Arguments

- Justification
- Moral language
  - Does it say anything about the external world?
  - Is it an expression of one's subjective feelings?
  - Is it a recommendation of a course of action?

- Non-cognitive: describes a statement that gives no factual information.

If I like something, I call it "good".

If I dislike something, I call it "bad".

Non-cognitive end to the matter.

Because there is nothing to discuss – we aren't seeking an objective way of saying whether something is right or wrong, but simply about personal wishes.

But is this how moral discourse proceeds?

We often say, "the fact is…"

Moral Discourse

Moral claim: Abortion is morally wrong.

- Let's analyse this statement.
- What **questions** can we ask *about* this claim?
- What **assumptions** lie beneath this claim?
- What questions does this claim *generate*?

Some questions…

- What is the meaning of the word "wrong"?

Moral Semantics

- Where does "wrongness" come from?
Is it real?

Moral Ontology

- What is the nature of this moral judgement?

Moral Epistemology

For KI: Not concerned with Moral Psychology.
We are interested in the significance of moral discourse insofar as it reveals the nature & construction of moral knowledge / what we know about morality.

For KI: No need to learn / memorise all the theories associated with each of these topics. Be careful when reading material online – many overlaps!

Ethics / Ethical Inquiry

Ethics: the study of morality
Inquiry: process of asking questions
to find out info about X /
an attempt to discover facts

How should we approach the study of morality?

- Descriptive Approach
  - Observe what humans do
  - Conclude how humans behave (e.g., humans act in their own self-interest)

- Approach taken by social scientists
- Not our primary concern in this KI module

How should we approach the study of morality?

- Philosophical Approach
  - Normative / Prescriptive Ethics
    (how *should* humans act?)
    - E.g., Humans should act in the interest of others (altruism)
    - E.g., Humans should act in the interest of all concerned, self included (utilitarianism)
  - aka normative ethical theory
  - E.g., "Abortion is morally wrong."
  - Justification for this claim comes from ethical theory.
  - Truth condition of the claim fulfilled when…?

  But… what is the *basis* of these ethical principles?

How should we approach the study of morality?

- Philosophical Approach
  - Metaethics / Analytic Ethics
    - Analyse ethical language
    - Analyse rational foundations of ethical systems
  - Focus is on reasoning, logical structures, language rather than on normative content

  - E.g., Is there such a thing as moral fact?
  - Is morality real?
  - What is a moral property?
  - What is the nature of the moral world?

How should we approach the study of morality?

- **Practical Approach**
  - Applied Ethics
    - Examine the choices made in specific areas of life e.g., bioethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, etc.

  - Ethical theory and applied ethics need to be examined alongside each other

How should we approach the study of morality?

- For KI: back to JTB and associated issues

4 of 6 key KI questions:

- What is knowledge?

- How is knowledge constructed?

- What makes knowledge valid?

- What makes knowledge affected by society?

#throwback

Who?	When?	What?
Plato	c428-347 BCE	Introduces ideals and the form of the good
Aristotle	384-322 BCE	Introduces natural law argument based on a rational view of purpose in the world
Aquinas	1225-74	Combines Aristotle with Christian beliefs
Hobbes	1588-1679	Suggests morality is based on agreement, to avoid chaos
Hume	1711-76	Suggests morality is based on the emotion of good will towards others
Bentham Mill	1748-1832 1806-73	Develop the theory of utilitarianism
Kant	1724-1804	Introduces morality based on reason and the idea of duty
Nietzsche	1844-1900	Challenges Christian morality and challenges mankind to evolve
Sartre	1905-80	Claims existential morality encourages you to become fully yourself

21st Century Ethics?

- Interest in moral relativism
- Interest in applied ethics
- Multi-faith world

Questions

- Can moral questions be decided on the basis of facts, or do they always depend on values and opinions?

- What would convince me in a statement about human rights or wrongs is final or absolute?

- Is everything simply a matter of personal choice and taste?