

Morality Evaluation: Two Perspectives from Motivation Theory and Consequentialism

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Abstract: Morality is a significant component of human behaviour norms and plays a crucial role. With the involvement of morality, a fundamental question must be asked: which behaviours should be considered “good”, and which should be considered “evil”? This involves the issue of the ethical evaluation criteria of morality. Among the whole question, it is clear that the standard that is truly important to morality evaluation should be discussed. Obviously, different theories have different attitudes toward it. For example, utilitarians insist that the value of morality comes from fulfilling people’s need, especially their emotional requirements, which means that only a movement that leads to a “good” result can be appraised as moral; moreover, deontologists argues that morality is made to demonstrate the transcendental and inevitable essence of human beings, such as liberty or free will, in other words, morality should be used to describe a motive which is accord with the essence. By discussing the debate between motivation theory and consequentialism, this article aims to investigate the two most important criteria for the evaluation of morality: whether it is universally valid and whether it is operable. Moreover, the analysis and discussion contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the fundamental ethical issue of identifying “goodness”.

Keywords: moral evaluation, deontology, utilitarianism, motivation

1. Introduction

The impact of morality evaluation has become an apparently important issue of concern to the whole society even the human being. With the diverse morality standards created by people of different gender, nation, culture and so on. From past to now, different factions of scholars have different explanations about how we should treat different morality evaluations and what kinds of morality evaluation are more important, which leads to a kind of responsibility of human beings to value them more [1-3]. When more complex and flexible reality forces us to go through a long unbearable process that almost nobody is able to gain any virtual fruit, the whole society is easy to be stuck in the crisis of relativism under an unclear evaluation standard of what is “good” or “evil”. This study leads to valuable elements of morality evaluation, and to analyze advantages and shortcomings of different moral theories such as utilitarianism and deontology by these elements, in order to find out a way to support the morality evaluation in the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Two Criteria for Morality Evaluation: Whether It Is Universally Valid and Operable

To fully understand the evaluation standard of morality, the process of the mechanism of morality must first be considered. This is the manner in which morality exercises a normative and restrictive influence on human behaviour. The process of knowing-identifying-norming is responsible for this effect. This means that for a subject to identify with morality, the mechanism of morality requires that they acknowledge the cognitive necessity of moral existence (in this instance, morality can be understood in a broad or narrow sense as a series or a specific code of behaviour). The subject will ultimately regulate their various behaviours by basing them on the appropriateness and necessity of the situation. Based on an understanding of this mechanism, it is easy to reach the conclusion that although morality is said to be consciousness and starts with the idea of the subject, it cannot be a phenomenon that is purely mental. This conclusion is supported by the fact that it is easy to be reached. In contrast, morality must be applicable and should be able to regulate the subject's behaviour in the real world. In addition, to serve as a benchmark for subject conduct, moral consciousness must not solely be effective for a particular subject and must also have an effect on every subject. If this does not happen, the topic will then devolve into complete moral relativism or even moral nihilism, thereby rendering the process of moral consciousness construction ineffective. In conclusion, asserting that operability and universal applicability are two crucial moral evaluation criteria is not difficult.

2.2. Utilitarianism: Understanding Morality from the Perspective of Utility

Utilitarians generally provide a solution that addresses both of these issues comprehensively. They start the construction of a relatively all-encompassing moral system with the distinctive communication patterns of individuals through summarization. For example, Adam Smith argued that empathy is the primary driving force behind moral behaviour, and it is precisely because of our compassion for the suffering of others that we can imagine how a victim feels or how feelings affect them [4]. David Hume held a similar belief that can be summarized as follows: Charity and humanity, friendship and thankfulness, natural affection and public spirit, or anything that emerges from tender sympathy for others and generous concern for our human species are qualities that are more deserving of the goodwill and praise of common humans [5-7]. Regarding the comprehension of moral evaluation standards, greater emphasis is placed on the satisfaction of human emotional capacity with this particular type of morality. It can also be regarded as placing more emphasis on utility. This type of morality is derived from human emotional capacity. Hume argued that the public utility is always the most essential standard among all the moral provisions. No method is more trustworthy than a thorough analysis of the genuine interests of humanity to find a solution to this problem. John Mill was incredibly direct and stated himself always resort to utilitarianism in all moral matters [8]. The so-called utilitarian approach must be understood in its broadest sense in this context and there is a requirement that it be founded on the long-term interests of people as they are forward-looking. In addition, in terms of the individual, "the only freedom that is truly called for is the freedom to pursue our own good in our own way," as long as others are not deprived of this freedom and their efforts to attain it are not hindered. This is the "only freedom that is truly called for". Jeremy Bentham ranked the motivations of his actions and argued that altruistic motivations should be in position on the list as "utilitarian commands are nothing more than the broadest and wisest (that is, most deliberate) benevolent commands", followed by the motivations of seeking fame and the pursuit of harmony [9].

The problem with utilitarianism can quite easily be identified—it lacks genuine inevitability. When utilitarians regard utility considerations as being the fundamental criterion for the judgement of morality, it must be acknowledged that as the interactions of people become more diverse and complex, more variables must be considered in order to determine which is a “benefit” for individuals and the society they live in. As a source of morality, emotions are not entirely reliable, and the presence of multiple emotions in response to various stimuli can result in moral judgements that are distinct from each other or even in direct opposition to each other.

2.3. Deontology: Understanding Morality from the Perspective of Motivation

Deontologists have identified the issue with utilitarianism, reaching the conclusion that the most effective way to ensure moral judgement reliability is to ground it in concepts (also known as presuppositions) and logic. Kant founded German conceptualism and believed the utilitarian solution to the two problems of making moral evaluation universally valid and operational was superficial [10]. He regards Intelligence, wit, and judgment, as well as what are commonly referred to as spiritual talents, or courage, decisiveness and determination in decision-making, as all temperamental characteristics [11]. It can also become incredibly detrimental and destructive if the motivation for a person to make use of their natural endowments and character consciousness is not charitable. The same is true of things that are won through chance, such as dominance and prosperity. The perceived happiness causes people to be proud or sometimes arrogant if there is no kind of consciousness to rectify their inner effects, and the entire principle of action must be corrected for it to be generally effective [12]. Therefore, it appears that kind consciousness is an indispensable condition for the enjoyment of happiness. Kant suggested that the utilitarian empirical synthesis of subjective interaction activities is not sufficient for providing certainty for moral consciousness, and the only thing that can be used to accomplish this is the attainment of self-contained kind consciousness, which is the purpose of rational human existence. As “obligations are the inevitability of the law of respect”, Kant clearly distinguished between “complying with obligation” and “out of obligation” actions. His reasoning for this was that “obligations are the law of respect”. In addition, through the exclusion of all empirical grounds for law, he arrived at the only universal moral law (prescriptive commandment): “Act in such a way that the norm of your will can always be regarded as a principle of universal legislation”. The phrase “the manifestation of law” or “the capacity to act in accordance with principles” is what is meant when talking about consciousness [13]. This capability is exclusive to the rational being (the subject) (e. g., consciousness is the property of causality that distinguishes the rational being from the conventional being), and intentional consciousness can also be referred to as the practical reason. From this, Kant concluded that the negative definition of freedom is the property of the consciousness when it can function independently of external stipulations. In contrast, the positive definition of freedom is the self-legislation of will, which is also referred to as the self-discipline of consciousness. The positive definition of freedom synthesises the norms of the consciousness with universal law, which allows the subject to organise their own code of consciousness as if it were a universal law.

The deontological ethics of Kant laid the foundation for the development of his view of moral practice. He distinguished between “knowledge of form” and “knowledge of the matter” as the two distinct sub-types of “rational knowledge”. This latter category can be further divided into two subcategories: physics, which concerns the laws of nature, and ethics, which concerns the laws of freedom. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that philosophy contains two fundamentally different parts, the theoretical part of natural philosophy and the practical part of moral philosophy (as this is how the practical legislation of reason based on the concept of freedom is known). Kant maintained that the only genuine, primary practice is one moral in nature that is founded on the idea of freedom,

but the moral law is the epistemic justification for freedom. In moral practice, “freedom is the reason for the existence of the moral law, but the moral law is the reason for the understanding of freedom”. As people are generally concerned about moral law (which is also known as the “respect” that was previously discussed), this plays a practical role in the world of emotions.

2.4. Limitations and Prospects of Deontology

Deontologists are able to construct the unity of universal validity and the applicability of logical self-consistency through moral laws, but deontology, unfortunately, has some limitations. One of the primary reasons is the fact that deontology still emphasises universal validity, despite its practical interpretation being inadequate. Even when it is unified with moral practice through something called “respect”, the universal moral law derived from pure speculation remains an abstract practice. Absolute commands are derived from concepts and logic, and they may theoretically be applicable to all practical activities. However, they do not provide direct guidance for practice. This is not directly reflected in the lack of a criterion for people to determine whether their actions are in accordance with categorical imperatives, and they also do not know how to make this universality concrete.

Despite the fact that all humans have the same characteristic of being rational, the application of reason in a variety of different contexts can lead to completely different outcomes for individuals as a result of factors that include gender, nationality, religion, culture and political persuasion. For example, profits, land rent and other forms of compensation may be considered to be entirely reasonable by business owners and landlords, but some workers may consciously consider their problems and whether or not they have been treated unfairly by business owners and landlords as they pursue profit. According to the moral philosophy of Kant, the material serving as the form of the moral law is the surrounding environment. At the same time, when a variety of content is used to fill the same form, the provided guidance will produce distinct and possibly even contradictory results. However, to what extent can a form-focused moral law provide guidance for human moral practice as its scope and complexity expand? This is a question that must be contemplated by deontologists.

By changing perspective, novel concepts such as Marxism can be discovered. Marx believed “the essence of man is not an abstraction inherent to a single individual, but rather the sum total of all social relations” [14]. As the social existence and social life of the subject are both concrete and realistic, they belong to a specific era and have a background specific to that era. Marx elucidated the diversity of morality and its evaluation methods from a historical standpoint, a way of thinking that does not endorse relativism or nihilism [15]. Kai Nielsen argued that the morality of Marx should be understood as a form of contextualism [16]. Diverse “moral beliefs” that result from different genders, ethnicities, religions, cultures and political persuasions “effectively concur with the convergence of situations”. Based on this understanding, as the situation is derived from actual social life, there is no need to worry about its operability, and as scenarios inevitably result in convergence, morality evaluation attains the universal validity it merits. Therefore, the question of moral evaluation revolves around the construction of a human-purposed and effectively converging situation.

3. Implications

As Marxism is perhaps an ideal solution to this problem, as all theories must be evaluated from a historical and practical perspective. Humans are dynamic as they are essentially the result of their conscious practical activities under particular historical conditions and social connections. Nevertheless, how can practice be understood from a non-metaphysical or truly practical

perspective? How should the true moral principles that are inherent in the dynamic nature of man be comprehended? How can all of this be accomplished without being haunted by the relativist crisis? This investigation and dialogue have identified a number of urgent issues and the focus of moral research has changed back to the daily lives of people, but these questions will also encourage others to examine the fields of morality and ethics in greater detail.

4. Conclusion

When facing moral evaluation, many factors such as gender, age, education, political persuasion and culture (including religion) must be considered. However, the significance of morality is that it must be formulated as a set of human-friendly rules or principles, meaning that a set of consistent and universal standards should be considered and discussed, which is not actually simple. Traditional moral theories, including social contract theory and utilitarianism, hold that morality is derived from experience and that ensuring the happiness of individuals is its purpose, but learning lessons is an endless task that fails to provide the required universal validity. Deontology (such as Kantian philosophy) is based on premises (including accurately explaining freedom or how people use their reason correctly) and logic, and it can provide stable principles. However, determining whether our practical actions conform to these principles is difficult as they are always abstract. Although there are theoreticians devoting themselves to unify these two standards, but new questions are always accompanied with new ideas. All in all, it will be a long even endless journey and struggle for human beings to build a set of steady moral principles, but only through this way can make all exploration valuable.

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