ETHICAL THEORY

BASIC PHILOSOPHY
EGOISM AND MORAL SKEPTICISM

JAMES RACHELS
TYPES

Psychological egoism: all humans are selfish in everything they do...the only motive from which anyone acts is self-interest

Ethical egoism: humans have no obligations to anything except what is in their own interest, humans ought to act in their own interest, and people are always justified in acting in their own interests, regardless on the effects on others
VIDEO-PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCHu1E0ca4E
REBUTTAL TO PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM

• This argument rests on the premise that people never voluntarily do anything except what they want to do.
• People only act as a means to an end.
• One may make a promise, and not want to keep it [e.g. help out with chores at home], and therefore acts in a way that one does not want to.
• However, the desire to keep promises is the end.
ETHICAL EGOISM

There is no reason why a person should act in the interest of others
I only need to think about myself
It is my advantage to live in a society in which people’s rights are respected, e.g. not yelling “fire” in a crowded theater, not stealing...

Ethical egoism is not logically consistent because the egoists live selfishly, but must encourage others to live unselfishly, or else her plans for happiness are defeated.

The principle of ethical egoism cannot be universalized.
GENUINE EGOISTS

Would have to say that they have no vested interest or care in friends, family or others

s/he would have no sympathy or empathy

This inherent truth makes the doctrine disturbing to James Rachels
THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

Also known as “the greatest happiness principle”

Happiness = pleasure

Hedonistic in nature

Actions are right [morally correct] in proportion as they tend to promote happiness

They are wrong if they produce unhappiness
THE GREATEST HAPPINESS PRINCIPLE

Is the ultimate end, with reference to all other things are desirable
It is as far as possible from pain and as rich as possible in enjoyments
It must take into account all individuals [animals inc.], and not just the agent, to determine if an action is ethical
The agent is objective
OBJECTIONS

Being a disinterested character/ objective observer is too high a standard for humans

People will not always act in the best interest of society [human pop. growth]

In each situation a person would have to determine all the costs and benefits
MORE OBJECTIONS

Humans are inherently flawed and selfish
The agent will want to make exceptions for her own case
The interest of two different people will come into conflict
There are other ends of human action besides happiness
THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE
[DEONTOLOGICAL]

Immanuel Kant
DUTY

If a person who hates their life, but nevertheless preserves it acts in conformity with duty, but not with the motive of duty The moral worth of an action does not depend on the result expected from it

The moral worth of an action does not depend on any principle or action that needs to borrow its motive from an expected result
I ought never to act except in a way that my maxim should become a universal law.

Hypothetical imperatives cannot be imagined without a condition given.

BUT categorical imperatives have known conditions.

A maxim gives us a subjective principle of actions and is not an objective principle, or practical law.
ILLUSTRATIONS

Duties of self and duties of other can be divided into perfect and imperfect categories.

A suicidal person wants to get rid of their life: what do they do? The idea that life should destroy life is a contradiction, and cannot be a system of nature.

This maxim cannot hold up.
THE END OF ITSELF

Actions must accord to the idea of certain laws

Humans exist as an end in themselves, and not merely a means

They must always be viewed as an end
CONCLUSION

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity [rational beings] whether in your own person, or in the person of any others, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.
DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

St. Thomas Aquinas
WHY WE NEED ABSOLUTES

Religion is necessary for morality because without God there could be no right or wrong.

God is to moral law what legislature to statutes.

Without God’s commands there would be no moral rules.

If morality is subjective, then we cannot criticize others, but if we say the Nazis were wrong, then we presuppose an objective standard of morality.
PROBLEMS?

If we accept divine command theory, then whatever God defines as good is good.

Today murder is wrong, tomorrow it is right; Today lying is wrong, tomorrow it is a virtue.

Therefore God is arbitrary.
ON THE OTHER HAND...

If we wish to argue that God is not arbitrary, then God has to appeal to a morality outside of her/himself; God discovers morality rather than inventing it.

This puts morality above God, or more absolute or real than God.

Aquinas: God cannot contradict his/her divine omnipotence.
OTHERS...CULTURAL

RELATIVISM

Some say we can never understand another culture except our own well enough to make judgments about it.

Moral judgments are only valid in the country or origin.

Most people think this is the most respectful way to approach other culture [and religions].

But: This is the root of moral isolationism.

And Cultures judge incoming cultures, as well as the incoming cultures judge the present ones.
BEHAVIORISM

• Comes from psychology
• Is the theory that human and animal behavior can be explained in terms of conditioning, without appeal to thoughts or feelings, and that psychological disorders are best treated by altering behavior patterns.
• Comes into conflict with “nature versus nurture” debates
FEMALE ETHICS

In a backlash to Victorian ideology, some constructed that women were indeed equal to men morally, and sometime even morally superior to men.

Female ethic included concern about the violent and destructive consequences to human life unlike patriarchal fields like war, politics, and capitalism that crush some to gain the upper hand.

But the female ethic is inseparable from the polarization of male and female, [essentialism] which has always led to the subordination of women.
THEORY OF JUSTICE

Humans must accept two basic principles: Equal basic liberties and the arrangement of social and economic inequalities.

These two would be accepted by rational humans in a hypothetical positions if they did not know any facts about themselves.

Of course no society can be a scheme of cooperation which is voluntarily entered into.

Each person is placed in a society due to their birth.

But the theory of justice would be close to perfect if executed correctly.
QUESTIONS

Which theories have the biggest flaws in them? The least flaws?
Are any theories ever perfect?
ETHICAL THEORY

CHRISTIAN
CHRISTIAN APPROACHES

Roman Catholicism, in which there is a tendency for reason (especially in the form of natural law) to be most prominent,

Among Protestant approaches, reason and Scripture are generally primary.
THE NATURAL LAW

St. Thomas Aquinas
PRESUPPOSITIONS

The world is a creation of a supremely rational being: God
God has made everything according to a divine plan
An eternal law governs everything
THREE NATURAL INCLINATION

To preserve human life
To survive [sex, food, fighting]
To do good
PRECEPTS

Good is a natural inclination
Natural law has been taught to all animals [food, sex, fighting]
Because humans are inclined to good, humans have a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society
OVERVIEW

Situational ethics puts a high premium on freedom from prefabricated decisions and prescriptive rules

The situational ethics approach to decision making is relative, or non-absolute and variant, or non-universal
LEGALISM

Legalism always emphasizes order and conformity while situational ethics puts a premium on freedom and responsibility.

The rightness is in the shape of the action as a whole, an not in any single phase or dimension of it.

Legalist says “do what is right and let the chips fall where they may”

Legalism claims a right, S.E. says your rights depend in the situation.
SITUATIONALISM

Was precipitated in Christian ethics by the reaction to legalism

Situational Christian ethics has a tactical formula for the strategy of love: the indicative, plus the imperative equals the normative [what is, plus the command equals what ought to be done]

Judgment / decision is responsibility in humility
EXAMPLES

Unmarried love is more ethical than married hatred
Lying can be more ethical than telling the truth
Stealing is better than respect for personal property
No action is intrinsically right or wrong: it depends on whether it hurts or helps people in the situation
IN SITUATIONS...

The question is not what should I do, but what should I do?
The situation list puts the onus of decision on the action-taker rather than prefabricated directives.
The only thing is love, or justice, or concern.
Sartre says humans are the same-facing a situation that changes-the choice is always a choice of the situation Responsibility.
VIRTUE ETHICS

Proposed by Aristotle; adopted by Catholic moral theologians
Equally between excess and deficit
The intermediary of two extremes
Excess and deficit are characteristics of vice
The mean of pleasure and pain is temperance
Some things are always wrong: adultery, theft, murder, envy, spite...you cannot cheat on your spouse with the “right” person It is no easy task to be good
PERSONALISM

Its essential, unifying perspective is that persons and personal relations are more basic for understanding reality than abstract ideas like being or nature.

It describes human persons as radically social beings who develop full potential only within human relationships.

It rejects the extreme body/soul dualism that exalts the spiritual at the expense of the somatic.
QUESTIONS

Does / should bioethics favor one theory over another?

Should any be thrown out all together?
VIDEO- ETHICS AND AUTONOMY

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvIYt7bTeH0
JEWISH ETHICAL THEORY
JUDAISM LIKE OTHER SYSTEMS

some of the moral norms of Judaism are identical to those of many other traditions—norms, for example, requiring aid to the needy and prohibiting murder and theft.

Jewish ethics uses many resources, as do other religions and secular systems, to know the good, teach it, and motivate people to do the good. In these ways, then, Jewish ethics is like other moral systems of thought and practice.
JUDAISM UNIQUE

The Jewish vision of the ideal person and society is a different picture from that in Christianity and most other religions and secular philosophies.

The use of Law as a motivational tool is also unique.
SIX MAJOR MORAL METHODOLOGIES OF JUDAISM

Stories
History
Maxims and theories
Theology
General moral values
Law
STORIES

1. *Stories*—the core Jewish story—the Exodus from Egypt, the revelation at Mount Sinai, and the trek to the Promised Land—loudly proclaims that we can and must work together with God to redeem ourselves and others from slavery of all sorts.
2. *History*. No nation that has gone through the exile and persecution endured by Jews can possibly have an idealistic picture of human beings.

3. *Maxims and theories*. The Book of Proverbs, the Mishnah
THEOLOGY/ GENERAL MORAL VALUES

4. Theology. All of Jewish morality is based, ultimately, on the biblical command that we should seek to be holy as God is holy; that moral action is commanded by God.

5. General moral values. The Torah announces some general moral values that should inform all our actions—justice, saving lives, caring for the needy, respect for parents and elders, honesty in business and in personal relations, truth telling, and education of children and adults.
LAW

Advantages:
  a bottom line
  translates moral goals into concrete rules
  helps us to decide among conflicting moral goal
  establishes and preserves the authority of moral norm
  preserves the coherence of a moral system
THE THREE FOLD STOOL

There are three sources of authority:
  Scripture, tradition, and reason.

Jewish approaches tend to give primacy to tradition, supplemented by reason, with Scripture foundational in principle but less directly appealed to.
Tradition is privileged, and even claims that may seem to an outside observer to be motivated by reason and experience may well be ascribed to tradition. These include the Talmud and traditional sources of *halakhah* as providing the basis and framework for analysis of ethical concerns.
QUESTION

Which theory is the most appealing for bioethics? Is this different that say, business ethics?
ETHICAL THEORY BIBLIOGRAPHY

General
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