VALUE THEORY

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Intro Philosophy

1. Evaluative concepts

Concepts that involve evaluation, or application of standards. Examples include right, wrong, ought, good, bad, justice, fairness, virtue, beauty…

2. Evaluative stances

Different branches of value theory study different sorts of evaluations: evaluations from different "stances" or "points of view":

Ethics The study of moral evaluative concepts

Aesthetics The study of aesthetic evaluative concepts (such as beauty)

Political philosophy The study of evaluative concepts concerning societies (such as: what makes governments legitimate? must we obey them?)

3. Sub-branches of ethics

Normative ethics The study of conduct—how ought we to behave?

Axiology The study of goodness—what makes the world a better place?

Virtue theory The study of character traits, both good and bad

Meta-ethics The study of the status of ethical judgments (such as whether they are objectively correct)

Applied ethics The study of specific, concrete, real-world ethical issues (such as abortion, euthanasia, and animal rights)

4. Normative ethics

Normative ethics is about evaluating how we act. What is acceptable to do, what is wrong to do, and what is obligatory to do?

A simplistic theory:

The Golden Rule An action (done by any person, in any circumstances) is morally obligatory if and only if the person doing the action prefers to have other people do similar actions to her

A more realistic, and historically important, theory:

Utilitarianism An action is morally obligatory if and only if it would produce a better balance of pleasure over pain in the world than would any other alternate action

Some points in its favor:

- Pleasure seems intrinsically good; pain seems intrinsically bad

- Everyone's pleasure/pain counts equally

- "Rules" can be outweighed if enough pain is at stake

- Enables criticism of society's morality

An objection to utilitarianism: imagine a hospital administrator who has the option of killing an innocent janitor, harvesting his organs, and using them to save the lives of several dying patients.

1. If utilitarianism is true, then the administrator ought to kill the janitor

2. The administrator ought not to kill the janitor

3. Therefore, utilitarianism is not true