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William Frankena's Ethics: Study Guide

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Outline of Frankena's "Ethics"

Chapter One- Morality and Moral Philosophy

I. Socrates- an example of ethical thinking from the Crito

The moral principles that constrain Socrates to obey the laws of the state and take the penalty are three-fold:

a) that we ought never to harm anyone, b) that we ought to keep our promises, and c) that we ought to obey our parents and teachers.

The Apology contains an example of conflict of duties. In this case, he judges that his duty to God and to the true good of the state takes precedence. The duty to obey the state is for him a derivative rule resting on the above rules, which are more basic. The basis for any moral judgment is reason.

II. Nature of Ethics or Moral philosophy

It arises when we pass beyond the stage of direction by traditional, and even fully internalized rules, to the stage in which we think for ourselves in critical and general terms.

Three approaches:

- 1) Descriptive empirical- historical or scientific
- 2) Normative thinking
- 3) Critical, objective analysis or meta-ethics

III. Nature of Morality

Morality is social in its origins, sanctions, and functions. Its initial demands, at least, are external to the individual. In Freudian terms, morality is the function of a super-ego, while prudence is simply a function of the reality principle of the ego. Morality is like law on the one hand and convention or etiquette on the other.

Riesmann's stages of development (4): The tradition-directed, inner-directed, other-directed, and the autonomous individual or society.

IV. Factors in Morality

a) forms of judgment- ascription in terms of moral quality, obligation or responsibility. b) appropriate reasons for these judgments. c) general rules, principles, ideals and virtues. d) ways of feeling about these. e) certain sanctions or additional sources of motivation. f) point of view.

V. Kinds of moral judgment

Moral obligation and moral value; also judgments of non-moral value

Chapter Two- Egoistic and Deontological Theories

The question: how may or should we decide or determine what is morally right or what a certain agent morally ought to do in a certain situation?

I. Importance of Factual Knowledge and Conceptual Clarity

Two prevailing habits: our ready acquiescence in uncertainty and our complaisance in ignorance. Philosophers cannot try to fall back on casuistry- giving only specific examples of moral behavior.

II. Prevailing Rules as a Standard

Objections: a) the actual rules of a society are never very precise and may come into conflict with one another. b) they are generally literal, negative, and conservative- not affirmative, constructive, creative, or adaptive- to new situations. They vary from culture to culture. Furthermore, they may be unjust.

III. Teleological Theories

The ultimate criterion of what is right, obligatory, etc., is the nonmoral value that is brought into being—and the comparative balance of good over evil produced. Teleologists see that to depend on the moral value of whatever is promoted would be circular. Teleologists may be hedonists, but may also identify good with power, knowledge, self-realization, etc.

Deontology is antecedent rather than consequential in nature.

The varieties of teleology are distinguished by their objects: ethical egoism and ethical universalism (utilitarianism). The former is represented by Epicurus, Hobbes, and Nietzsche. Utilitarians may be hedonists like Mill and Bentham or nonehedonists like Moore and Rashdall.

IV. Deontological Theories

Act-deontologists maintain the basic judgments are all purely particular ones. General rules are derivative at best. This is the view of most existentialists.

Rule-deontologists hold to either fairly concrete rules or abstract ones. They insist that these rules are independent of utilitarian considerations and are basic, not inductively arrived at. Kant and Ross belong to this school.

V. Ethical Egoism

It is an ethical theory, not a pattern of action or trait of character. modesty may well become an ethical egoist if he considers himself "enlightened".

Ethical egoists may hold any kind of theory of what is

good and what is bad, or of what the welfare of the individual consists in.

Criticisms: a) One cannot will the egoistic maxim to be a universal law. While the theory may not be logically self-contradictory it does seem to involve one in a conflict of will. b) Further, it would be difficult to use as a basis for advice, a necessary component of morality- the same with judging. It advocates prudentialism as the whole story- but this is an amoral principle, it isn't disinterested.

VI. Psychological Egoism

It means that ego-satisfaction is the final aim of all activity. Butler critique: Some primary appetites such as sexual appetite may rebel against self-love, the only desire whose object is one's own good, according to Butler. We may perform acts of altruism because we wish to do so. Any satisfaction derived is consequent.

VII. Act-Deontological Theories

Another rather extreme reaction to the ethics of traditional rules, it offers no moral standard. The primary element is the "decision" as understood either by intuitionists or by existentialists..but there is no scientific evidence of an intuitive faculty- just the reverse.

Main argument pro: the uniqueness of each situation. But even if this is allowed, there are still grounds for comparison and generalization.

Two arguments con: (1) Rules are a practical necessity.

They are also needed in the process of moral education.

(2) Moral judgments are implicitly general. This latter is an argument against even the less extreme act theories. Moral and value judgments imply reasons, and reasons don't apply in particular cases only.

VIII. Rule-Deontological Theories

Immediately, some weaknesses become apparent. Rules generally admit exceptions and may come into conflict with each other. One way to skirt this difficulty is to say that they have built-in exceptions. Ross goes further, distinguishing actual duty and prima facie duty/or right. Every rule of actual duty has exceptions, but there may be exceptionless rules of prima facie duty. The main problem that remains is to establish criteria for such prima facie rules and how to resolve conflict between them on some hierarchical basis.

IX. Kant's Theory

A pure-rule deontologist can avoid this conflict if he adopts a monistic rule deontology. With Kant, it is the first form of the categorical imperative: Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will to be a universal law. Although necessary in Frnkena's view, the question is whether it is sufficient. He says in effect that when one acts voluntarily one always acts on a maxim or rule that can be formulated. One must be willing to universalize that rule. He uses the example of breaking promises, the universalizing of which would be self-defeating. But still, not all maxims which can

be so willed are duties. There is more to the moral point of view than being willing to universalize one's maxims. One may do so from the prudential point of view.

Chapter Three- Utilitarianism and Justice

I. Utilitarianism

One serious objection arises because of the difficulties in measuring and balancing goods and evils.

II. Act- Utilitarianism

In the extreme it is impracticable. Further, if two alternatives would produce an equal balance of good over evil there would be no way of choosing between them, although one may be more just. Worse still is when the just act is outweighed in utility by an unjust one.

III. Rule- Utilitarianism

The question here is which rule has the most utility. The rules that bring about the greatest general good must be universalized- i.e., everyone acting wholly or largely on rules of the always-acting type.

Justice is independent of utility, though. Mill retorts that justice is built into the principle of utility. But a combination of the two would mean giving up pure utilitarianism.

IV. A Tentative Theory (Mixed Deontology)

There are at least two basic and independent principles of morality: That of beneficence or utility and that of justice. Because of possible conflict, these two principles must be regarded as principles of prima facie, not actual, duty. Precedence may be a difficult question and a weak link in the theory.

V. Two Questions

Whether a principle of beneficence must be admitted and whether to regard it as an irreducible one. (1) It seems that we have a prima facie obligation to beneficence, at least. We don't need to admit such a duty, and it isn't true that justice implies beneficence. Right and justice aren't necessarily equivalent. (2) Bringing about the greatest balance of good over evil implies a prior principle- that of promoting good and preventing or avoid^{ing} doing harm or evil. Actually the principle of utility represents a compromise with the ideal- the principle of benevolence.

VI. Principle of Benevolence

All of our duties, even justice, presuppose benevolence though they do not all follow from it. It is the failure to recognize this principle that makes deontological systems so unsatisfactory..But it doesn't tell us how to distribute goods and evils- this is where the principle of justice comes in.

VII. Principle of Justice: Equality

The principle of benevolence is a necessary condition of all our prima facie duties, but a sufficient condition for only some of them. Distinction between distributive and retributive justice. The former is concerned with the comparative treatment of individuals. Sidgwick shows that we must act according to rules if we mean to be just. There are a number of other criteria that have been proposed: (1) The classical meritarian criterion of justice, (2) Egalitarian treatment of individuals, and (3) Treating individuals according to their abilities, needs, or both. We cannot use contribution or merit as our basic

criterion of justice as that would be circular-- we must adopt some non-meritarian concept of justice. Whether we should treat people in proportion to their needs and abilities depends on whether doing so helps or hinders them equally in the achievement of the good life. The basic standard of distributive justice is equality of treatment (not identicality). But men are equal only in the sense that they *prima facie* ought to be treated equally.

In addition to the guidelines provided by this discussion, all that is needed is good will, clarity of thought, and knowledge of the relevant facts to apply in problem solving.

VIII. Summary

Rules of actual duty follow from these principles only when one such principle applies; in other cases, one must make a decision in light of the facts and the principles of benevolence and justice.

IX. Ethics of Love (Agapism)