

What Should We Do?

by David Barnett

Metaphysics

Practical Ethics

Given how the world is,
should we:

Outlaw abortion?

Legalize pot?

Outlaw the death penalty?

Give money to UNICEF?

Cheat on the next exam?

Sneak food into theaters?

Become vegetarians?

Ethics

Theoretical Ethics

Necessarily,
we ought to ...

Epistemology

Metaethics

The metaphysics
and epistemology
of ethics:

Are there moral truths?

Are moral truths absolute or relative?

How can we know moral truths?

The five senses?

A special faculty of moral intuition?

Plato's Method of Conceptual
Analysis?

Theoretical Ethics

- Necessarily, we ought to ...
- Necessarily, an action is right if, and only if, ...

First Preliminary

- To whom does ethics apply?
- Moral agents vs. moral subjects
 - Something is a moral agent only if
 - i. it has free will
 - ii. it is rational.
 - Something is a moral subject if, and only if, its interests are morally relevant.

Second Preliminary: Philosophical analysis

- Analogy with scientific practice:
 1. Propose a generalization
 - All unsupported objects fall to the ground.
 2. Search for counterexamples
 - Unsupported Helium does not fall to the ground.
 3. Revise generalization
 - All unsupported objects heavier than air fall to the ground.
 4. Search for counterexamples

Philosophical Analysis

1. Propose a generalization
 - Necessarily, something is a bachelor if, and only if, it says things like, “Hey baby, watch me play basketball.”
2. Search for counterexamples
 - It’s possible for there to be (i) a bachelor who doesn’t say such things and (ii) something that says such things but which is not a bachelor.
3. Revise generalization
 - Necessarily, something is a bachelor if, and only if:
 1. it is a man
 2. it is unmarried
4. Search for counterexamples

What is moral rightness?

Proposal #1

Necessarily, something is a right action
if, and only if,
it is **legal**.

What is moral rightness?

Proposal #2

Necessarily, something is a right action
if, and only if,
the Bible says to do it.

What is moral rightness?

Proposal #3

Necessarily, something is a right action
if, and only if,
it is **normal**.

What is moral rightness?

Proposal #4

Necessarily, something is a right action
if, and only if,
it is **natural**.

The naturalistic fallacy

What's in common with
obvious examples of
actions that are
intuitively not right?

Gratuitous suffering.

What is moral rightness?

Proposal #5

Necessarily, something is a right action

if, and only if,

it **does not lead to gratuitous suffering.**

What is moral rightness?

Consequentialism

Necessarily, something is a right action
if, and only if,

it leads to the best consequences.

Consequentialism

What are the best consequences?

Utilitarianism

One consequence is a *better* than another
if, and only if,
it involves **greater net happiness** than the other.

Consequentialism

- Counterexamples?
 - Wandering loner
 - Relevant difference to trolley?

Deontology

Consequences are not the only factor in determining whether an action is right.

Deontology

- Social Contract Theory:
 - Necessarily, something is a right action
if, and only if,
it is dictated by our **social contract**.
- Hobbes: actual contract.
- Rawls: hypothetical contract.
 - Whatever contract would be agreed upon by purely selfish and rational thinkers who are ignorant of their positions in society.