

David Hume 1711-76

Q: What is utilitarianism ?

- answers question of what to do/admire or how to live in terms of maximizing utility or happiness.
- happiness measured in economic terms

Q: Why is stealing bad and giving charity good?

- Hume's answer: utility and analysis of facts is insufficient.

He rejects any model in which sense experience enables us to reason our way to such a conception. Instead, he argues that it arises purely as the result of **custom and habit**. So reason can neither assist nor oppose the process. Similarly, the **passions** are outside the sway of reason **ethics**

- study of the concepts involved in practical reasoning:

Q: What are some of these concepts?

- good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality, choice
- problem areas... "thou shalt not kill"

Q: How could one have a contradictory stance on something like this?

- cf. abortion, capital punishment, surgical strike, Islamic fatwa, suicide, vegetarianism
- all we can do is try to clarify the issues by
 1. critically examining some of the main systems of ethics
 2. considering how they might deal with a particular instance of killing

Teleological theories:

- characterized by assumption that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on its results or consequences
- Plato end of human action is the good
- Aristotle end is eudemonia (happiness, success, living by reason)

Q: What's the end for Hume?

- for Hume, end is pleasure, happiness--these are the criteria of morality
- ethical system is based on the idea of achieving some good state of affairs

Deontological theories:

- cf. Kant: claim that actions are right or wrong **'in themselves'** or that they are in accord with a law of some kind

Q: What kind of law?

- ethics based on the notion of a duty or what is right.

Hume wants to use experimental method, wants to deduce general maxims from a comparison of particular instances

16/ "Men are cured now...": experience is the only road to truth

Q: Kant starts examination of human nature by identifying two social virtues. What are they?

- benevolence and justice

Q: What is benevolence?

-benevolence natural philanthropy feeling for the happiness of humankind and a resentment of their misery

Q: How is this manifested?

-manifested in qualities such as mercy, sociability, generosity, etc.
-part of a person's merit lies in their utility to other people

Q: What is justice for Hume?

-possession of the goods or property which will ensure an individual's happiness

-(section II "anything which it is lawful for him, and for him alone to use")

-but, he points out that there could be no place for justice in extreme situations like...

- a. a golden age when mankind lacked for nothing and lived in harmony and tolerance (Rousseau, noble savage)
- b. a state of nature, characterized by want, ignorance and savagery (Hobbes)

-he concludes this point on p. 23: 23/ "Thus, the rules..."

Q: In section V he raises the question of why we approve of the social virtues on acct of their utility. He points out that individual and general interests are inextricable

43/ "Usefulness..."

so, public utility pleases, but, why? Why should that please the individual?

-his answer is to appeal to the notion of sympathy

Q: What is sympathy?

-(love, pity... mitleid... I love, therefore I am)

-sympathy arises directly from the capacity of putting ourselves, by means of our imagination, in the place of another person.

-a man cannot be indifferent to the happiness or misery of his fellow beings

-whatever promotes their happiness is good...what tends to their misery is evil

Q: In support of his view that reason can't be the sole source of morals he offers five considerations. What are they?

1. (p. 84-85)
 - reason can judge either matters of fact or relations.
 - but, in the case of certain crimes (ex. ingratitude) it is the sentiment that determines their immorality.
 - morality can't consist in the relation of actions to rules
2. distinction between:
 - a. speculative reasoning: we consider what is known and infer from it something which was previously unknown
 - b. moral deliberations: all the objects and their relations must be known so that we base our approbation or blame on the total situation
3. moral beauty can be compared with natural beauty: in both cases dis/approval arises from contemplation of the whole, and thru sentiments rather than intellectual faculties
4. if morality consisted merely in relations, it would apply as much to inanimate objects as it does to moral agents
5. ultimate ends of human actions can't be accounted for by reason

Reason is the slave of the passions

- So, for Hume, the bounds of reason and taste are easily ascertained
- 88/ "Reason,... taste...."
- reason gives us knowledge of truth, taste gives the sentiment of beauty.
- only taste can become a motive for action, in so far as it gives pleasure or pain and therefore happiness or misery