



Ethical theories Essay Writing

Lecture 2, MS008A



Today

- Ethical Theories – some main theories
- Essay writing – tips and tricks
- The Sage Code of Ethics – Your role as a System Administrator

[Ethical theories]

- The formal study of ethics goes back to the greek philosopher Socrates.
- Philosophers have proposed many ethical theories
- **Why study these theories?**
 - A useful ethical theory makes it possible for us to examine moral problems, reach conclusions through logical reasoning and defend the conclusions.

[Theories]

- Relativism
- Kantianism
- Utilitarianism

Theory 1: Relativism

- There are no universal moral norms of right and wrong
- Different people/groups of people can have opposite views of a moral problem – both can be right.
- Two kinds of relativism:
 - **Subjective relativism**
 - **Cultural relativism**

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

5

Subjective relativism: pro and con

- **Pro:**
 - Each person creates his/her own morality (example: views on abortion).
 - If morality is relative, we do not have to agree – for instance if abortion is right or wrong. Both sides are right.
- **Con:**
 - A line of defense for doing what you want to do: " Who are you to tell me what to do and what not to do?" Morality = doing what you want to do
 - No moral distinction between actions of different people – the Adolf Hitler/Mother Teresa example
 - Doing what you want as long as it does not hurt anybody: What does it mean to harm somebody? The question is NOT subjective
 - Tolerance is not the same as subjective relativism. Does being tolerant mean that you accept that others are intolerant, racist etc. Relativism = no universal rules. 'People ought to be tolerant' = a universal rule. Inconsistent.
 - Deciding what is right or wrong can be based on any means other than reason, for instance Tarot cards!

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

6

Cultural relativism

- Different views of right and wrong held by different societies
- The meaning of right and wrong rest with a society's moral guidelines
- Right and wrong varies in time and place
- Example: Circumcision of African women
 - Anthropologists have defended a culture's right to stick to tradition
- Cultural differences concerning truthfulness, stealing and cheating.
 - Example in the book about testifying to lower speed after a car accident. 90% of Norwegians would not, 10 % of Yugoslavians would not.

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

7

Cultural Relativism – pro

- Different social contexts demand different moral guidelines
- It is arrogant for one society to judge another – we have more technology than others, but we are not 'better', more intelligent, more moral etc.
- Morality is reflected in actual behaviour: 'Do as I say, do not do what I do' – but does this work?

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

8

Cultural relativism: cons

- Different views on right and wrong does not imply that there ought to be different views –
 - Example: How to solve the drought problem:
 - Aquaduct vs. Sacrifice to rain gods
- Societies share core values, therefore, they may exist a universal ethical theory – opposing cultural relativism. Examples of core values:
 - care for newborn,
 - not telling lies,
 - prohibition against murder.
- Moral guidelines are a result of tradition, not necessarily based on reason.

Theory 2: Kantianism

- Immanuel Kant (1724 -1804).
 - Immanuel Kant was born at Königsberg in East Prussia, 22 April, 1724; died there, 12 February, 1804.
 - There are two periods of Kant's literary activity. The first, the pre-critical period, extends from 1747 to 1781, the date of the epoch-making "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"; the second, the critical period, extends from 1781 to 1794.
- Good Will and the Categorical Imperative
- Peoples actions should be governed by **moral laws that are universal**
- Principles of morality **must be based on reason**
- Kantianism explains **why** an action is right or wrong, does not just state that it is so.

[Good will]

- The only thing that can be called **good** without qualification.
- Is not the same as good deeds, but good in itself.
- Intelligence and courage are good qualities, but can be used in harmful way: robbing banks, fraud etc.
- Focus is on **what we ought to do**, not **what we want to do** = dutifulness = acting in a certain way according to moral rules.

[The categorical Imperative]

- **First formulation:** Moral rules = universal laws. 'Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to become universal laws'.
- **Second formulation:** 'Act so that you always treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves, and never only as a means to an end.'
- Again: The Carla case. Now evaluated using *Kantianism*:
 - **First formulation:** Use the rule: I can claim credit for a report written by someone else. Reports would cease to be valid as indicators of knowledge if everyone followed this rule.
 - **Second formulation:** Carla is using her professor as means to an end.

[Theory 3: Utilitarianism]

- A philosophy that is in sharp contrast to Kantianism
- Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) (english philosophers)
- Two philosophies:
 - Act utilitarianism- an action is good if its overall effect is to produce more happiness than unhappiness
 - Rule utilitarianism – We ought to adopt those moral rules which if everyone follows them, lead to greater increase in total happiness
- Utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill:
<http://www.utilitarianism.com/mill1.htm>

[Principle of Utility]

- (Lat. utilis, useful).
'Utilitarianism is a modern form of the Hedonistic ethical theory which teaches that the end of human conduct is happiness, and that consequently the discriminating norm which distinguishes conduct into right and wrong is pleasure and pain.'

[Cont...]

- In the words of the philosopher **John Stuart Mill**:
 - [Utilitarianism is] ... 'the creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, utility or the greatest happiness principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure' (*Utilitarianism*, ii, 1863).

[Hume]

- The philosopher Hume did not see any religious source or sanction of morality in utilitarianism
- In his 'Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals (1751)' he carried out an extensive analysis of the various judgments which we pass upon our own character and conduct and on those of others
- From this study drew the conclusion that **virtue and personal merit consist in those qualities which are useful to ourselves and others.**

[Act Utilitarianism]

- Principles of Utility
- An action has nothing to do with the attitude behind the action
- Bentham: No motive is in itself a bad one. If motives are good or bad, it is because of their effects.

[Pros and cons of act Utilitarianism]

- Pro:
 - It focuses on happiness
 - It is down to earth – where to build a prison, where to treat drug-addicts- the metadon – programme (but: Not in my back yard)...
- Cob:
 - It is not practical- too much energy goen into every moral decision
 - Ignores our sense of duty
 - The problem of moral luck – the effect decides whether the action is moral or not

Rule Utilitarianism

- **Weaknesses** of Act Utilitarianism has led to **Rule Utilitarianism**
- Everyone should **follow rules** that lead to the **greatest increase in total happiness**
- Applies the principle of happiness to the effect of **moral rules**, act utilitarianism applies the principles to **individual actions**
- Focuses on **rules** like Kantianism:
 - Rules should be followed without exception
 - Rule utilitarianism looks at the consequences
 - Kantianism looks at the will motivating the action

Rule Utilitarianism - pros and cons

- **Pro:**
 - Simple calculation! General consequences on society by adopting a universal rule
 - Solves the problem of moral luck – the occasional atypical result does not affect the goodness of an action (the hospital scene – sending flowers is always a good action)
- **Con:**
 - We must use a single scale to evaluate completely different kinds of consequences – for instance building a new motorway: cost and benefit in money, vs divorce and people losing homes
 - Think of more cons!

Essay writing

More tips

How to write an essay - different approaches

1. **Traditional**
Beginning – middle – end
2. **Argumentative**
For instance: find an author you disagree with, contrast him/her point by point
3. **Compromise**
Thesis - anti-thesis – synthesis
argument – counter argument – balanced view

What is a good structure?

- It isn't enough to make sure that you have an introduction at the start, a conclusion at the end, and the other stuff in between.
- You need a solid **introduction**.
- The introduction may contain something about how you have interpreted the question, and it is often a good idea to state a thesis (an argument) which you are going to illustrate or explore in the body of the essay.

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HiO 2004

23

Continued....

- You may prefer to save the 'findings' of your exploration to the end, in which case you have to introduce the question carefully at the start.
- You need a tight, powerful **conclusion** *which is the logical consequence of everything that has gone before.*
- The good essay has developed a number of related strands which the conclusion ties together.

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HiO 2004

24

Two dull kinds of essay structure

- *The one that's not well enough organised:*
 1. Definition of the thing
 2. Some stuff about the thing
 3. Summary
- *The one that's too formulaic:*
 1. Introduction, saying that we will discuss the thing
 2. Three arguments in favour of the thing
 3. Three arguments against the thingSummary of the above

Rules of thumb for essay writing

- Answer the question.
- Use a clear, logical structure
- Give your own analysis, not a mere description.
- A fresh, original approach
- Clear, consistent references
- Base your essay on extensive relevant reading and research.
- Argue your case, with your own point of view.
- Show evidence of independent thought.
- Try to avoid formulas, clichés, and the obvious approaches.

[Organising your notes]

- You need to organise your material so that it flows from one area, sub-section or argument to the next in a logical order.
- Each part should build upon, or at least reasonably follow on from, the previous parts
- The argumentation should lead the reader to your conclusion
- **One good approach** is to look through your notes and identify a handful of **themes** within the discussion, and to structure your essay around consideration of those.
- You should order the analysis of each theme so that the essay builds up towards the conclusion.

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HiO 2004

27

[Analysis]

- **Describe** something before you give an **analysis** of it.
- Only include as much description as is needed for the analysis to make sense.
- Give a **clear, coherent** and **consistent analysis**, supported by **evidence**.
- Don't just repeat what books or papers say – write your own analysis
- Show your awareness of other people's analyses, with references.

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HiO 2004

28

Don't wander off the subject

- Answer the question, and only the question. And keep checking that you are remaining on track throughout the essay.
- If there's something interesting that you want to include, but which is of dubious relevance to the main argument or theme of the essay, put it in a *footnote*.

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

29

Sources

Use the Internet — but with care and discrimination.

Academic Journals	The Internet
Peer reviewed (proves accountability, reliability)	Reliable, if ending is .ac, .gov, .org (Careful with .com)
Review: a timely, thorough, meticulous process	Readable for lay people, popular, undemanding, fast produced information
Tone: different view points, balanced arguments	Extravagant, over-emphatic, sweeping, vague statements
Citations, references, bibliography	No back-up by published items, only what is "said"

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

30

[Plagiarism]

- Definition: 'Using others' ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information'
- Actions that are similar to plagiarism:
 - **Stealing**
 - **Fraud**
 - **Hiring someone to write your paper**
 - **Faking, imitating, replicating**

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

31

[Academic dishonesty]

- **Cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty:**
 - Willful and intentional fraud and deception for the purpose of improving a grade or obtaining course credit
 - **Remember:** As a student you have the full responsibility for the content and integrity of all academic work submitted

Kirsten Ribu - Siri Fagernes - HIO 2004

32

[Don't cheat]

- Plagiarism – using other people's words and ideas without acknowledging where you got them from – is regarded as **an enormous sin**
- Make sure that you have got perfect references!

[How to avoid plagiarism]

- **Footnotes, references, and bibliographies**
- **Quotations** : direct words of the original author, use quotation marks
- **Paraphrase, summarise**: stating someone else's ideas in your own words

[Sources]

- ESSAY- WRITING - THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE - by David Gauntlett (1998, revised 2000, 2001).
- University of Leeds: Institute of Communication studies
<http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/> - Study materials

[Discussions and excercises]

- Discussion in class:
 - Page 88: Excercises 26, 27,29.
- Essay: Page 89: Excercise 35.
- Requirements:
 - Sources – Find out about Plato and 'The Republic' – use it as background material.
 - Use ethical theory. Show that you understand how you are arguing your case.
 - Good structure.
- Deadline: Monday 20th of September

[Next week]

- More on writing