

Morality and Voluntaryism



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Morality is an idea that can be confusing. To some, morality is whatever their god says it is. To others, morality is what each person decides it is for themselves. And to still others, morality is a tool used by some to force their values onto others. But what if morality isn’t any of these things? What if morality means something concrete, something objective? And if it does, what does it have to do with voluntaryism?

Etymology

I think for the sake of clarity we should disregard colloquialism in favor of etymology. What do the roots of the word “morality” tell us it means? The root of morality is the Latin *moralis*, which means “the proper behavior of a person in society.” Each of these words have concrete, albeit sometimes relative, meaning. Let’s examine each, beginning with the biggest in scope.

Society

Society is “community; fraternity”, and you can’t have either without several individuals. I see no reason why we can’t use “society” when referring to non-human individuals, but since we are human, we’ll just look at human society. Community is “friendly intercourse; affability”, and fraternity is “body of [humans] associated by common interest”. It seems to follow that society only exists where individuals are being friendly, affable, and cooperative with one another. Where this is not the case, society is either breaking down or non-existent.

Person

A person is an individual human, and what every human has in common is the desire to remove a feeling of uneasiness about their current state in the world. And so they act; they purposefully utilize means over a period of time in order to achieve their desired ends. A person, then, is an individual of actions, which actions are behavior, and which behaviors

are either proper or improper for the maintenance of society.

Proper Behavior

The way in which people utilize means to achieve their desired ends matters in a world of scarcity. Two people can't utilize the same resources at the same time. How we settle a dispute of this nature will directly affect the society (community, fraternity) between not only us, but also everyone else if our behavior becomes habitual. What behaviors are proper or improper is determined by whether they contribute to building or destroying society, and all that society implies.

Morality

Considering all the above, we can say, objectively, what is moral and what is immoral as it concerns individual behavior relative to others. Some behaviors are more obviously immoral than others. Murder, battery, rape, slavery, theft, are all immoral behaviors or practices. Ethics, the "science of morals", is the discipline that we study and develop in order to make these determinations. What does this have to do with voluntarism?

Voluntarism

Voluntarism is based on the voluntary principle, which states that "all human relations should happen voluntarily, or not at all." The key to understanding the voluntary principle is in understanding that "should" there in the middle. "Should" implies obligation, so to what are we obligated to relate voluntarily with other humans? There are several answers to that question, all of which depend on the desired ends of acting individuals. For two examples, ethics informs us that if we desire peace in society, and economics informs us that if we desire prosperity in society, we should observe the voluntary principle.

Final Thoughts

What seems obvious from the above is that morality is largely if not entirely determined by the consequences of certain behaviors by individuals. In which case, morality is necessarily consequentialist. That's okay with me. And why not? I'd love to hear your thoughts. In any case, if morality is "the proper behavior of a person in society", then we can reason over it objectively without resorting to subjective preferences, and thereby deflecting claims of engaging in "moralizing".

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