Chapter 1 : The Moral Problem of Predation | Jeff McMahan - racedaydvl.com

"The Moral Problem's ability to combine originality and subject overview are two factors that render this book an essential text for anyone enrolled on an intermediate level moral philosophy course and above. With a certain level of guidance, the book's powerful clarity and explanatory style could also.

Get Full Essay Get access to this section to get all help you need with your essay and educational issues. Get Access The Moral Problem: Right and Wrong Essay Sample With regards the view of morality and its problems, Immanuel Kant and David Hume present two contrasting ideologies on morality and ethics. Kant focuses on the use of reason and its imposition on human will. Reason produces actions that influence morals. For Hume, however, the rules of morality are not derived from reason. Instead, man is bound to his duties and morals can produce or prevent actions. These two contrasting viewpoints with regards to moral laws and human action will enable a synthesis of these two ideas in order to ascertain if moral laws are based objectively and its relation to a societal structure. In the crude sense, society is at first based on a simple set of rules to guide behavior. To break such rules corresponds to a certain punishment. This, in a sense, is not an ethically or morally wrong behavior but merely a wrong act that breaks a certain rule. Morality and ethics have developed as another different perspective in the human consciousness, turning to another circle of perspective. Morals are the personal perspective of the individual on certain issues while ethics are applied morals in a given societal structure. In turn, ethics become code of moral laws that is generally accepted and followed in an organization or group. However, there are instances in the human condition when morals and ethics clash because of difference or unaligned interests with regards to certain phenomenological events. These clashes are important in analyzing and applying critique in the different instances of these events. In discussing the essence of morals and how it affects society, two Enlightenment philosophers give the definition and origin of morals and ethics and how they are formed through the development of human contact. Thinking Categorically Kantian doctrines dictate that obligation begins with purpose. However, the problem lies with the notion of happiness; it is not in the capability of human to achieve this. Happiness is only a matter of luck. True happiness is beyond personal gratification and pleasure, which are only finite and can never be the definition of real happiness. This coincides with the relation of duty obligation and the motive it acts upon morals. For ethics to work, it must be unconditional and universally accepted so as to act as a standard set of rules that is to be followed by the whole. Systemic knowledge in reason can only be fulfilled through assumptions that factual or empirical evidence cannot support. The metaphysical is about the totality on the nature of things and this nature must remain questioned because of our subjective constraints in sensing. If we are to assume these truths, empiricism cannot alone guarantee results because we are apt to follow moral laws that govern every human being in terms of individual actions Ellington, As an individual, man is to favor the self first before finding concern for others. What is important as an individual is to satisfy personal wants and needs first before pressing on with other issues. However, the problem lies with the individual in a given society. Man cannot exist entirely for himself, and this individualistic trait presses on in a communal society. This entails man, as a reasonable social animal, to naturally harmonize with fellow men as a means of ensuring survival of his kind. In the process of cooperation, he creates a beneficial relation for every being. This is the most basic precept of man within society; moral laws are not yet present in these contexts. Morals and ethics come from repetitive behavior of human beings in a given situational context. These actions are not merely whims or impractical responses. These actions are codified with their behavior and universally accepted in a specific context. However, Kant argues that a moral law can only be effective if it is to be considered as a universal truth and accepted by society as a whole, not specifically. Kant further argues that morality is not based on the outcome of the action, but rather it is through the motive that morality is based upon. Reason differentiates us from other beings. Man, according to Kant, is subject to the dictates of reason. Man is sensible and intellectual and therefore does not base judgments on natural impulse or irrational response. Rather, we base actions from reason that in turn form rules of conduct and principles that state how we ought to act when it comes to the burden of choice. Reason also brought forth the use of empirical

knowledge in deriving certain truths. A thing, to be considered true, must be subject to the sense test—that it can be seen, smelled, touched, and heard. Empiricism eventually led to the development of science where this method is generally employed in the scientific method. In order to ascertain truths, there must be enough evidence to support it. However, the problem of the empirical methodology is subjected to critique. According to Kant, when we are to use this method of sensory thinking and subjecting it to empiricism, it still implies that we are thinking categorically, that it is only a subjective opinion on the subject rather than a clear representation of the whole. Bias limits the objective analysis of the human state. Hume attempts to explain ethics in a natural point of view to elucidate aspects of human nature; not just of the material world that the being interacts but also to explain moral judgments and the formation of religious belief. According to Hume, morality is more of an existing natural phenomenon than a normal theory. Moral judgments are merely expressions of sentiment. The understanding of good and evil can be felt through certain emotions; the elation of approval or the unwanted feeling of disapproval. These emotions can be felt from the self or through other unbiased perspectives. Those feelings that elicit disapproval that causes harm for oneself or others are called vices, while those that benefit or contradict the former are called virtues. Hume argues that everybody has similar moral feelings and point of views that at some point, there is synthesis on what human beings accept as virtues and vices. Hume states it is certain that an action, on many occasions, may give rise to false conclusions in others Hume, Practical virtues temperance, beneficence are those that can be used in an individual or a specified point and view and the artificial virtues justice, fidelity are mainly used in issues in order to propagate social unity and cooperation. Human consciousness remains subjective since individuality is focused on the self rather than on an attached or connected view of different persons. In natural law, action is based according to laws. Only a rational being will base action according to the interpretation of laws. But as Hume argues, reason cannot entirely support the laws of morality since reason differentiates between truth and falsehood. Truth and falsehood consist of arguments that relate to the nature of ideas or to facts. Anything that cannot fall under such categories is incapable of being neither true nor false. Hence, it is not the object of reason Hume, For Hume, human act can be considered as laudable or blamable but cannot be reasonable or unreasonable. The former are entirely different from the latter and the contradiction of these actions form natural responses. Reason has no influence on moral distinctions unless it is used to induce passion in order to determine connections between the cause and effect of an act. But an act based on passion is considered unreliable for it removes reason itself from the act. The synthesis that lies between these two modes of thinking is human action is the basis for the cause of reason; not reason alone. The Enlightenment used reason as a forefront in identifying the universality of things in every aspect. A truth can only be considered a truth if it is verified by the processes of empiricism. However, moral laws are subjective conditions of human act and empiricism cannot entirely derive truths from such a metaphysical act. Morality or human act, in a sense, cannot be subjected to the laws of sense observation. The analysis of a phenomenological human event cannot be put under the scrutiny of the scientific method since human act is based on individual whim. What it can generalize upon is the totality of societal act and not of the individual. However, both philosophies attempt to put these cumulative phenomenological events under the treaties of empiricism. Emotion Versus Reason Man is a subjective animal, as such subjectivity compared to rational act, is completely erroneous. Ethics are based on moral norms in society and how it affects the individual as a whole. Reason-based ethics are no different from emotionally-based ethics. In relation to aforementioned topics, human action is the basis of deriving moral truths. Reason, cannot entirely cause action, although reason may cause passion in acts. This is the use of reason in formulating morals and eventually forming ethics. Emotionally-based ethics are bound to change often because of subjectivity. As moral formation also coincides with human experience, then emotion based on experiences are bound to influence personal ethics by altering definitive parameters of the human consciousness. If experience is to present new lessons in everyday activities, then ethical standards can be altered in order to satisfy the daily offerings of experience. The problem with emotional ethics is that it is not totally grounded by reason unless substantiated. Emotion corresponds with the different characteristics of the human psyche, thus rendering ethics based on emotions to be completely biased and sometimes irrelevant. It is irrelevant in the sense that emotions are groundless assumptions to base ethical norms, especially in society. In

relation to the ideologies brought about by Kant and Hume, human act is the basis of the formation of morals and ethics. Morality in the Industry Ethics are developed through a series of constant behavior of human act and generally become more of a norm rather than an accepted truth. These in turn contribute to the formation of norms in a given society while ethics and morals come second and third respectively. A behavior formed from mass consciousness delimits individual freedom and constitutes a mass-reliant behavior in terms of action. Norms become the definition of action; to stave off from such norms entails alienation with the self and society. In our culture today, everything revolves on the idealism of generating profit and capitalization. Freedom is not a requirement for a mass-produced idea of consciousness as long as it serves its purpose of generating profit. In turn, the industry, which supplies these standardized ideas, sells these ideas to become mass idealisms. These create another perspective of thinking in terms of phenomenological human events. Morals and ethics are compromised since freedom is not an ideal espoused by a capitalistic view of society.

The Moral Problem [Michael Smith] on racedaydvl.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. This widely anticipated volume offers a systematic introduction to and striking analysis of the central issues animating current debate in moral philosophy.

Suppose that a judge or magistrate is faced with rioters demanding that a culprit be found for a certain crime and threatening otherwise to take their own bloody revenge on a particular section of the community. The real culprit being unknown, the judge sees himself as able to prevent the bloodshed only by framing some innocent person and having him executed. Beside this example is placed another in which a pilot whose airplane is about to crash is deciding whether to steer from a more to a less inhabited area. To make the parallel as close as possible it may rather be supposed that he is the driver of a runaway tram which he can only steer from one narrow track on to another; five men are working on one track and one man on the other; anyone on the track he enters is bound to be killed. According to classical utilitarianism, such a decision would be not only permissible, but, morally speaking, the better option the other option being no action at all. An opponent of action may also point to the incommensurability of human lives. Under some interpretations of moral obligation , simply being present in this situation and being able to influence its outcome constitutes an obligation to participate. If this is the case, then deciding to do nothing would be considered an immoral act if one values five lives more than one. Related problems[edit] Five variants of the trolley problem: The central question that these dilemmas bring to light is on whether or not it is right to actively inhibit the utility of an individual if doing so produces a greater utility for other individuals. The initial trolley problem also supports comparison to other, related, dilemmas: The Fat Man[edit] As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five people. You are on a bridge under which it will pass, and you can stop it by putting something very heavy in front of it. As it happens, there is a very fat man next to you â€" your only way to stop the trolley is to push him over the bridge and onto the track, killing him to save five. Resistance to this course of action seems strong; when asked, a majority of people will approve of pulling the switch to save a net of four lives, but will disapprove of pushing the fat man to save a net of four lives. One clear distinction is that in the first case, one does not intend harm towards anyone â€" harming the one is just a side effect of switching the trolley away from the five. However, in the second case, harming the one is an integral part of the plan to save the five. This is an argument which Shelly Kagan considers and ultimately rejects in his first book The Limits of Morality. This solution is essentially an application of the doctrine of double effect , which says that you may take action which has bad side effects, but deliberately intending harm even for good causes is wrong. Another distinction is that the first case is similar to a pilot in an airplane that has lost power and is about to crash into a heavily populated area. Even if the pilot knows for sure that innocent people will die if he redirects the plane to a less populated areaâ€"people who are "uninvolved"â€"he will actively turn the plane without hesitation. It may well be considered noble to sacrifice your own life to protect others, but morally or legally allowing murder of one innocent person to save five people may be insufficient justification. In this instance, pushing the villain to his death, especially to save five innocent people, seems not only morally justifiable but perhaps even imperative. The loop variant[edit] The claim that it is wrong to use the death of one to save five runs into a problem with variants like this: As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five people and you can divert it onto a secondary track. However, in this variant the secondary track later rejoins the main track, so diverting the trolley still leaves it on a track which leads to the five people. But, the person on the secondary track is a fat person who, when he is killed by the trolley, will stop it from continuing on to the five people. Should you flip the switch? The only physical difference here is the addition of an extra piece of track. This seems trivial since the trolley will never travel down it. The rejoining variant may not be fatal to the "using a person as a means" argument. This has been suggested by Michael J. Costa in his article "Another Trip on the Trolley", where he points out that if we fail to act in this scenario we will effectively be allowing the five to become a means to save the one. If we do nothing, then the impact of the trolley into the five will slow it down and prevent it from circling around and killing the one. This approach

requires that we downplay the moral difference between doing and allowing. Transplant[edit] Here is an alternative case, due to Judith Jarvis Thomson , [3] containing similar numbers and results, but without a trolley: A brilliant transplant surgeon has five patients, each in need of a different organ, each of whom will die without that organ. Unfortunately, there are no organs available to perform any of these five transplant operations. A healthy young traveler, just passing through the city the doctor works in, comes in for a routine checkup. In the course of doing the checkup, the doctor discovers that his organs are compatible with all five of his dying patients. Suppose further that if the young man were to disappear, no one would suspect the doctor. Do you support the morality of the doctor to kill that tourist and provide his healthy organs to those five dying persons and save their lives? The man in the yard[edit] Unger argues extensively against traditional non-utilitarian responses to trolley problems. This is one of his examples: As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five people. You can divert its path by colliding another trolley into it, but if you do, both will be derailed and go down a hill, and into a yard where a man is sleeping in a hammock. He would be killed. Unger therefore argues that different responses to these sorts of problems are based more on psychology than ethics â€" in this new case, he says, the only important difference is that the man in the yard does not seem particularly "involved". Unger claims that people therefore believe the man is not "fair game", but says that this lack of involvement in the scenario cannot make a moral difference. Unger also considers cases which are more complex than the original trolley problem, involving more than just two results. On these grounds, they advocate for the dual-process account of moral decision-making. Since then, numerous other studies have employed trolley problems to study moral judgment, investigating topics like the role and influence of stress, [15] emotional state, [16] impression management, [17] levels of anonymity, [18] different types of brain damage, [19] physiological arousal, [20] different neurotransmitters, [21] and genetic factors [22] on responses to trolley dilemmas. Analysis of the data collected through Moral Machine showed broad differences in relative preferences among different countries [32]. Other approaches make use of virtual reality to assess human behavior in experimental settings. In popular culture[edit] In an urban legend that has existed since at least the mids, the decision is described as having been made in real life by a drawbridge keeper who was forced to choose between sacrificing a passenger train and his own four-year-old son. If a decision is not made within a certain period of time, the king announces that the player has five seconds to make up their mind, "or they all die. Robinson of Current Affairs go even further and assert that the thought experiment is not only useless but downright detrimental to human psychology. The authors are opining that to make cold calculations about hypothetical situations in which every alternative will result in one or more gruesome deaths is to encourage a type of thinking that is devoid of human empathy and assumes a mandate to decide who lives or dies. They also question the premise of the scenario.

Chapter 3 : Michael A. Smith - Wikipedia

This is a very clear and carefully argued book on meta ethics. If you're studying and writing meta ethics papers you'll find the first one or two chapters a very helpful survey of the literature and its contours.

This depiction aims to capture features of our common experience. If an individual judges it right to keep a promise rather than to aid a stranger in need, she will ordinarily feel moved, at least to some degree, to act so as to fulfill the promise. If she comes to change her mind about the priority of her promise, she will ordinarily no longer be moved to keep the promise and will be moved instead to provide aid. Before we turn to the many questions which the foregoing depiction leaves open, and which lie at the heart of debates about the nature of moral motivation, we should make note of two important points. First, the depiction says nothing about the strength of moral motivation. For all that it tells us, the motivation all or some people feel to do what they judge right might be extraordinarily weak. Common experience suggests that moral motivation in fact tends to be fairly robust, but with one qualification to be noted later, philosophical views about moral motivation generally follow the depiction in taking no position regarding the exact strength of moral motivation. Second, the depiction reflects a widely shared assumption, one which forms part of the backdrop for debates about the nature of moral motivation, namely, that moral motivation is a strikingly regular and reliable phenomenon. Throughout social life, in both our personal relations and our public interactions, we take it for granted that moral judgments dependably, if not unfailingly, motivate, that they effectively influence and guide how people feel and act. Still, the assumption is not wholly uncontroversial; indeed, some have expressed serious doubts regarding whether moral motivation is as regular and reliable as we commonly suppose Copp , The basic phenomenon of moral motivation seems relatively straightforward. The difficult philosophical task becomes one of attempting to understand and explain more fully and precisely the nature of moral motivation. Sections 2 and 3 explore two approaches to the task. While the approach discussed in section 3 has been predominant, the approach to be considered briefly in section 2 provides an instructive contrast, as well as a useful first glimpse of how ideas about moral motivation have been thought to bear on broader metaethical questions. Section 4 explores more general considerations about moral motivation and metaethics, while section 5 considers alleged implications for philosophical theories about moral motivation from recent work in empirical psychology. Moral Motivation and the Nature of Moral Properties When we judge that an action is right or wrong or that a state of affairs is good or bad, we seem to represent the world as being a certain way. We seem to express a moral belief, attributing a particular moral property or normative characteristic to the action or state of affairs. Taking the apparent representational form of moral judgments as our lead, we might try to explain moral motivation by appealing to the nature of the properties that figure in our moral judgments. Perhaps we are reliably motivated by our moral judgments, at least when those judgments are roughly correct, because moral properties like rightness and goodness themselves motivate us, when we apprehend them. Mackie famously criticizes this picture of moral properties in his extended argument against the objectivity of ethics. Mackie claims to find something like it in the work of a number of historical figures, including Kant and Sidgwick, but his clearest presentation of the picture comes in his remarks about Plato. They are a very central structural element in the fabric of the world. The philosopher-kings in the Republic can, Plato thinks, be trusted with unchecked power because their education will have given them knowledge of the Forms. Apprehension of these properties move an agent to act, and to do so unaided by any additional source of motivation; their motivational power depends on no desire or disposition of the individual herself. Second, apprehension of moral properties not only motivates on its own: Once an agent does apprehends them, their motivating power overcomes any opposing desires or inclinations. According to existence internalism, a necessary connection exists between having a certain normative status and motivation. Consider a view about reasons associated most prominently with Bernard Williams According to what is called internalism about reasons or reasons internalism, necessarily, if an individual has a reason to do an action, he must be able to be motivated to do that action. According to Mackie, the motivating power of objective values, if there were such values, would have to be just as Plato depicted it. So moral cognitivismâ€"the view that moral judgments and

beliefs, and the sentences that express them, can be true or false€"provides the correct account of moral semantics, of what our moral judgments mean. Given that our moral discourse is cognitivist, it would seem to presume the correctness of moral realism, the view, roughly, that moral judgments and beliefs are truth evaluable, and some of them are literally true. Talk about morality is, Mackie evidently thinks, rather like talk about unicorns. But there are no such creatures, and so our unicorn talk is systematically in error, though few of us any longer succumb to the error. In denying the existence of moral properties, Mackie rejects moral realism, combining a cognitivist moral semantics with an error theory. And most have rejected efforts to explain moral motivation by appealing to a motivating power emanating from moral properties and the acts and states of affairs that instantiate them. One partial exception to this last claim may be worth noting. Christine Korsgaard has endorsed the idea of something like objectively prescriptive entities, though these entities are not, in her view, moral properties. Whether or not there are any properties or entities with anything like the powers Mackie describes, it is a mistake to suppose that moral realists and objectivists must be committed to their existence. No realist or objectivist need think that moral properties, or facts about their instantiation, will, when apprehended, be sufficient to motivate all persons regardless of their circumstances, including their cognitive and motivational makeup. An individual might grasp a moral fact, for example, but suffer from temporary irrationality or weakness of will; she might be free of such temporary defects but possess a more indelible motivational makeup that impedes or defeats the motivating power of moral facts. Any plausible account of moral motivation will, and must, acknowledge these sources of motivational failure; and any plausible analysis of moral properties must allow for them. Even those realists or objectivists who maintain that all rational and motivationally unimpaired persons will be moved by moral facts need not think they will be overridingly indefeasibly motivated. As already noted, regardless of their views with respect to broader metaethical questions, contemporary philosophers do not take any position on the precise strength of moral motivation€"with the qualification alluded to earlier that they reject, apparently universally, the idea that moral motivation is ordinarily overriding. Moral Judgment and Motivation Philosophers have most often attempted to explain moral motivation not by appealing to the special powers of moral properties but by appealing to the nature of moral judgments. Perhaps moral judgments are such that no person could sincerely judge an act morally right or a state of affairs good, while remaining wholly unmoved. Efforts to understand moral motivation in terms of motivation by moral judgments must confront two central questions. First, what is the nature of the connection between moral judgment and motivation€"do moral judgments motivate necessarily or do they motivate only contingently? Second, can moral judgments motivate on their own or can they motivate only by the intermediation of a desire or other conative state? Of course, philosophers have answered these questions in varying ways. Now one way in which moral judgments could motivate, and, indeed, motivate on their own, would be if moral judgments were not representational after all. Suppose moral judgments did not ascribe properties and express moral beliefs about what things have those properties. They simply express a motivating state that the individual already has; to make a sincere moral judgment is already to be motivated, at least to some degree. The real puzzle as to how moral judgments can motivate arises for those who maintain that moral judgments express moral beliefs, for the connection between belief, a cognitive state, and motivation is uncertain. How philosophers resolve the puzzle turns on a central issue in moral psychology, namely, whether what is called the Humean theory of motivation is true. According to the Humean view, belief is insufficient for motivation, which always requires, in addition to belief, the presence of a desire or conative state. Moral motivation thus cannot arise from moral belief alone but must depend as well upon a preexisting desire or other conative or intrinsically motivating state. It would perhaps be fair to say that Humeanism continues to be the dominant view. It has been held both by some who accept and by some who reject cognitivism and moral realism, so it has not alone been considered decisive in settling broader issues in metaethics. The view has been held by noncognitivist anti-realists, for example, but also by moral realists like Michael Smith and Peter Railton a. A number of prominent philosophers, including Thomas Nagel , John McDowell , Mark Platts , David McNaughton , Jonathan Dancy , Thomas Scanlon , and Russ Shafer-Landau , have rejected the Humean picture, however, arguing that, in fact, moral motivation does not depend on the existence of desire: Precisely how and under what conditions moral belief can itself motivate is

a matter of dispute among anti-Humeans. Some hold that moral belief is sufficient to motivate directly. Merely believing that it is right, say, to keep a promise will move the believer, at least to some degree, to act so as to keep the promise. Others hold that moral beliefs produce desires, which then motivate in conjunction with the moral beliefs that produced them. Believing that it is right to keep a promise produces a desire to do so, and these cognitive and conative states jointly move the believer, at least to some degree, to act so as to keep the promise. Certain virtue theorists offer a quite refined version of the latter idea, arguing that only a particular type of moral beliefâ€"one tied to an ideal or complete conception of a situation in light of a more expansive understanding of how to liveâ€"necessarily generates in an individual the motivation to do as a moral belief of that type indicates she ought Little ; McDowell The virtuous person has not mere moral beliefs but a complex of moral belief and outlook which will reliably move her to behave morally. Proponents of various anti-Humean views readily acknowledge that persons often fail to be moved and to act as they believe they ought. According to any of these views, however, a failure of motivation springs from a cognitive failure. As already noted, many have found the basic Humean picture most plausible. Before examining a few of the considerations thought to favor it, we should make note of the fact that Humeanism does not itself commit one to any particular view as to the sorts of desires responsible for moral motivation. A Humean might well take the view that no particular desire is implicated in moral motivation. On the contrary, varying desires may, when contingently present, move an individual to do what she judges she ought to do, including the desire to be well regarded by her neighbors, to advance her interests in some way, or to promote the welfare of those who matter to her. Appealing simply to some contingent desire or other may be inadequate, however, to explain the basic phenomenon of moral motivation. After all, what needs to be explained, many would argue, is not merely how we may, on occasion or even frequently, be motivated to do as we think we ought: That includes explaining why motivation reliably shifts so as to track changes in our moral beliefs. As we will see, those who accept the Humean picture have sometimes suggested that we look to quite particular desires or to deep features of human psychology to explain moral motivation. One argument in favor of the Humean picture alleges that if beliefs were sufficient to motivate, then we would expect people with the same beliefs to be motivated in the same way. In fact, however, whereas some people are motivated by their moral belief, say, that contributing to famine relief is a duty, to write a check to Oxfam, others feel no such inclination whatsoever. But anti-Humeans claim that they can explain away these differences by showing either that differential motivation is in fact due to other differences in belief or to motives that compete with and override the desires generated by moral beliefs Shafer-Landau , â€" A second argument in favor of Humeanism appeals to the view about reasons associated with Williams , briefly discussed earlier. Recall that according to internalism about reasons or reasons internalism, it is necessarily the case that if an individual has a reason to do an action, then he must be able to be motivated to do that action. On a more specific version of the view, an individual has a reason to do an action only if he has a desire to perform that action or to achieve some end that requires doing that action. If internalism about reasons is correct, then when an individual correctly judges himself to have a reason to perform an action, he must already have a preexisting desire. Anti-Humeans sometimes reject reasons internalism, as well as the Humean theory of motivation. But even allowing that reasons internalism is correct, they believe this second argument fails to undermine their position. For it seems possible that not all of our moral judgments involve the judgment correct or otherwise that we have a reason for action. An individual could, for example, judge that it would be right to fulfill a promise without judging that she has a reason to do anything. What might explain this? Perhaps, for instance, she fails to reflect on the connection between what it is right to do and what one has reason to do; or perhaps she mistakenly believes that truths about morally right action do not entail truths about what one has reason to do. They differ in such a way, it would seem, that belief states cannot entail desire states. Whereas beliefs aim to fit the world, desires aim to change the world. For a mental state to count as a belief, it must be at least somewhat responsive to evidence that bears on the truth or falsity of its propositional content; that the facts are contrary to a belief counts against it. In contrast, facts contrary to the propositional content of a desireâ€"the fact that the world is not currently as one wantsâ€"need not count against that desire. Precisely because desires aim not to answer to the world but to make the world answer to them to make the world fit their propositional contents or what the

desires are desires for , they may well persist even when the world refuses to cooperate. Assuming the foregoing claims about belief and desire are true, so the argument goes, at least some versions of anti-Humeanism would require what is incoherent, namely, mental states with incompatible directions of fit: But anti-Humeans would argue that their picture of moral motivation via moral belief need involve no incoherence. To see this, we need merely consider the possibility that a mental state could have opposing directions of fit so long as in exhibiting each direction of fit, the mental state was directed at different propositions:

Chapter 4 : The Moral Problem: Right and Wrong | Essay Example

The Moral Problem: Right and Wrong Essay Sample With regards the view of morality and its problems, Immanuel Kant and David Hume present two contrasting ideologies on morality and ethics. Kant focuses on the use of reason and its imposition on human will.

In this blog I present, in an informal way, core ideas in philosophy and their application to current events and everyday life. For critical thinking lessons and resources, please check out my free online course reasoningforthedigitalage. Before you go around raping and pillaging, lets take a look at what a naturalistic account of objective morality has to offer in terms of a response to the various problems that have emerged. Moral obligation is justified in terms of reasons. Reasons for and against an action are at the bottom of all naturalistic moral realist theories So far so good How do you decide whose reasons are the true indicator of moral facts? I only care about mine. Ok, you reply, but suppose someone were to do the same to you, would that bother you? Of course it would. If I can only save one life: What about spending money to extend my life 1 year or spending that same money to extend the life of a stranger for 5 years? What about my personal interest in going to a concert and the interests of a starving child who could eat for 3 months off the ticket price? Is it morally wrong for me to preference my own possibly trivial interests in such a situation? The point is, reasons as a ground for naturalistic moral realism seem to only get us so far. As it stands, we have no clear account of how to weigh them against each other or how to reconcile competing reasons. But where do reasons come from? On some accounts reasons are a reflection of our motivations. We all have different motives for action but different motives will generate different reasons for action. I have no desire to X , does it mean that I have no reason to X? Since reasons underpin naturalistic morality, people having different reasons will imply different standards of wrong and right. This will undercut any hope at objectivity in morality. The only way out of this mess is to come up with a way to mediate between competing reasons Before proceeding, lets get one conceptual distinction out of the way: If I keep a lost wallet we can ask "why did you keep the wallet? It is often said that explanatory reasons are agent-relative reasons. A justifying reason, on the other hand, would be something like this: Rationality is a universal quality and humans all possess it to varying degrees. Therefore, we could, if acting rationally, all share the same reasons for action thereby giving rise to objective morality. So, to repeat, the first main problem for Smith is this: Objective moral facts can be known by appealing to reasons. What kind of reasons are we talking about to ground moral judgment? Motivational or justifying reasons? Clearly, we all have different motivations for doing things. Because of this problem, Smith defends a position called "reasons internalism". In other words, reasons internalism tries to show that knowing a moral fact justifying reason will necessarily play a role in motivating the right actions. What is naturalistic moral rightness? You find a wallet on the ground and want to know what to do. First imagine that you are perfectly rational and then imagine what you would want done in that particular circumstance. So, where does the objectivity come from? Lets work backwards for a second. How do we determine what to do? We appeal to reasons. Reasons come from agent-specific desires, beliefs, and motivations. Obviously, we differ enormously in these agent-specific respects The trick is to find a way to make everyone recognize and be motivated by the same reasons. The only way to do this is to find something that generates the same desires. Since rationality is universal, if in any particular situation we imagine ourselves as purely rational we will share the same motivations and desires because they arise from the same source. Those same motivations and desires across individuals will in turn generate the same reasons for action across individuals , which in turn will generate the same moral judgments about a particular moral situation. Now, how does this connect to the agent-relative vs justifying reasons issue? Knowing what a hypothetical fully rational agent would want to do creates in actual you a desire to do that thing. Added to our pre-reflective set of desires, we now have a new desire to do what a purely rational agent would do. This new desire will play a motivational role in how we act because we want to actualize desires. Why should we suppose that there is an overlap between what is rational and what is moral? Would our desires really be the same if we were all fully rational? Can desires be rational or is reason content-free? Is it true that knowing

what a fully rational agent would want to do cause me to want to do that too? I know how my sense of sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing work. If we can sense these properties, surely there must be an organ or faculty for it. Rightness is simply the qualities or properties we would want acts to have in circumstance C if we were fully rational. If you want to know what rightness is, think about what a fully rational being would want in a particular moral situation. Ok, maybe so, but rationality is naturally realized; that is, it emerges from the natural world. A rational creature is simply one with a certain psychology-type. And psychology is something that can be studied scientifically, so it is therefore, a natural quality. Rather than saying this moral disagreement is a consequence of people misperceiving objective moral truth, it make more sense to say moral rules are socially constructed and reflect cultural ways of life. If you removed all the distorting factors in people ethical reasoning cognitive biases, cultural prejudices, uncritically accepted beliefs, dogma, ideology, religion, disagreement over non-moral facts and engaged in rational discourse, everyone would eventually end up with the same moral conclusions. The empirical fact that moral arguments tend to illicit the agreement of our fellows gives us reason to believe that there will be a convergence in our desires under conditions of full rationality. And convergence on these truths requires convergence in the desires that fully rational creatures would have. But what about all the moral disagreement? Alongside massive disagreement we find entrenched agreement. For example, there is widespread agreement on thick moral concepts descriptive concepts that are also value-laden: Moral agreement is so extensive that normativity has been incorporated into naturalistic descriptive concepts. If we look at how these concepts are used across cultures we will find significant overlap not only in the behaviors they describe but also in the moral evaluation of those behaviors. Essentially, there is moral progress across and within cultures, and one reason for this is rational discourse. Current intractable disagreements can be explained away by absence of ideal conditions of reflection and discussion; i. Is it rational arguments that bring about change in moral attitudes or is it something else like emotions and the ability to empathize? If we did remove all the distorting influences, would there be a convergence of desires of fully rational people? Is the convergence claim falsifiable? He has a normative reason to gain wealth no matter what the cost to others. But a fully rational creature would not want this. He comes to this conclusion even thought the vast majority of others conclude the contrary. But the criminal is demonstrating intellectual arrogance. The criminal sticks to his opinion that he has reason to gain wealth no matter what the cost to other. From there we engage in rational dialogue and check our intuitions and arguments against those of others. If they differ, they we need to find some reason for which we should prefer ours Is this a satisfying reply?

In The Moral Problem Smith diagnoses a longstanding tension between the apparent objectivity and practicality of moral judgments. The idea of moral objectivity is that "it is a distinctive feature of engaging in moral practice that the participants are concerned to get the answers to moral questions right.".

What is a Moral Issue? A working definition of an issue of moral concern is presented as any issue with the potential to help or harm anyone, including oneself. Moral issues are those which involve a difference of belief and not a matter of preference. On this hypothesis, a moral dispute would involve a factual disagreement or a disagreement in belief where one or the other or neither belief is correct. It would not involve a disagreement in attitude or a disagreement in feeling. On this view, examples of a moral issue would include whether it is right that one speaks truthfully in a particular circumstance or whether one obeys the law in a particular circumstance, as these issues as the rightness or wrongness of the action are assumed to be factually determinable through empirical inquiry. On this hypothesis, a nonmoral issue would involve ceteris paribus issues of personal preference having no empirical consequences of benefit or harm such as which shoe one puts on first in the morning, whether or not one prefers to eat grapefruit for breakfast, or whether or not one prefers to listen to music after dinner c. Many nonmoral issues are factual. This distinction would not be sufficient distinguish between scientific and moral beliefs. For example, the question of whether it is right that the speed of light is always constant is a question of science [3] and is not an ethical issue. As well, the distinction would not be sufficient to distinguish some questions of convention, moral codes, or etiquette from ethical or moral beliefs. In setting a table, the proper side of the plate a fork is to be placed, is a convention and does not seem to be an ethical or moral issue. Moral issues are those which involve the experience of a special kind of feeling. This feeling is said to differ intuitively from other kinds of feelings such as religious or aesthetic feelings. On this hypothesis, such feelings can be those of satisfaction, shame, or guilt. Sociopaths or psychopaths have no such feelings. These terms are informal descriptors for â€¦ "Antisocial personality: A personality disorder characterized by a basic lack of socialization and by behavior patterns that bring the individual repeatedly into conflict with society. People with this disorder are incapable of significant loyalty to individuals, groups, or social values and are grossly selfish, callous, irresponsible, impulsive, and unable to feel guilt or to learn from experience. Frustration tolerance is low. Such individuals tend to blame others or to offer plausible rationalizations for their behavior. Other feelings experienced by some persons can be simply inappropriate. For example, feeling guilty for taking your fair share or feelings of inadequacy due to an inferiority complex, and so forth. Moral issues are those which involve the specific kind of situation where actions affect other people. On this view, essentially, whenever people interact, issues of moral concern would arise. By inference, then, there would be no matters of moral concern for persons such as Robinson Crusoe. Interestingly enough, the objection of self-regarding duties is one reason why the Golden Rule cannot be a universal principle of morality. Not all persons wish to treat themselves as we treat ourselves. Depending on ones lifestyle, one has specific duties to oneself. Just as different persons have some different duties to themselves so likewise not all persons would wish to be treated in the same manner. Moral issues are those actions which have the potential to help or harm others or ourselves. This is the definition we shall take as a working definition for this course. This working definition is a version of consequentialist ethics and has a number of objections which are discussed later in the course. Notice that if we have an issue of moral concern, it might involve something good or evil. Often, many people assume if an issue is of moral concern then it must an issue involving some wrong action. On this definition, very few human decisions or actions are not of some moral concern since very few, if any, decisions have no consequences helping or harming ourselves or others. On this view, only decisions with no possible consequences helping or harming would qualify as nonmoral actions. Decisions such as the latter are difficult to imagine. Thus, it may well be that any decision made and any action performed is of some ethical concern. Principles from the physical, biological, and social sciences can be used to determine the potential to help or harm â€" so, in a sense, our decisions would be only as prudent as our knowledge base. On this view, carelessness, unintentional, and inadvertent actions would

also be moral issues. The full explication of the view expressed here would be dependent upon a consistent theory of human action. Is an accident of moral concern? Accidents have causes, and if those causes are a result of a decisions, then it would follow that those accidents would be an issue of moral concern. However, it is virtually impossible to imagine all harmful consequences of an action which might affect other persons in some way, given that any action is always be done in situations where all factors cannot be known and controlled. Clarification on this distinction together with some exercises in making the distinction are provided here: Disagreements in Attitude and Belief with a self-scoring quiz on that topic. The difficulty with this view is that practically any matter of fact involving human action regardless of conscious choice would have consequences which have the potential to be ethically good or bad.

Chapter 6 : The Moral Problem | Ethics | General Philosophy | Subjects | Wiley

What is the Moral Problem? NORMATIVE ETHICS VS. META-ETHICS It is a common fact of everyday life that we appraise each others' behaviour and attitudes from.

All human action may be judged, with varying accuracy and relevance, in moral terms. The moral issue becomes pertinent when commands of the state to the individual represent a direct contradiction of what that individual has been taught to regard as right and good. The classic instance is the taking of human life. Once again we are reminded that no peace will be just and durable when it is not based on a foundation of universal human rights and international law, that is built on morality and ethical conduct. No moral code makes a senseless death morally justifiable, and sanity argues that the continued existence of humankind is a desirable goal. The force of international morality is given form by means of an international consensus. The global concern over human rights is a prime example. However, the basic rights of Palestinians are still denied. The world agreed that Palestinians are human beings with the right to life, liberty and security of person. The world believed that the process of liberation is irresistible and irreversible and that, in order to avoid serious crises, an end must be put to colonialism and all practices of segregation and discrimination associated therewith. The subjection of the Palestinians to Israeli subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation. Likewise, the world, formally recognised the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, their right to their property and to the income derived from their property. The world, through the United Nation, recognised that the continued displacement and dispossession of Palestinian refugees has arisen from the denial of their inalienable rights under the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and declared that full respect for the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine is an indispensable element in the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The distinguished American prosecutor at Nuremberg, Robert H. There have been no serious effort to apply these legal standards, despite the numerous occasions on which universal human principles have been flagrantly violated by Israel. The international community has failed to carry out their moral responsibity. The terrible events that take place in Palestine, involving the loss of lives of hundreds of Palestinian men, women and children, raise important issues concerning the legal responsibility of the political and military leaders of Israel. The world cannot overlook the extent to which Israeli participation in prior massacres directed against the Palestinian people creates a most disturbing pattern of a political struggle carried on by means of mass terror directed at civilians, including women, children and the aged. Many well-documented occurences of Israeli terror over the years have taken place. Israel is clearly responsible for grave violations of international law, and the political and military leaders involved in the undertaking are individually liable for their roles in aiding and abetting the perpetration of massacres, as well as for their failure to apprehend, or even to accuse or lay complaint against, those principally responsible for directing the massacre and those who committed these atrocities. Human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. This approach, adopted by the international community at the World Conference on Human Rights, applies also to peace. Strict adherence, de facto and de jure, to international human rights law and international humanitarian law is the prerequisite for creating trust and strengthening security in the wider sense. The Israeli occupation of Palestine is the root cause of human rights violations in the area. However, until such time as authoritative institutions enforce these rights and the world recognises that its morality will be judged on its fulfillment of its legal and moral obligations, morality will continue to be a limitation on state action, difficult to define but impossible to ignore.

Chapter 7 : The Moral Problem by Michael Andrew Smith

"The Moral Problem's ability to combine originality and subject overview are two factors that render this book an essential text for anyone enrolled on an intermediate level moral philosophy course and above. With a certain level of guidance, the book's powerful clarity and explanatory style could als.

Tweet Holmes knew that killing people was wrong, but he faced a dilemma. During its Atlantic crossing, The William Brown ran into trouble. In a tragedy that would repeat itself 70 years later during the fateful first voyage of The Titanic, the ship struck an iceberg off the coast of Canada. The crew and half the passengers managed to escape to a lifeboat. Once there, tragedy struck again. The lifeboat was too laden with people and started to sink. Something had to be done. The captain made a decision. The crew would have to throw some passengers overboard, leaving them to perish in the icy waters, but raising the level of the boat. It was the only way anyone was going to get out alive. Holmes followed these orders and was complicit in the deaths of 14 people. But the remaining passengers were saved. Holmes and his fellow crew were their saviours. Without doing what they did, everyone would have died. For his troubles, Holmes was eventually prosecuted for murder, but the jury refused to convict him for this. They reduced the conviction to one of manslaughter and Holmes only served six months in jail. I discuss this case every year with students. In the context, we would be hard pressed to have done differently. Indeed, many of my students think he should avoid all punishment for his actions. What we ought to do is dependent on what is happening around us. Sometimes our duties and obligations can change. This post is my first attempt to do so, examining one of the key arguments developed by Vallor over the opening chapters of the book. That argument comes in two parts. The first part claims that there is a particularly acute and important moral problem facing us in the modern age. The second part argues for a solution to this problem: Before I get into the details, a word of warning. What I am about to say is highly provisional. I am very conscious of the fact that the problems I raise with certain aspects of her argument might be addressed later in the book. So take what I am about to say with a hefty grain of salt. The Moral Problem of Accelerating Change We are living through a time of accelerating technological change. This is one of the central theses of futurists like Ray Kurzweil. In his infamous book The Singularity is Near , Kurzweil maps out the exponential improvements in various technologies, including computing speed, size and density of transistors, data storage and so on. Some of these improvements are definitely real: But Kurzweil and his fellow futurists take the idea much further, arguing that converging trends in artificial intelligence, biotech, and nanotech hold truly revolutionary potential for human society. Others are less optimistic, thinking that the singularity holds much darker promises. We all have a sense that things are changing pretty quickly. Jobs that were once stable and dependable sources of income have been automated or eliminated. Digital and smart technologies that were non-existent ten years ago are embedding themselves in our daily lives, turning us all into screen-obsessed zombies. This is to say nothing of the advances in other technologies, such as AI, 3-D printing and brain-computer interfaces. You might think that we can handle all this change â€" that although things are moving quickly they are not moving so quickly that we cannot keep up. But this assessment might be premature. A doubling of computer speed year-on-year is not that spectacular for the first few years, particularly if you start from a low baseline, but after ten or twenty years the changes become truly astronomical. If it covers half the pond on day 47 when does it cover the entire pond? One more day is enough to completely wipe out the pond. Accelerating change poses a significant moral challenge. We all seek moral guidance â€" even the committed moral relativists among us try to figure out what they ought to do. But noted in the introduction, moral guidance is often contextual. It depends, critically, on two variables: Once upon time, no one would have said that you had a moral obligation to vaccinate your children. But with the invention of vaccines for the leading childhood illnesses, as well as the copious volumes of evidence in support of their safety and efficacy, what was once unimaginable has become something close to a moral duty. Some people still resist vaccinations, of course, but they do so knowing that they are taking a moral risk: Consequently, there is a moral dimension to their choice that would have been historically unfathomable. Accelerating change ramps up the problem of moral contextuality. They may face challenges and have powers

that are beyond our ability to predict. This is something that most historical schools of moral thought did not envisage. The founders of the most enduring classical traditions of ethics â€" Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Confucius, the Buddha â€" had the luxury of assuming that the practical conditions under which they and their cohorts lived would be, if not wholly static, at least relatively stableâ€¦the safest bet for a moral sage of premodern times would be that he, his fellows, and their children would confront essentially similar moral opportunities and challenges over the course of their lives. Vallor , 6 All of this suggests that the following argument is worthy of our consideration: Support for premise 1 derives from the preceding discussion of moral contextuality. If what we ought to do depends on the context, we need to know something about that context in order to provide practical guidance. Support for premise 2 derives from the preceding discussion of accelerating change. I also think the argument as a whole is worthy of serious scrutiny. The question is whether there is any solution to the problem it identifies. The Failures of Abstract Normative Ethics One possible solution lies in abstract normative principles. Students of moral philosophy will no doubt be suspicious of premise 1. They will know that modern ethical theories â€" in particular the theories associated with Immanuel Kant and proponents of utilitarianism â€" offer a type of moral guidance that makes no appeal to the context in which a moral choice must be made. You ought to only act on a maxim of the will that you can, at the same time, will as a universal maxim. In other words, whenever you are about to do something ask yourself: Are my choices universalisable? If not, then you are taking special exceptions for yourself and not acting in a moral way. It should work whatever fate may throw your way. Consider also the basic principle of utilitarianism. Again, there are many formulations of utilitarianism, but they all involve something like this: This principle also floats free of context. No matter what circumstance you find yourself in, you should always aim to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. Vallor finds both of these solutions to the problem of accelerating change lacking. The issue is essentially the same for both. Although they may seem to be context-free, abstract moral principles, translating them from their abstract form into practical guidance requires far greater knowledge of moral context than initially seems to be the case. To know whether the rule you wish to follow is truly universalisable, you have be able to predict its consequences in multiple scenarios. But prediction of that sort is elusive in an era of rapid technological change. The same goes for figuring out how to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. This has been notoriously difficult for utilitarians given the complex causal relationships between acts and consequences. This was true even before the era of accelerating technological change. It will hardly be better in it. For what it is worth, I think Vallor is correct in this assessment. Although abstract moral principles might seem like a solution to the problem of accelerating change, they falter in practice. That said, I think there is some value to the abstraction. Having a general rule of thumb that can apply to all contexts can be a useful starting point. We are always going to find ourselves in new situations and new contexts, irrespective of changes to our technologies. In those contexts we will have to work with the moral resources we have. I may walk into a new context and not know what choice is universalisable or likely to maximise pleasure, but I can at least know what sorts of evidence I should seek out to inform my choice. The Virtue Ethical Solution Vallor favours a different solution to the problem of accelerating change. She argues that instead of finding solace in abstract moral principles, we should look to the great virtue ethical traditions of the past. These are the traditions associated with Aristotle, Confucius and the Buddha. These traditions emphasise moral character, not moral principles. The goal of moral education, according to these traditions, is to train people to develop virtuous character traits that will enable them to skilfully navigate the ethical challenges that life throws their way. Why is this a compelling solution to the problem of accelerating change? An analogy might help. As a university lecturer in the 21st century, I am very aware of the challenge of educating students for the future. The common view of higher education is that it is about conveying information.

Chapter 8 : Philosophical Disquisitions: The Moral Problem of Accelerating Change

Abduction: The best explanation of moral agreement in the world is our convergence upon a set of extremely unobvious a priori moral racedaydvl.com convergence on these truths requires convergence in the desires that fully rational creatures would have.

Yet beneath the foliage and concealed from the distant eye, a continuous massacre is occurring. Virtually everywhere that there is animal life, predators are stalking, chasing, capturing, killing, and devouring their prey. The means of killing are various: They have been lavishly fitted out with the instruments necessary for that purpose; their strongest instincts impel them to it, and many of them seem to have been constructed incapable of supporting themselves by any other food. If a tenth part of the pains which have been expended in finding benevolent adaptions in all nature, had been employed in collecting evidence to blacken the character of the Creator, what scope for comment would not have been found in the entire existence of the lower animals, divided, with scarcely an exception, into devourers and devoured, and a prey to a thousand ills from which they are denied the faculties necessary for protecting themselves! If we are not obliged to believe the animal creation to be the work of a demon, it is because we need not suppose it to have been made by a Being of infinite power. Penguin, , p. Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, , pp. Animals are assumed not to have free will and are thus incapable either of choosing evil or of deserving to suffer it. Neither are they assumed to have immortal souls; hence there can be no expectation that they will be compensated for their suffering in a celestial afterlife. There have certainly been important religious thinkers who have found fault with the arrangement whereby a large proportion of sensitive beings are able to survive only by feeding upon others, and some of these thinkers have entertained visions of a better order. The prophet Isaiah, for example, writing in the 8th century B. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. These are standards that most human beings, unlike other predators, could satisfy now with no sacrifice of health and little if any sacrifice of happiness; yet most persist in practicing forms of predation that are at once more refined and more dreadful than those of other predators. Instead of having to capture their prey and kill it with their hands and teeth, human predators tend to employ professionals to breed their prey in captivity, slaughter them, and prepare their bodies for consumption. And just as most human beings rarely observe acts of predation in the wild, so they do not witness the mass torment and killing that occurs in their mechanized farms and abattoirs, which is deliberately concealed, albeit with the collusion of those from whom it is concealed. A veil of propriety is maintained both to avoid putting people off their feed and to spare them the recognition that they too are predators, red in tooth even if not in claw though curiously some do paint their vestigial claws the color of blood. Among our modes of sanitized predation, the one that is most common in developed societies â€" factory farming â€" inflicts a lifetime of misery and torment on its victims, in contrast to the relatively brief agonies endured by the victims of predation in the wild. There are no even remotely credible arguments for the moral permissibility of factory farming. There is, in my view, only one argument for the permissibility of a practice of eating meat that has any plausibility, though it is restricted in scope. It supports the permissibility of eating meat only from animals that are 3 Isaiah I will not discuss this argument here, though I have done so elsewhere. Granting, then, at least for the sake of argument, that morality requires that we eat straw like the ox, or at any rate the moral equivalent of straw, the question arises whether we also have a moral reason to protect animals from predation by nonhuman predators. This question is restricted in two important ways. First, the question is not whether there is a moral reason to intervene against all forms of predation, but only whether there is a reason to protect potential prey that are capable of suffering and of having a life worth living. Second, it is not, at least in the first instance, whether there is an obligation to prevent predation where possible, but only whether there is a moral reason to do so, and if so how strong that reason is. It may be, for example, that there is a strong moral reason but that it is outweighed by competing considerations, or cannot be effectively acted on, in present conditions â€" conditions that might, however, be susceptible to change. There is some intuitive support for the idea that there is a moral reason to intervene against predation. Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

Oxford University Press, reprint , Part 4. Indeed, when the issue is raised in the philosophical literature, the usual response to this suggestion is to argue that if a moral theory implies that there is a moral reason to reduce or eliminate predation, that constitutes a reduction of the theory to absurdity â€" a reductio ad absurdum. It is a familiar objection to utilitarianism that it is excessively demanding in the sacrifices it requires individuals to make for the sake of other people. Recently Alison Hills has sought to strengthen this type of objection by arguing that when utilitarianism takes account, as it must, of the sheer magnitude of the suffering experienced by animals in the wild, it must imply that human beings have reasons, and in many cases duties, to intervene to mitigate it, including duties to reduce the incidence of predation. She assumes, however, that this implication counts strongly against the plausibility of the theory. The demandingness objection is much more damaging when we take animals seriously. Last viewed 7 December An Introduction New York: Cambridge University Press, , p. If so, their fear may well be justified. But unlike political action, moral philosophy is not a matter of strategic calculation, manipulation, and compromise. Its aim, as I conceive it, is to discover the truth about matters of morality. If we are ultimately to act in conformity with the reasons given by morality, we must know whether we do indeed have a moral reason to try to reduce the incidence of predation or perhaps even to eliminate it, if that becomes possible. The fact that the vast majority of people worldwide would now find it preposterous to suppose that we have such a reason provides little reason to suppose that they are right, just as the uniformity of opinion about the ethics of slavery among whites in the antebellum South provided little reason for supposing that it can be permissible to kidnap and enslave other people. Most commonsense intuitions about the question whether human beings ought, if possible, to eliminate or reduce the incidence of predation are therefore epistemically highly suspect. If the arguments in favor of intervention are better than the arguments against it, we can hope that they will eventually come to guide human action, in the same way that moral arguments against eating meat have, in only a few decades, increased the proportion of people who are vegetarians or vegans from negligible to substantial in those societies in which the arguments have been published and debated. In the meantime, there seems little reason to fear that people will be persuaded not to become vegetarian, or not to oppose factory farming, by becoming convinced that arguments that support vegetarianism and oppose factory farming also support the eventual elimination of predation. The moral case for vegetarianism has many dimensions that will remain compelling even if certain arguments for vegetarianism have implications that people are unwilling to accept. People can, for example, see that they bear greater responsibility for the suffering and premature deaths of animals that are killed specifically for human consumption than they bear for the suffering and deaths caused by predation. The case in favor of intervening against predation is quite simple. It is that predation causes vast suffering among its innumerable victims, and to deprive 12 Gruen, Ethics and Animals, pp. Suffering is intrinsically bad for those who experience it and there seems always to be a reason, though not necessarily a decisive one, to prevent it â€" a reason that applies to any moral agent who is capable of preventing it. If suffering can be deserved, deserved suffering might constitute an exception, as its intrinsic badness for the victim might be outweighed by its impersonal goodness. The elimination of predation could therefore make the difference between an indefinitely extended future in which millions of animals die prematurely and in agony every day and an alternative future in which different animals would live longer and die in ways other than in terror and agony in the jaws of a predator. Most people who read this article will recognize that we have a moral reason to avoid causing animals to suffer if we can do so without cost, and that this is because suffering is intrinsically bad for those that experience it. But if animal suffering is bad when we cause it, it should also be bad when it results from other causes, including the action of other animals. If that is correct, our moral reason not to contribute to causing suffering by eating meat produced in factory farms is stronger than our reason to prevent comparable amounts of animal suffering caused by others, including predators. But that is compatible with our having a strong reason to prevent suffering in animals for which we would be in no way responsible when we can do so at little or no cost to ourselves. Oxford University Press, , pp. I take no position here on whether anyone can deserve to suffer. Nussbaum, Frontiers of Justice: Belknap Press, , p. Nussbaum is among the few philosophers who have suggested that there is a moral reason to intervene against predation. Clarendon Press, , pp. The latter can be found in manuscript form on his website at http: One is to bring about

the gradual extinction of some or all predatory species, preferably through sterilization, and with the exception of the human species, which is capable of voluntarily ending its predatory behavior. Both of these methods of eliminating or reducing the incidence of predation would obviously require substantial interventions in the natural world. Perhaps the commonest objection to the simple moral case I sketched for intervening against predation is that any such intervention would risk environmental catastrophe. For the complexity of any major ecosystem so far surpasses our understanding that an attempt to eliminate predation within it, however carefully planned and well intentioned, would have unpredictable ramifications throughout the system. The most obvious scenario is that the elimination or even significant reduction in predation would produce a Malthusian dystopia in which herbivore populations would expand beyond the ability of the environment to sustain them. Instead of being killed quickly by predators, herbivores would then die slowly, painfully, and in greater numbers from starvation and disease. Rather than diminishing the suffering and extending the lives of herbivores, the elimination of predation might increase their suffering overall and even diminish their average longevity. We can call this the counterproductivity objection. Given the state of our knowledge at present, this is a strong objection to almost any attempt to reduce predation now. Ecological science, like other sciences, is not stagnant. It should eventually become possible to gradually convert ecosystems that are now stabilized by predation into ones resembling island ecosystems that have flourished for significant periods without any animals with a developed capacity for consciousness being preyed upon by others. We should therefore begin to think now about whether we would have moral reason to exercise the ability to intervene against predation in an effective and discriminating way if we were to develop it. If we conclude that we would, that gives us reason now to try to hasten our acquisition of that ability. One possible way to eliminate predation in an ecosystem without increasing the suffering of herbivores through overpopulation is to limit the expansion of herbivore populations by means other than predation. In some instances in which predation has been diminished unintentionally, human beings have then intervened to replace the original predators. In the United States, Britain, and 8 various other developed countries, for example, the increasing incursion of human activities into hitherto stable ecosystems has diminished the number of animals that once preyed on deer, resulting in an increased number of deer that have then had difficulty finding sufficient food. Most human communities solve this problem by permitting or encouraging the hunting of the deer. Hunters then happily perform the service of culling the herds without having to be paid for it, as they enjoy both the killing and the eating of their prey. But when they are successful, hunters, like other predators, deprive their prey of further life that could have been good. And they often cause great suffering as well, particularly when they wound an animal that is able to escape being killed. In principle there are better ways of controlling populations of herbivores whose exposure to predators has decreased. The most obvious of these is selective sterilization. These are mainly intended for use in dogs and cats in part to reduce the number of strays, which is the analogue for domesticated animals of overpopulation among wild animals , but some communities are seeking to use them to control local deer populations as well. Presumably it will become possible at some point to regulate the size of herbivore populations through germ-line genetic modification as well. The question whether predation is bad is relevant to present action in ways other than helping to guide or inform our research agendas. There are various predatory species that are now threatened with extinction. Many people advocate intervention to preserve those species and to restore their populations to some prior level. An example of such a species is the Siberian tiger. Human beings can decide now whether to allow or cause that species to disappear, to enable it to continue to exist in small numbers, or to try to restore the number of its members to a much higher level. Because the number of remaining Siberian tigers has been low for a considerable period, any ecological disruption occasioned by the great decline in their number has already occurred. If the several hundred that remain were all to disappear, the effect on the ecology of the region would presumably be negligible. If this is right, human beings can choose between two ecologically sustainable options. One is to complete the elimination of predation by Siberian tigers in a large region, the other to increase the level of predation in that region by repopulating it with tigers. If the latter option would substantially increase terror, suffering, and premature death among other animals inhabiting the region, and maintain that increase indefinitely, then the view that there is a moral reason to prevent suffering and

premature death among animals, however they might be caused, supports the option of allowing or causing the tigers to die out in the region â€" unless, perhaps, their role in the food web would simply be taken over by some other preexisting predatory species, in which case the extinction of the tigers would be a loss without any compensating gain in the reduction of suffering. I accept that, and also accept that there can be value in the continued existence of a species that is independent of or additional to the value for each member of the species of its own continued existence.

Chapter 9 : What is a Moral Issue? Distinction Between Moral Actions and Nonmoral Actions

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