

Handout 4: NEB & The Divine Command Theory

NEB background:

The fundamental project of the normative ethics of behavior is the attempt to discover, properly formulate, and defend a criterion of moral rightness for act-tokens.

An **act-type** is a repeatable kind of action; something that can be performed by different people at different times and places.

An **act-token** is a non-repeatable concrete individual action; something that is performed by just one person (the "agent"), on one occasion, and in one place.

Act-token, x, is **morally wrong** =df. performing x is not morally right.

Act-token, x, is **morally obligatory** =df. not performing x is not morally right.

Act-token, x, is **morally right** =df. performing x is not morally wrong.

C is a **criterion of morally right action**=df. C is a statement of interesting necessary and sufficient conditions for the moral rightness of act-tokens.

(e.g.) An act-token, x, is morally right if and only if _____

Sample criteria of morally right action:

GR: An act-token, x, is morally right if and only if in performing x, the agent of x has done unto others as he would have them do unto himself.

GHP: An act-token, x, is morally right if and only if x produces the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

VTR: An act-token, A, is morally right if and only if a perfectly virtuous person might perform A

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The Divine Command Theory (General Version).

DCT: An act-token, x, is morally right if and only if x does not violate any of God's commands.

x is God =df. x is the unique supremely knowledgeable, powerful, and good person who created the world.

Argument from Objective and Absolute Morality:

Rule R is **objective** =df. the existence of R does not depend upon anyone's beliefs, attitudes, or conventions.

Rule R is **absolute** =df. R applies to every agent, regardless of the context he is in.

1. There are objective and absolute moral rules.
2. If there are objective and absolute moral rules, then DCT is true.
3. Therefore, DCT is true (From 1 & 2 by Modus Ponens).

Argument from Reasons.

1. Everyone has a reason to obey the rules of morality.
2. If everyone has a reason to obey the rules of morality, then DCT is true.
3. Therefore, DCT is true (From 1 & 2 by Modus Ponens).