

February 3, 2002

LEVEL: 9

[Chapter 2]

Introduction

[URL: Ch2Intro]

SECTIONS (& perhaps subsections):

- I On Part II (“The Interpersonal: Relating Face to Face”)
 - II On the Present Chapter
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I On Part II (“The Interpersonal: Relating Face to Face”)

We now take up the concept of interpersonal morality in Chapters 2-4. Interpersonal morality is that of face-to-face relationships, where we make agreements valid only for at most a small community, one small enough that everyone can talk with everyone else, and small enough that everyone can see how the agreements affect everyone else.¹ Face-to-face relationships are the ground of “care and responsibility” as central moral perspectives. The impersonal perspective of “justice” becomes increasingly important as we require dealing with others we don’t know personally. The problems of moral judgment differ sufficiently from those of interpersonal

¹This is not a sharp division. Rather, as community size increases, I am less and less aware of the effects of our mutual agreements on the others, at least in any detail, less and less able to discern who I need to talk to, and less and less able to spend the time talking to this growing group. However, even though I recognize this a continuum, I will consider face-to-face morality as qualitatively different from the other end of the continuum, social justice, where agreements must be made without face-to-face contact and where emergent system effects become of great importance.

“Emergent system effects” refers to forces that affect moral decisions beyond the sum of the individuals involved. For example, capitalism allows for class divisions, which systematically disadvantage one group and advantage another, even though each individual makes the best moral claims possible in the situation she confronts. Why? I’ll have to explain this in detail in a separate essay [xx].

morality that they require different treatment. Interpersonal morality is the simpler case, so I start there, in this and the next two chapters. Social justice is built on interpersonal morality,² so I take it up in Chapter 5.

I have found it difficult to write about interpersonal morality without using examples that have societal justice aspects. After all, most relationships are embedded within a larger societal context, and most of the moral theory I've studied has concerned social justice, rights, and so on. My intention in Chapters 2-4 is to write about issues where interpersonal morality is the most salient issue, and to consider issues specific to social justice in Chapter 5.

That distinction made, let me consider now only interpersonal morality. As the title of the present chapter suggests, my purpose here is to describe what it is that we do when we make judgments about and agreements on how we are to relate to each other. I argue that such judgments are made through processes like those by which we reconcile our various personas. In other words, I hold that the quest for morality has the same basic form as the quest for authenticity. Moral judgments differ only in that the personas involved include our introjected understandings of the other. These introjected personas are the result of empathy, but not a chosen, willed empathy – the usual image – but rather an empathy wired into us and all creatures having internal representations of the world. The resulting tension among these personas has the same dynamic, at least to a first approximation, as the intrapersonal tension among one's various Goods. And just as Chapter 1 did not specify anything about one's integrated self except that it *be* integrated, so this chapter advances no special morality beyond that same integration. In this

²Social justice = interpersonal morality with the added complexity of emergent system effects.

respect it parallels Habermas's discourse ethics, in which the sole final criterion of morality is agreement.³

Morality is therefore not any specific agreement but rather a process by which people seek agreement. Orientation toward this process constitutes the relationship between people.

Chapter 3 ("[Relationships vs. Means & Ends](#)") elaborates on this, arguing that we should focus first on these relationships and only subordinately on the specific means and ends agreed upon.

The last of the three chapters ([4: "Morality beyond Agreement: Moral Action within Moral Conflict"](#)) takes up what I term the "[agreement problem](#)". Since no one has any standpoint from which to state inerrantly what is moral or even how we should come to agreement, we are faced with the problem of what to do when the very terms of morality itself can be disputed. In what sense can we even speak of morality in such circumstances? I argue that a particular sense of morality remains, since empathy does not disappear just because we argue over it. However, in a world in which empathy can be buried under layers of emotional pain and philosophical abstraction, reliance upon it is not easy, and in the end the sense of morality described here is not an easy one to uphold. Alas, in an imperfect world there are no painless answers.⁴

³Note also the parallel with Habermas's distinction between communicative action and strategic action. Strategic is action oriented toward producing a specific, and pre-specified, result, while communicative action is oriented toward producing understanding or agreement, with no pre-specified image of what the actual understanding of agreement will be. The only way we know either has been achieved is by the actors saying, "I understand" or "I agree". [xx I'm not sure I'm entirely happy with the following distinction. After all, if my "pre-specified goal" were merely to "stop feeling hungry", many things could create that. How is that different from my goal being "to understand/agree"?]

⁴[xx Here's some previous material, left here for later use as needed:] Another consequence of this problem is an uncertainty about how to resolve persistent moral differences. If no one can be certain h/her moral position is valid, how can any moral decisions be made except by moral unanimity (unlikely) or by the accidents of strategic advantage (immoral and often

II On the Present Chapter

Let me return to the present chapter. I begin with the basic distinction between the Good and the Right, i.e., the distinction between decisions involving only one's own Goods and those involving both one's own and others' Goods. I will later argue that this distinction is not as clear as it appears, but I discuss it nonetheless, both because there are in fact some differences between the two situations and because the distinction hold a central place in moral philosophy as it exists today.

[xx Now I describe this chapter itself. Talk about previous attempts to ground morality.

Nietzsche and music. Foucault and art. Apel and his {transcendental? metaphysical?} grounding. Habermas and the presuppositions of argumentation. {Q: Should this be discussed here? Should it be a separate essay? Should it be part of another essay? Should it be discussed at all?}]

[xx I need to talk about the two moral orientations (or whatever Kohlberg wound up calling them) of "care & responsibility" and "justice". {Q: Again, where should this discussion go? In the material above? In its own essay? As a section of another essay?}]

My description of face-to face moral judgments has them grounded on empathy, whatever cognitive scaffolding we erect on that foundation.

The next essay defines morality in terms of the "relational" principle – basically, an ability to look each other in the eye when proposing or defending a moral position. This principle is

systematically oppressive)? Although the answer to this question might fit within this chapter's description of morality, I have given it its own chapter, Chapter 4, because of its lengthy description and its movement beyond simple agreement.

oversimplified there, but it provides a foundation for solving later complexities as we encounter them.

The relational principle depends on empathy; without empathy, “looking one another in the eye” would pass sociopaths, who experience others’ senses of the Good only as problems to be overcome. When dealing with others that way, no human relationship exists for them. The concept of “sociopath” and the distinction between instrumental and human relationships raise the problem of evil. The relational principle grounds morality on empathy and its concomitant premise that people desire moral relationships with each other. But if evil people exist, then these premises are false. The essay on this problem argues that our perceptions of evil are if not demonstrably mistaken, at least premature. It then lays out the consequences for morality of such a position.

Chapter 2 concludes with an essay outlining the sense in which the chapter can be said to justify the ways of relating perspective on morality, given that we differ in our senses of the Good and that no one (including me) (and you) can be certain that a moral perspective or norm is valid. Because of this problem, the sense of justification used here has a dialectical structure, which is important to understand.