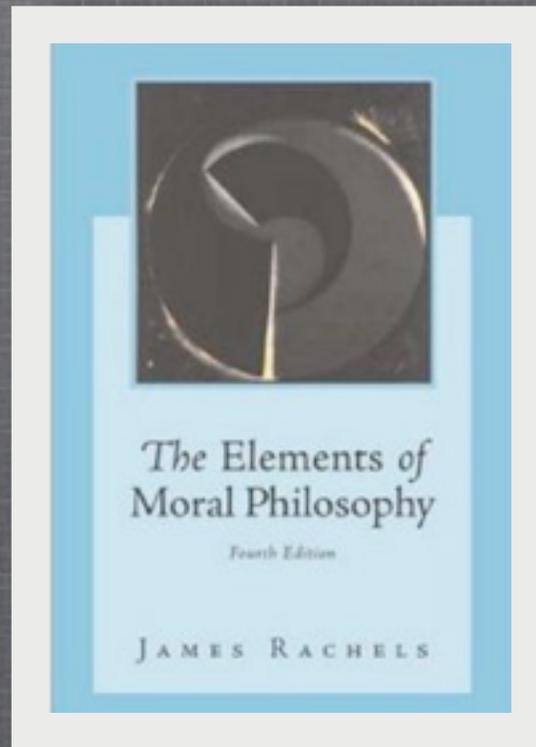


# TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH AND ETHICS

The Elements of Moral Philosophy  
by James Rachels



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# WHAT IS MORALITY?

## MINIMUM CONCEPTION OF MORALITY

*„Morality, is at the very least, the effort to guide one's conduct by reason [...] while giving equal weight to the interest of each individual who will be affected by what one does.“*



James Rachels (1941 - 2003)

# CULTURAL RELATIVISM

- Various cultural codes, therefore universal truth in ethics is a myth
- But: Conclusion doesn't follow from the premise!
- Some issues (e.g. no critique possible, decisions based just on standards of the society) but some lessons learned (e.g. avoid arrogance and keep an open mind)
- Questions to ask for moral thinking:
  - Does the practice promote or hinder the welfare of those lives affected by it?
  - Is there an alternative set of social arrangements that would do a better job of promoting their welfare?

# ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM

- moral opinions are based on our feelings
- **Simple Subjectivism:** interprets moral judgements as statements *about* attitudes.
  - No disagreement between different positions possible
- **Emotivism:** language is used for influencing people's behavior and to express one's attitude
  - Where is the place of reason in ethics?
  - doesn't give account of the connection between moral judgements and the reasons that support them

# MORALITY & RELIGION

- are often regarded as inseparable
- priests and ministers are treated as moral experts
- **Divine Command Theory**  
Dilemma: *„Is conduct right because the gods command it, or do the gods command it because it is right?“* [Socrates]
- **Theory of Natural Law:** everything in nature has a purpose  
unnatural = immoral, natural = morally right  
  
*„morality is a matter of reason and conscience, not religious face; and in any case, religious considerations do not provide definitive solutions to the specific moral problems that confront us“*

# PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM

- Every human action is motivated by self-interest. To remain in accordance to this, motives of actions are being reinterpreted.
- But: Not ALL actions are selfish or are done from self-interest
- „There is no inconsistency in desiring that everyone, including oneself *and* others, be happy.“
- This theory is irrefutable! If the *controlling assumption* becomes, that all behavior is self interested:
  - then everything happens can be interpreted to fit this assumption!
- The thought that there is but a single motive cannot be sustained!

# ETHICAL EGOISM

„Each person ought to persue only his / her self-interest exclusively“

- **Arguments for the theory:**
  - Altruism is 'killing' the significance of the individual's life
  - Self-respect demands from the individual not to sacrifice his / her own life for the others
  - It is compatible with the Commonsence Morality
- **Arguments against the theory:**
  - Cannot handle conflicts of interest (what if my self-interest is really harmful for others?)
  - Logically inconsistent (it contradicts itself)
  - It is arbitrary (by definition I am better than the others and my needs matter more)

# THE UTILITARIAN APPROACH

„Whenever there is a choice, one should choose whatever has best overall consequences for everyone concerned“

- The revolutionary idea about this theory is that the inability of a being to developed thinking is not a sufficient reason to mistreat it. Not only humans, but all the animals that are able to suffer must be treated with respect and moral concern.
  - Arguments against the theory : Not taking into account the conflicting interests, justice and people's rights.

# ABSOLUTE MORAL RULES

- Existence of absolute moral rules argued by some philosophers, such as E. Anscombe and I. Kant, but in conflict with Utilitarians and the moral common sense.
- Kant's main principle: *„Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.“*
- Kant's retributivism is absolute as well.

# THE IDEA OF A SOCIAL CONTRACT

Social Contract Theory is one of four major options in current moral philosophy

## Objections

1. It is based on a historical fiction
2. Its implications for our duties towards beings who are not able to participate in the contract

# FEMINISM AND THE ETHICS OF CARE

Do modern moral philosophy incorporate a male bias?

If there are gender differences in thinking, it is a question of emphasis rather than differences in fundamental values

1. Women think different because of their social role to which they are assigned
2. Theory of evolutionary psychology

# VIRTUE THEORY VS. THEORIES OF OBLIGATION

VT: being a moral person is having certain traits of a character

- What traits of a character make one a good person?
- Are virtues individual?
- Are there virtues that are essential?
- Should be regarded as part of an overall theory

ToO: Emphasize impartial duty, the moral agent listens to reason

# WHAT WOULD A SATISFACTORY MORAL THEORY BE LIKE?

- Many have tried, only partially successfully.
- Hume: A human life is unimportant from an universal perspective, but not from the individuals perspective.
- People are rational agents with the power of choice.
- Justice, Fairness and Punishment