

Philosophy 104, Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2006
 Russell Marcus, Instructor
 email: philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org
 website: <http://philosophy.thatmarcusfamily.org>
 Office phone: (718) 997-5287

Lecture Notes, March 22

I. Quizzes:

1. How is each virtue a mean between two extremes?
2. What is a social contract?

II. The Prisoner's Dilemma

On Monday, we considered the Prisoner's Dilemma, en route to a last moral theory.
 Two conspirators are put into separate cells from which they can not communicate with each other.
 They are each given the options to cooperate, or to defect.

		Person A	
		Cooperate	Defect
Person	Cooperate	A and B each get 2 years in jail.	A goes free, while B dies.
B	Defect	B goes free while A dies.	A and B each get 7 years in jail.

Here is a more abstract version of the prisoner's dilemma, which represents the various outcomes in terms of their ordinal ranks.

The best outcome is 1, the worst outcome is 4.

The ranking for A appears first in each box, followed by the ranking for B.

		Person A	
		Cooperate	Defect
Person	Cooperate	2, 2	1, 4
B	Defect	4, 1	3, 3

There are many real life examples of this kind of relationship:

The employer-employee relationship.

Relationships between vendors and clients.

Between lovers.

Between students and teachers.

Among train riders, or car drivers.

There are links on the website to more examples.

The problem is that rational persons, committed to their own interests will always defect. If A and B each defect, they end up in the lower right hand corner of the chart. But they would like to be in the upper left hand corner.

The moral of the story of the prisoner's dilemma:
By each pursuing our own interests, we do not end up in the situation we in fact prefer. This is thus a metaphoric response to Mandeville and Smith.

III. Hume, on the prisoner's dilemma

Your corn is ripe today; mine will be so tomorrow. 'Tis profitable for us both, that I should labour with you to-day, and that you should aid me to-morrow. I have no kindness for you, and know you have as little for me. I will not, therefore, take any pains on your account; and should I labour with you upon my own account, in expectation of a return, I know I should be disappointed, and that I should in vain depend upon your gratitude. Here then I leave you to labour alone: You treat me in the same manner. The seasons change; and both of us lose our harvests for want of mutual confidence and security.

IV. Social Contract Morality

Morality is a set of rules that rational people agree to accept for mutual benefit
In terms of the prisoner's dilemma: morality moves us from the lower right-hand corner to the upper left-hand corner.

V. An objection to the social contract

The social contract is supposed to provide a justification for state authority over the individual. In particular, the state has the right to punish any violators of the law, since the violator is deemed to have agreed to his punishment by agreeing to the social contract. But, we have never signed any contract.

Locke responds to this criticism by appealing to tacit consent.
We use the roads, police, schools, etc.
We are free to give up our property and leave, but if we stay, we are bound to obey the laws.
We are also bound by the laws if we are merely visiting a foreign country, and using the protections of that government.

VI. Hume on natural rights

In line with the above objection, Hume thinks that talk of natural rights and hypothetical constructs is bunk. Recall Mill's comments on the social contract.
Mill says that the contract is a mere fiction.
It does not trump the real standard of morality, which is utility.
Even if we were to agree to the rule of law, the nature of the punishments, of the justice meted out, must be determined.
And here we must appeal to utility, p 72.

Hume agrees that the talk of rights in Hobbes and Locke is misguided.
In a state of abundance, we would have no need for property rights.

Imagine if every one had a Ring of Gyges.
We could have whatever we needed, and so would not need to rely on rights.
In a state of extreme necessity, we would give them up.
Survival would be our main focus.
'Rights' would lose relevance.

So, Hume concludes, they're just conveniences, given the world in which we live, p 450.
Rights aren't anything more metaphysically interesting, in the way that Locke would have them.
Property rights justified by utility, that's all, pp 450-451.
Compare again with Mill's discussion of the social contract, on p 72
Mill says that there are various, confused notions of justice, and we choose among them on principles of utility.
"Social utility alone can decide the preference."

VII. A bit of review for the midterm