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Morality Versus Slogans

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MORALITY VERSUS SLOGANS

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**Presented to the WMU Center for the Study
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Morality versus Slogans

I am not going to say anything that everyone doesn't already know. I think of myself as simply making explicit some points that people may have overlooked, and clarifying some points that are confusing because people may not have taken enough time to think about them sufficiently. I don't offer myself as any kind of authority. Philosophy is not science. Philosophers do not discover new facts in the way that some scientists do, or even historians, and which most of us simply have to accept on their authority. One should never accept anything any philosopher says simply on his authority. Philosophy is not religion, it provides no new faith of its own, at least I do not. Other philosophers can speak for themselves, but I consider myself to be in the Socratic tradition. I am simply a midwife whose task is to help others deliver their own thoughts more clearly and precisely.

In order to do this I must show you that you do not really accept some of the views that you think you accept. But before I do this, I want to make a few things clear. I am not a moral skeptic or moral relativist. In fact I accept all of the standard moral views; I regard killing, cheating, etc., as bad, and relieving pain, helping people, etc., as good. My

positive views about morality are so ordinary that I expect everyone to agree with everything I have to say, to wonder why I even bother to say it. I don't intend to say anything at all controversial, and if I seem to do so that will be because I haven't expressed myself clearly enough. I am completely superficial, everything is on the surface and if I seem to say anything profound, then I have been misunderstood. This goes for my positive views as well as my criticisms of others. I am saying this all right at the start so you won't expect anything controversial or profound in what follows.

THE GOLDEN RULE

First, to show you how non-controversial my views are, I am going to discuss the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Most people claim that they think the Golden Rule is a good principle by which to live. But consider the following case: I am sleeping in my bedroom in Hanover, New Hampshire--a little town, and I don't lock my doors. Tonight that seems to be a mistake because I am awakened by a noise downstairs. I go out of the bedroom and look down over the balcony and there is a burglar frantically trying to find something of value and stuffing various

items into a bag. I see him but he doesn't see or hear me. I go back in my room where I have a telephone and I am about to call the police. All of a sudden I think of the Golden Rule. Should I hang up the phone and go to bed? That's what the Golden Rule says to do, doesn't it? There is no question at all that if I were a burglar I certainly wouldn't want anyone to call the police on me! Therefore if I act according to the Golden Rule I should not call the police on this burglar. That's what the Golden Rule tells us. You might object that the burglar himself is not following the Golden Rule. He would not want me to rob his house, so he is not following the Golden Rule. That is correct, but the Golden Rule does not say "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you unless they have done unto you what they would not want done unto them." So the Golden Rule seems to tell you not to report the burglar. "Oh come on" you say, "there is something wrong with that interpretation." But I have simply given the Golden Rule a straightforward reading and on that reading it really is a silly rule. The only reason that people still think it is any good is that they haven't really thought about it at all.

Consider an example where someone has not done anything wrong. An encyclopedia salesman

comes to the door and wants to sell you an encyclopedia. What do you have to do if you want to follow the Golden Rule? You have to buy it. Once the other salesmen in town know you follow the Golden Rule, you are going to have everyone of them at your front door too. I can tell you from experience, because I used to sell encyclopedias, that there is no question of what encyclopedia salesmen want. Given that they want you to buy, if you accept that you should do unto others what you want others to do unto you, then you have to buy the encyclopedias. You can even imagine a sophisticated use of the Golden Rule in the ongoing dialogue between the sexes, where the boy says to the girl, "The Golden Rule says you should do unto me what...", and the girl says, "Well, you should do unto me....", and then the boy says, "Well I said it first."

After consideration, everyone realizes that the Golden Rule is not really a very good guide to conduct. It seems to require conduct that everybody admits is not required and sometimes seems to require conduct that is clearly wrong. If followed literally, and how else are we to understand it, it requires all normal policemen not to arrest criminals, and all normal judges not to sentence them. Assuming that normal judges and policemen want neither to be

caught nor sentenced, according to the Golden Rule, it follows that they ought not to arrest or sentenced others. The Golden Rule also requires, and students might like this, that teachers not give flunking grades to students even if they deserve it. If you were a student you would not want to be flunked. But it also seems to require that a student get a better grade than those who do not deserve it, because if you were a student and deserved a better grade, you would want a better grade. So it now seems that the Golden Rule is really pretty useless if you are trying to find out what you ought to do.

The Golden Rule does have some useful functions for children, e.g., a six year-old girl who starts beating-up on her little four year-old brother, taking his toy away at the same time. So you say to her, "Would you like someone to beat-up on you and take away your toy?" She says, "No." Then you say, "Well do not do it to others" Of course everyone knows it was wrong to beat up on a kid and take his toy. So the Golden Rule seems, even here, to be merely a rhetorical device and is not any help at all in finding out what you ought to do. The Golden Rule doesn't tell you anything that you don't already know except in cases where it tells you the wrong thing. It is really a useless and pointless rule to use as

a guide to your conduct because it really doesn't tell you how you ought to act in any cases in which you have any doubt.

I am not denying that the Golden Rule, in some cases, tells us to do the moral thing. What I am saying is that in those cases, you already knew what was immoral before you applied the Golden Rule. If you are wondering whether to kill somebody, you don't need that Golden Rule to tell you, "I wouldn't want to be killed, therefore I shouldn't kill him." You knew it was wrong to kill him before you applied the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is of no help at all because it gives you the wrong answers as often as it give you the right ones. Using procedures that are not very reliable, that sometimes give you the right answer but just as often give you the wrong answer, is not very useful.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Having shown the inadequacy of the Golden Rule, let us consider the Ten Commandments. You may remember that some people, even former President Reagan, regard the Ten Commandments as a list of completely universal moral rules that should be accepted by everyone as their guide to morality. He recommended that they be posted on the bulletin

boards of all of the schools. But it is very doubtful that he knew all the Ten Commandments. Some know one or two, but very few know all ten. In fact, there are several different versions. For example, Luther has one version and Calvin has another even though they are very similar. Do the Ten Commandments really provide an adequate and universal moral guide? Some of the Ten Commandments may not be moral rules at all. For example, it is not clear whether the rule against worshipping idols has anything to do with morality. I am not in favor of worshipping idols. I do not, never have, never will, but not everything that we are against is necessarily immoral. I do not believe that worshipping idols has anything to do with morality. But because I don't want to make any claim that may be controversial, I shall ignore the question of whether worshipping idols is a moral matter.

Let us now consider the commandment against coveting thy neighbor's wife. It is a little sexist. It does not say anything about not coveting thy neighbor's husband, for it was addressed to men, not women, but that is not my concern here. It says, "Don't covet thy neighbor's wife" and then continues, "or his house, or his oxen, or his ass, or his manservant or his maidservant." Manservants and

maidservants are polite translations of "male and female slaves." So in the official statement of one of the commandments it says don't covet thy neighbor's slaves, male or female, which seems to condone slavery. "Don't covet your neighbor's slaves" does not sound like a universal moral rule. Nor is it the kind of rule we want posted on every schoolroom bulletin board. Maybe this explains the Reagan administration's policy on South Africa. One might object, "No, no, no, it tells you not to covet slaves, so it's really against slavery." This objection is not very strong for it would lead one to say that because it tells you not to covet wives it has to be against marriage. Even if one grants this completely inadequate defense, it's of no avail because unfortunately there is another Commandment that clearly does not count as a completely universal moral rule. If any of the Ten Commandments allows immoral behavior then we cannot use the Ten Commandments as a guide to the moral life. A guide which we know is sometimes wrong is clearly of no use to us in settling doubtful cases.

Those who know the Ten Commandments know the immoral commandment: "But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy

daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine oxen, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor any stranger who is within thy gates. That thy manservant and maidservant shall rest as well as thou" (Deuteronomy V:14). This commandment recommends the humane treatment of slaves. So it was a big advance over the practice of the times. Even the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle thought there were natural slaves. Aristotle said: "There are natural rulers and natural slaves." You can see that I am not just attacking ancient religion; ancient philosophers were no better. Nowadays we know better. We know that slavery is wrong. Even humane slavery, if that is possible. So even if the commandment about giving the slaves a day off is an improvement over the practice of the time, which it certainly was, nobody would accept it as expressing a timeless, universally acceptable moral rule. Imagine posting this is on your bulletin board: "Give your slaves a day off." Is that the kind of commandment we would want posted in the schoolroom as President Reagan recommends? I do not deny that some of the Ten Commandments are perfectly good moral rules, e.g., "Do not kill." It actually doesn't say that but you can interpret it that way. All I am saying is that the fact that a rule is one of the Ten Commandments is

not a good reason for accepting it as a universal moral rule. If the Ten Commandments has rules which are not good, the fact that a rule is one of the Ten Commandments doesn't tell you whether it is a good one or a bad one. So we can see that the Ten Commandments does not provide a universally adequate moral guide. You will note that I have shown the inadequacies of both the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments without saying the slightest thing that is controversial. I have just told you what you already know.

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Having eliminated the two most popular accounts of morality, I shall now mention one philosophical account, perhaps the most famous one of all, the Categorical Imperative, formulated by Immanuel Kant, regarded by some as the greatest philosopher of all time. The most popular formulation of the Categorical Imperative is, "Act only according to that maxim that you could thereby will to be a universal law." This can be paraphrased as "Don't do anything you could not will everyone to do." Kant shows how the Categorical Imperative rules out lying promises. They are immoral because you could not will that everyone make lying

promises. If everyone knew that everyone was lying when they promised, nobody would expect the promise to be kept and then there would not really be any promises. So the Categorical Imperative shows you that lying promises are wrong. The Categorical Imperative proves it, but we have already seen that the Golden Rule correctly shows that you should not hit your little brother and take away his toy and that some of the Ten Commandments are genuine moral rules.

In order to provide an adequate moral guide, the Categorical Imperative must classify as immoral all and only those acts which really are immoral. If it sometimes correctly tells you that an act is immoral, e.g., making a lying promise, and sometimes incorrectly tells you that an act is immoral, then it is not better than these other popular guides. The Categorical Imperative does seem to classify as immoral acting on the maxim, "Never be the first to arrive at a party." If everybody acted on that rule, there could not be any parties, and so it seems just like a maxim that allows lying promises. If one were interested, many maxims could be invented that would be impossible to make into universal laws, and using the Categorical Imperative, Kant would have to regard it as immoral to act on those maxims, but some of them might, in fact, even be maxims that it would

be good manners to follow, e.g., "Never be the last to leave a party." It is impossible for everyone to act on that maxim, someone has to be last. It is clearly wrong to claim that acting on such a maxim is immoral. So we can see that the philosophical slogan is no better than the popular slogans in providing a universally adequate moral guide.

This attack on the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments, and the Categorical Imperative is not an attack on morality. It's an attack on simplistic thinking about morality. It's an attack on the view that you can summarize morality in a one sentence, or maybe a ten sentence, slogan. It is amazing how many people, when shown the inadequacy of these slogans, conclude that morality has been shown to be inadequate, that ethical relativity and skepticism are the only possible positions. It is as if somebody, when you give them Newton's three laws of physics, concludes that since they are not completely adequate and do not account for everything, that shows that physics is inadequate.

To back up their sophistication about the subjectivity of values, people often quote Shakespeare's remark, "Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Of course, Shakespeare was not a philosopher and besides, only a character says

it, and so we don't know if Shakespeare believed it or not. But a lot of people quote this remark as if it proved that morality is subjective. It is amazing how poorly people argue, how little they pay serious attention to whether or not they hold inconsistent views. What may make what I have said so far seem at all controversial is that I have pointed out the inconsistencies in views that people hold without ever realizing that they hold such inconsistent views.

MORAL THEORY

A moral theory is an attempt to go beyond slogans and to provide an adequate description of morality, one that does not result in inconsistencies. A good moral theory also shows how morality is related to our more general values and to impartiality and rationality. I have developed a moral theory which I think accurately describes morality, the moral system that we actually use when making moral judgments and deciding what to do in moral situations. What follows is based upon that theory, which is presented in far greater detail in my book, *Morality: A New Justification of the Moral Rules*, published by Oxford University Press in 1988 and now also available in paperback. (It may be relevant to point out here that there is not necessarily a conflict

between morality and self-interest).

GOODS, EVILS, and RATIONALITY

Before I talk about morality at all I want to say something more about our general values, because "moral values" is not a redundant phrase. There are a lot of values besides moral values. I want to talk about those things we consider to be goods and evils, or benefits and harms, if you like that better. By an evil or a harm, I simply mean something that you would always avoid for your self or your friends unless you had some reason for not avoiding it. I define a good or a benefit in a similar way, as something you would not avoid for yourself and your friends unless you had some reason to. I claim that, in the sense I have given to the terms, we all agree on what the goods and evils are, i.e., we all have the same basic values.

I have no argument at all for this claim. If you do not agree with me all I can do is try to clarify. If after I clarify and you understand and still disagree with me, there is nothing else for me to do. I have nothing further to say to you and you might as well stop reading this essay. In order to test whether or not there really is agreement, I am going to present the list of basic evils, a list of things that rational people,

including you and your friends, avoid unless you have an adequate reason for not avoiding them. Here is the list:

Death

Pain

Disability

Loss of Freedom

Loss of Pleasure.

These evils differ from almost everything else in the world, because for anything else which does not involve these evils, we do not need any, let alone an adequate, reason for not avoiding them e.g., books.

If there is agreement on the evils, I do not think there will be any problem in getting agreement on the goods. Here is the list of goods (those things you would not avoid unless you had an adequate reason for doing so):

Abilities

Freedom

Pleasure.

The close relationship between the goods and evils should be apparent. It should also be apparent that we regard anyone who, without an adequate reason, does not avoid the evils or does avoid the goods as acting irrationally.

In order to explain what counts as an adequate reason we must first make clear what a reason is. A reason is a conscious belief that you or someone else will avoid suffering an evil, or will gain a good. So if you are acting rationally you wouldn't want to suffer any of the items on the list of evils unless you or someone else is going to avoid one of these evils or gain some good. Everyone admits that acting so as to avoid a good or not to avoid an evil when no one, including yourself, is going to benefit in any way is irrational, e.g., killing yourself in order to make someone else suffer. It is also clear that causing yourself serious harm in order to gain some minor good, e.g., cutting off your arm to win a quarter bet, is also irrational. In order for your harming yourself to be rational, the reason you have must be adequate, i.e., the evil avoided or good gained must be equal to or greater than the harm caused. For example, it is not irrational to have your arm cut off in order to avoid the very high risk of death that would come from the spread of bone cancer in your unamputated arm.

This account of goods, evils, and rationality is really quite simple. We all agree that it may be rational to seek death in order to avoid intense permanent pain, e.g., some seriously ill people

choose to die rather than continue to suffer such pain. Other people who are willing to undergo such pain in order to stay alive are also acting rationally. This shows that my claim that we all agree on what is good and evil is not a claim that we all agree on the ranking of the goods and evils. All disagreement about goods and evils is disagreement on the way we rank the evils and goods, it is never disagreement on whether something counts as a good or as an evil. When we do cost-benefit analysis there is not disagreement on whether something counts as a cost or as a benefit.

Although I do not claim that everybody agrees on the ranking of the goods and evils, by and large people tend to agree. A person who commits suicide to avoid going to the dentist is acting irrationally. But there are other times where one's illness and pain are serious enough that it is not irrational to prefer death. I cannot provide a procedure for ranking the goods and evils. Insofar as there are disagreements I shall not attempt to settle them because I do not want to say anything controversial. I admit that we sometimes disagree on what is better or worse, but claim that we always agree on what is good and bad. This account of what is a good and evil explains why we always choose goods over evils and it also explains what it means to say that we sometimes choose the lesser of

two evils. We want to avoid both of them, but if we are forced to suffer one of them, we choose the lesser evil.

MORALITY

Once we see that there is complete agreement on what counts as the fundamental goods and evils, it may seem less implausible that there is also agreement on morality. Remember that I regard it as implausible that morality can be stated adequately in a single sentence slogan. Indeed, you should not expect this essay to provide a complete account of morality, for morality can no more be adequately summarized in a short essay than can physics or biology. Besides if it did, you would have no reason to buy my book. But I am going to present the broad outline of the moral system we all use in making our moral judgments.

Morality is like grammar; we all use it but we have difficulty in making it explicit. A philosopher is like a grammarian. What he does is make explicit the rules that we all use. What I am going to do is simply to make explicit the moral system that you all in fact use in making your moral judgments. I shall not say anything new at all. You can test whether what I say is correct by seeing if the outline that I give you is

such that when you use it, it provides you with the moral judgments you always make, assuming that you are good moral people.

First, a moral system applies to all rational people, i.e., it applies to everybody whom we hold responsible for their actions. This means that it applies not only to philosophy majors and college graduates, but also to college freshmen and even high school students. But if morality applies to everyone, then a moral system has to be simple enough for everyone to understand it. We cannot judge people by a moral system if the system is so complicated that people can't understand it. So, since we judge high-school students, and even younger children, by a moral system, this requires the moral system to be so simple that even they can understand it. If anybody presents a moral theory that results in a moral system that requires one to take a philosophy class in order to understand it, this is enough to show that the theory is wrong. The theory could not be describing the moral system we actually use in judging people.

Since everybody is supposed to act as morality requires, i.e., to abide by the moral rules, we blame and punish them when they do not. But we never want anyone to act irrationally, so it cannot be irrational for people to act as morality requires.

Otherwise we would sometimes blame or punish people for refusing to act irrationally. A system that is understood by everyone to whom it applies and which is not irrational for them to follow, is what I call a "public system." Games are such public systems, i.e., the rules apply to all the players in the game and all the players understand the rules and it is not irrational for any of them to follow them.

Morality differs from other public systems in at least one important way: it applies to all rational persons. Whereas the rules of a game apply only to the people playing, morality applies to everyone. Cheating is taken by many people to be the paradigm case of an immoral action because cheating seems to provide a model for all immoral action. But because one can cheat only those with whom one is participating in some shared activity, many philosophers have falsely concluded that morality applies only within a given society. Social contract theory and ethical relativity both rest on making the wrong analogy between cheating and morality. Morality is universal and does not depend upon any prior agreement, actual or hypothetical.

THE MORAL RULES

What are the rules of morality, i.e., the public

system that apply to all rational persons? What rules would a rational person who wants to avoid the evils want as part of a public system that applies to everyone? I claim that people would agree on the rules they would want to be part of a public system that applies to everyone. A list of these rules contains the following five rules:

Do not Kill

Do not Cause Pain

Do not Disable

Do not Deprive of Freedom

Do not Deprive of Pleasure.

Be sure to notice the close connection between these rules and the items on the list of evils. These first five rules just tell you "Don't cause anyone to suffer an evil." Since you don't want to suffer an evil, and you know that no other rational person does either, if you are putting forward a public system that applies to all rational persons, you obviously want these rules to be included in that system.

These five rules are not the only moral rules. There are, as luck and chance would have it, five more rules. These second five rules are also related to the evils, but less directly. I do not have the space here to provide the arguments showing how obedience to these rules is required for avoiding

causing the suffering of evils, but I can recommend a book that has all these arguments in it. Even without consulting this book, I do not think anyone will be surprised by any of the second five rules. This is the list of the next five rules:

Don't Deceive

Keep Your Promise

Don't Cheat

Obey the Law

Do Your Duty--where Duty includes those actions you are required to do by your job, your position, your family, your circumstances, etc., e.g., a teacher has a duty to show up for class.

These are the ten moral rules that all rational persons would want to be part of the public system that applies to all rational persons. No one should be surprised by these ten rules. These are all obvious, simple rules that everyone is supposed to follow regardless of what their personal goal in life is. Careful attention to these rules shows that they primarily set limits on what one is morally allowed to do. They do not provide a positive goal for life. This is done by another part of the moral system, what I call *the moral ideals*. But before I say anything about moral ideals, I want to point out a few interesting features of the moral rules.

Notice that they are simple and general. They can be understood by everyone. They are all prohibitions, or can be stated as prohibitions, e.g., "Keep Your Promise" is exactly equivalent to "Don't Break Your Promise." Everyone of those rules can be stated as a prohibition and with no change in meaning at all. What is not obvious from just looking at them is that they all have exceptions. The moral rules are not absolute, they have exceptions. They are, however, universal--they apply to everyone. Many people confuse universal and absolute. The moral rules are universal, they apply to everyone, but they are not absolute. They have exceptions, but these exceptions are also universal. What are the justified exceptions? Here, not surprisingly, people may disagree somewhat, just as they disagree on the ranking of the evils. In fact, it is this difference in the ranking of the evils that accounts for most moral disagreement when there is agreement on the facts. But almost all moral disagreements are in fact disagreements on the facts. Very seldom is there disagreement on the facts, including estimates on the probability of consequences, and disagreement on what morally ought to be done. In my seven years as a member of the Ethics Committee in a hospital, and as a consultant on ethical problems, I have not run

across a single case, not one, where there was moral disagreement which was not based upon disagreement in the facts.

Philosophers tend to distinguish facts from values and claim that we all agree on the facts and disagree on the values. In my experience, the exact opposite is true. We all agree on our values and disagree about the facts. If you look carefully and precisely at what are presented as examples of moral disagreements, I think your own experience will confirm this claim. Take the example of Star Wars vs. Disarmament. Is there any disagreement in values? Does one side want to blow-up the world and the other side save it? Of course not. Everyone wants to save the world. One side thinks that Star Wars will save it, the other side thinks that disarmament will save it. They disagree about the probable consequences of different courses of action, or what the facts of the case are. They all have the same values--namely avoiding the death and destruction that will accompany any nuclear exchange.

When people agree on the facts, they almost always agree on when it's justified to break a moral rule. This is because they agree that the justified exception has to be a part of the public system. If you

are going to break a moral rule you have to be willing that everyone be publicly allowed to break the rule in the same circumstances. That this sounds a little like Kant's Categorical Imperative is not surprising for the attraction of the Categorical Imperative is that it seems to capture the kind of impartiality that morality requires. This kind of impartiality does not require that we break a moral rule only when we would will that everyone actually break the rule in the same circumstances. Rather it requires that we break the rule only when we would be willing to publicly allow that everyone break it.

Let us consider applications of the procedure for justifying a violation of a moral rule that it can be broken justifiably when one would be willing to publicly allow everyone in the same circumstances, to break that rule. First let us consider the question whether one can cause pain to someone, just for fun? Clearly not, for no rational person would be willing to publicly allow anyone to cause pain to another simply for the fun of it. But now consider whether one would be willing to allow someone to cause pain to another when it is necessary to do so to help them avoid death, and they consent to your causing that pain. Here it is clearly justifiable to break the moral rule because every rational person would be willing to

publicly allow everyone to break the moral rule against causing pain to someone who gives consent when it is done to save their life. This is so obvious that it seems almost not worth saying. It is not obvious that it is justified to cause pain when it is necessary to save a person's life and they refuse consent. Not all rational persons would agree to publicly allowing violating the rule against causing pain in these circumstances.

This explains why informed consent is so important in the practice of medicine. Doctors are breaking moral rules left and right, they are causing pain and disability and taking away freedom all the time. If what they do is not to count as immoral they must be justified in doing it. When you break a moral rule with regard to someone with their consent and for their benefit, everyone agrees that it is completely justified, because everyone would be willing to publicly allow such violations of the moral rules. Though we do not explicitly make use of the procedure that I have outlined, one can see that it explains not only all those cases that are clearly justified violations; it also explains those cases where people disagree on whether the violation is justified or not. These are the cases in which impartial rational persons can disagree on whether they would publicly

allow such a violation. This summarizes what the moral theory says about the rules and when it is justified to violate them. I am aware that it may sound unfamiliar, but I think that you can see that it is all extremely simple and straightforward, that it simply makes explicit the procedure that you all use all the time.

THE MORAL IDEALS

Now I am going to make explicit the moral ideals. Moral ideals are those precepts that tell you to help others, to prevent the suffering of pain and disability etc. Following the moral ideals goes beyond what is required by the rules, but that does not mean that in a conflict between the rules and the ideals, one should always follow the rules. For example, everyone agrees that you can break a promise to meet someone at the movies, if it is necessary to save a life. The moral ideal of saving a life justifies your breaking this moral rule. The moral rules and moral ideals are both important, and sometimes one should take precedence over the other, sometimes the reverse. It depends on what rules and ideals are involved. It depends on the particular circumstances. But there is an important difference between the rules and the ideals. The rules tell you

not to cause an evil, e.g., do not cause pain; the ideals tell you to prevent or relieve evil being suffered, e.g., relieve pain.

You will notice that the moral rules can be obeyed with regard to all people, all of the time, equally. You can obey the moral rules impartially with regard to all people all the time, twenty-four hours a day, seven day a week, fifty-two weeks a year. You can obey them when you are alone on a desert island, in fact, you cannot help but obey them when you are alone on a desert island. The situation is really different with regard to the moral ideals. You cannot be following the moral ideals twenty-four hours a day. You have to sleep sometime, and when you are sleeping you are not following the moral ideals. This is a significant difference between the moral ideals and the moral rules, e.g., all of you reading this essay are right now obeying all of the moral rules, but none of you right now are obeying any of the moral ideals. Reading this essay may lead you to follow moral ideals, but right at this minute, you are not following them, whereas you are obeying all of the moral rules.

This difference between the rules and the ideals leads to another difference: it is appropriate to punish people for not obeying the moral rules, but it

is not appropriate to punish them for not following the moral ideals. When would you punish them? The moral rules differ from the moral ideals in that the moral rules should be enforced. When people say that morality cannot be enforced, another one of these wonderful slogans, they usually don't know what they're talking about. Everybody believes in the enforcement of the moral rules. It's only the moral ideals that should not be enforced. In fact, the moral rules are enforced by every criminal code in every civilized society in the world. There are rules against killing, causing pain, breaking promises, etc. To say that you should not enforce morality is a slogan as misleading as the slogans that I discussed at the beginning of this essay. I suspect that as much careful thought has been devoted to it as has been devoted to the Golden Rule by those who regard it as an adequate summary of morality or as a completely satisfactory moral guide.

Morality is too important to be summarized in terms of slogans. But that slogans are inadequate to summarize morality does not mean that only philosophers can properly understand what morality is. We all know what morality requires of us. It may be that we are not all that anxious to get completely clear about it.

Biography

Bernard Gert is Stone Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy at Dartmouth College. He received his Ph.D. in 1962 from Cornell University. He has been a visiting associate professor at The Johns Hopkins University, and a visiting professor at Edinburgh University and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has received the following fellowship and awards: National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship (1969-70); National Endowment for the Humanities - National Science Foundation Sustained Development Award (1980-84); Fulbright Award - Israel (1985-86).

Professor Gert is author of the following books: The Moral Rules: A New Rational Foundation for Morality (Harper Torchbook, 1975); Philosophy In Medicine: Conceptual and Ethical Issues in Medicine and Psychiatry (Oxford University Press, 1982), co-authored with Charles M. Culver; Morality: A New Justification of the Moral Rules (Oxford University Press, 1988); Man And Citizen by Thomas Hobbes, edited with introduction (Doubleday Anchor, 1972).

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HIGHER ORDER DISCRIMINATION
Monday, 7:30 p.m., 3770 Knauss
- Jan 23** **Adrian Piper**
IMPARTIALITY, COMPASSION, AND MORAL IMAGINATION
Tuesday, 1:00 p.m., 3020 Friedmann
- Feb 1** **Martin Benjamin**, Department of Philosophy, Michigan State University
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Thursday, 7:30 p.m., 3760 Knauss
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(A Panel Discussion) Moderator: **Eugene Grochowski, M.D.**, Bronson Methodist Hospital
Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., Fetzer Center

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