The Problem of Normativity
Enlightenment Legacy

- Two thoughts emerge from the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries that shape the ideas of the Twentieth Century
I. Normativity

- The gap between ‘is’ and ‘ought’
- Description and prescription
- Fact and value
Descriptive/Normative

- Purely Descriptive
- Thick
- Purely Normative

Descriptive  Normative

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Normative Terms

• Thin: good, bad, evil, right, wrong, should, ought, may, must, virtue, vice, obligation, permission, ....

• Thick: courage, integrity, generous, honest, sincere, kind, prudent, foolish, rash, lazy, ....

• Thick terms evaluate as well as describe

• All compare the way the world is with the way it ought to be
David Hume
(1711-1776)
Hume’s Ethics

• Morals have an influence on actions and affections
• Reason alone can have no such influence
• So, morality is not a conclusion of reason
• It consists of no matter of fact
David Hume

- In every system of morality I have met with I have noticed that the author proceeds for some time reasoning in the ordinary way to establish the existence of a God, or making points about human affairs, and then he suddenly surprises me by moving from propositions with the usual copula ‘is’ (or ‘is not’) to ones that are connected by ‘ought’ (or ‘ought not’).
David Hume

• This seems like a very small change, but it is highly important. For as this ‘ought’ (or ‘ought not’) expresses some new relation or affirmation, it needs to be pointed out and explained; and a reason should be given for how this new relation can be—inconceivably!—a deduction from others that are entirely different from it.
Is —> Ought

- Moral “reasoning” goes from *is* and *is not* to *ought* and *ought not*
- How can we go from *is* to *ought*?
- Reason supplies no connection
Is => Ought?

- Phase 1, Description: ... is ....
- Phase 2: ?????????????????????????
- Phase 3, Normativity: ... ought ....
Is => Ought?

- Why is cruelty wrong?
- Why is generosity good?
- No fact of the matter to be found in them
Feelings

• “. . .’tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object.”

• “An action or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? Because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind.”
Is $\Rightarrow$ Ought?

- Sentiment or feeling takes us from is to ought
- Phase 1, Description: ... is ....
- Phase 2: Feelings: That arouses a feeling of approbation or disapprobation in me....
- Phase 3, Normativity: ... ought ....
Slave of the passions

- “Reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions.”
- Moral sense: capacity for the feelings that constitute the basis for our moral judgments
II. Two-level Theories

- Surface level
- Deep level
- What happens, hidden, at the deep level determines what happens at the surface level
Two-level Theories

Surface level, to be explained

Hidden, deep level, which explains the surface level
The Scientific Revolution

- Copernicus (1473-1543)
- Tycho Brahe (1546-1601)
- Johannes Kepler (1571-1630)
- Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)
- Isaac Newton (1642-1727)
Laws of Nature

• The signal achievement of the scientific revolution was the development of a system of universal and necessary laws of nature

• $s = \frac{1}{2}gt^2$
• $\sum F = 0 \Rightarrow a = 0$
• $F = ma$

• $\sum F_{a,b} = -\sum F_{b,a}$
• $G = \frac{g m_1 m_2}{r^2}$
Laws of Nature

• Universal: apply to all situations, all times
• Necessary: describe what *must* happen
Scientific Societies

- British Royal Society (1640s; chartered 1662)
- French Royal Academy of Sciences (1650s; chartered 1666)
- Observatories at Paris (1667) and Greenwich (1675)
- Scientific journals (1665)
Enlightenment

- The Age of Reason
- We can know the nature and laws of
  - Nature
  - Human beings
  - Society
  - Ethics and politics
- Immanuel Kant: “Dare to know!”
Morality

• The Enlightenment, scientific image of man threatens to undermine morality

• But Enlightenment thinkers approach morality and politics by affirming objective, universal laws, expressing a moral ideal

• How can these be reconciled?
Enlightenment

- Voltaire (1694-1778): skepticism about anything beyond science; toleration
Liberty

- Classical Enlightenment thinkers (John Locke, Immanuel Kant) take this as a brief for liberty and respect for individual rights
- Skepticism, undermining of religious authority (Locke and Kant were Protestants) —> tolerance for differing viewpoints
Enlightenment

- Denis Diderot (1713-1784): 28 volume Encyclopedia; materialism: “This world is only a mass of molecules.”
Enlightenment

- Baron Paul d’Holbach (1723-1789): materialism, atheism
Enlightenment

Enlightenment thinkers agree about some basic theses:

- **Truth**: there are truths that are absolute, independently of any individual mind, and thus universal.
Enlightenment

- Knowledge: it is possible to have objective knowledge of some of them.
Enlightenment

- **Reason**: reason is the best way to achieve and justify such knowledge.
Enlightenment

- *Progress*: acting rationally in response to objective knowledge improves our chances of achieving our aims.
Theory of evolution

• Later in the 19th century:
• Charles Darwin (1809-1882)
  * On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859)
  * The Descent of Man (1871)
• Random mutation, natural selection
These views (materialism, evolutionary theory) are *two-level* theories

- Surface, conscious level
- Underlying, explanatory level

- Change our concept of what it is to be human
- We normally aren’t aware of the ultimate explanations of our behavior
Two-level Theories

Surface level, to be explained

Hidden, deep level, which explains the surface level
Two-level Theories

• The atomic theory of matter is a two-level theory
• There is nothing wrong with such theories
• But they generate puzzles when applied to human beings
• How do we make sense of ourselves as agents—who decide, intend, and act?
Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989)
The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.
Two Images

• For the philosopher is confronted not by one complex, many dimensional picture, the unity of which, such as it is, he must come to appreciate; but by two pictures of essentially the same order of complexity, each of which purports to be a complete picture of man-in-the-world, and which, after separate scrutiny, he must fuse into one vision. Let me refer to these two perspectives, respectively, as the manifest and the scientific images of man-in-the-world.
Stereoscopic Vision

(86) 3405-North from Sanganir Gate, up Jauhri Bazaar, a typical business street in prosperous Jevpur, India. Copyright by Underwood & Underwood.
The 'manifest' image of man-in-the-world can be characterized in two ways, which are supplementary rather than alternative. It is, first, the framework in terms of which man came to be aware of himself as man-in-the-world. It is the framework in terms of which, to use an existentialist turn of phrase, man first encountered himself—which is, of course, when he came to be man.
Objects

- The basic objects of the manifest image: “persons, animals, lower forms of life and ‘merely material’ things, like rivers and stones.”
Manifest Image

WTF... THIS BOOK HAS ABSOLUTELY NO INFORMATION ON KILLING BIRDS

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Scientific Image

• The scientific image arises out of the manifest image, by the scientific method: careful observation and measurement, hypothesis testing, experimentation

• But something new happens with the introduction of theoretical entities (atoms, microparticles, genes, etc.) that are unobservable but causally active
Macro v. micro

- Manifest image: Macro-level
- Scientific image: Micro-level
The Images

Manifest image: rationality, morality, responsibility, freedom, practical reason

Scientific image: governed by causal laws, value-free, purely determined
How, then, are we to evaluate the conflicting claims of the manifest image and the scientific image thus provisionally interpreted to constitute the true and, in principle, complete account of man-in-the-world?
Normativity

• ...the irreducibility of the personal is the irreducibility of the 'ought' to the 'is'....
The Space of Reasons

- The irreducible element of the manifest image is *normativity*
- The scientific image describes the realm of law
- But in the manifest image we conceive ourselves as bring in the space of *reasons*
- Not a different realm, but a different way of seeing the same realm
Surface:
- We think of ourselves as free
- We act for reasons
- We act rightly or wrongly, virtuously or viciously
- We take responsibility
Scientific image

- Depth:
  - We are determined by something we aren’t conscious of
  - Our reasons are mere rationalizations
  - Morality is either nonsense or reduces to something else
  - Since we are not free, we have no responsibility