

ETHICS AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

Preface (p.7)

It is tempting to think of ethics as a kind of pyramid. Its broad base consists of all our moral judgements on individuals and their characteristics and actions. On the top of it there is a very general norm like the utilitarian principle of utility or Kant's categorical imperative. A critical discussion of the pyramid model of ethics is the first leitmotif of this book. The second main theme is to sketch an alternative to the pyramid picture. My suggestion is that ethics is like an iceberg. The formulated parts of ethics are just the tip of all that which lies under the surface – all our practical knowledge. The third recurring theme is a critical discussion of what it means to be an expert in the field of ethics.

Introductory remarks (pp. 8-13)

The words *ethics* and *morals* are used in a wide sense to refer to all our conceptions of what is good and bad and right and wrong in human life. Some comments on double standards are followed by a short presentation of the classical approach to ethics: agent-centered, with an emphasis on the character and experience one must have in order to be able to act rightly; and the modern approach: action-centered, focusing on criteria for distinguishing between right and wrong acts.

What does it mean to be an expert in ethics? (pp. 14-35)

The chapter starts with a discussion of a clear case of double standards in ethics: a business man who practices one set of norms in his professional role, and another set of norms in his private life. This leads to a consideration of the limitations of moral conventionalism. The

search for alternatives to conventionalism begins with the story of how the wide-spread neglect of normative issues in mid-twentieth century philosophy was replaced some decades ago with a new interest in medical ethics, environmental questions, the moral problems of modern war-fare and so on. The chapter ends with reflections on the traditional over-emphasis on theoretical knowledge at the expense of the existing practical knowledge in the professions and other walks of life.

Conventional morality and critical ethics (pp. 36-43)

The field of ethics is often looked upon as a complex of norms and values. The first point of this chapter is to remind the reader of some other aspects of ethics: the crucial role of examples, experience and situational understanding in ethics. The second main point of the chapter is to remind the reader of the existence of a core of moral understanding which is a precondition for all critical ethical thinking. The belief that everything in ethics stands in need of rational argumentation rests on a mistake.

Ethics and practical knowledge (pp. 44-60)

Ethics was long regarded as a science. The situation changed dramatically when the classical conception of science as necessary propositions about unchangeable circumstances was replaced by the modern conception of science as systematic empirical research. Ethics, after all, is not concerned with how it is but with how it ought to be. In the mid-twentieth century, normative ethics was often regarded as a matter of emotions far removed from rational inquiry. But new technologies in medicine made it necessary to reconsider the established professional ethics in that field, and the successful fusion of conceptual analysis and received medical ethics became a model for the whole field of practical ethics. At about the same time, three research centres devoted to the neglected area of practical knowledge grew up in Sweden and Norway. The chapter traces the development of the new research subject practical knowledge in some detail with an emphasis on its potential for the study of ethics. The approach which has been developed at the University of Nordland in Bodø, Norway, is seen as a particularly promising addition to the traditional repertory of ethical studies.

The deductive ideal (pp. 61-75)

There are similarities between deductive arguments, in which the conclusion spells out what is implicit in the premisses, and ethical reasoning from general norms to particular cases. But there are also important differences. Ethical concepts have to be open, in a certain sense of that word, and the use of general norms requires familiarity with the sets of cases which determine the meaning of the norms. That is why the application of ethical norms to particular situations requires much more than the ability to carry out logical deductions. Analogical thinking in the sense of comparisons with other relevant cases plays a central role in legal and ethical contexts and all other fields of culture.

The remarkable elasticity of utilitarianism (pp. 76-79)

A good many philosophers have felt that utilitarianism provides a suitable framework for thinking about ethical issues. The elasticity of that framework is also its weakness. In this short paper it is suggested that the remarkable elasticity of utilitarianism depends upon a

fuzzy conception of consequences, including the unwarranted idea that the value of the consequences of our actions can always be estimated without any influence from the ethical convictions we already have.

Kant and the Utilitarians (pp. 80-97)

Kantian ethics and utilitarianism are often presented as rival ethical theories which sometimes lead to different solutions to practical ethical problems. This paper argues that this rests on a failure to grasp the differences between the two approaches. All reasonable people take both human dignity and welfare into account in everyday life, but Kantians and utilitarians handle such matters very differently on the analytical level. Kant's ethics is a two-step procedure: thought-experiments followed by pragmatic considerations. In the utilitarian tradition, this is reduced to considerations of the likelihood of the welfare consequences of our action alternatives.

From "Is" to "Ought"? (pp. 98-115)

Can statements about how it ought to be be derived from statements about how it is? Can evaluations be inferred from descriptions? Questions of that magnitude are best discussed by going through some examples in some detail, which is what happens in this paper. It is suggested that it might be illuminating to view the passage from descriptions to norms and evaluations less in the light of the deductive pattern and more in the light of commitments embedded in social institutions. The idea that there is a problem concerning the relations of descriptions, evaluations and norms which can be solved once and for all can then be replaced with the never-ending task of trying to better our understanding of our own roles in the practices which form our lives.

Understanding and development (pp. 116-128)

In this contribution to the philosophy of development, three positions are outlined and compared to each other – *understanding without development*, *development without understanding*, and *development through understanding*.

The committed expert (pp. 129-134)

F.W. Taylor, the founder of working life studies, was a firm believer in scientific objectivity. His conception of science can be described as a fusion of the classical emphasis on self-evident first principles and science in the sense of empirical research. His objectivistic claims stand in sharp contrast to Socrates and his modern followers, the committed experts devoted to the task of making the persons concerned more able to speak for themselves.

Two irreconcilable traditions (pp. 135-151)

When the architect Jerker Lundequist defended his doctoral dissertation on design theory at the Royal Technological Institute in Stockholm in 1983, the author of the present chapter played the role of the opponent. The opponent was equally impressed with the dissertation writer's vigorous search for alternatives to the dominating paradigms in that field and the

difficulty of the task of breaking out of a tradition to which one is firmly tied. Lundequist's attempt to reconcile Wittgenstein's later philosophy with the approach suggested by Herbert Simon testifies to the strength of the dominating tradition. To illustrate the point, his understanding of rule-following, planning and models is dealt with in some detail.

On the actor's practical knowledge (pp. 152-159)

Maria Johansson's essay on the actor's practical knowledge (2012) is a good demonstration of the virtues of the new Scandinavian approach to practical knowledge. Starting off as a child actor in a popular Swedish television series, she can look back at a long career as an actor and director. Unlike most researchers in theatre studies, she writes about acting from an insider's point of view, supplementing the analysis of her own professional experience with talks in a reference group consisting of six colleagues. Inspired by Aristotle's approach to practical knowledge, there is an emphasis on the ethics of the acting profession (courage, loyalty, trust and so on). There is also an original chapter on the role of intuition, inspired by philosopher Hans Larsson's classical analysis of that phenomenon. Johansson aptly describes her method as searching for *multifaceted pictures* of intuition, trust and so forth.