SOURCE OF MORAL KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract:

> One cannot deny the fact that we all have some understanding of moral issues. There is a sense that every one of us has regarding right and wrong, good and bad, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. This moral understanding can be in the form of some vague idea, notion, or simply a gut feeling. No matter who the person is, from which culture or community the person belongs to, everybody faces a moral quandary sometime or other in one's life. Essentially, this assumes that a fundamental sense of right or wrong exists. There seems to be some consensus about what is right and what is wrong when it comes to actions. Some actions, for instance, torturing babies just for fun, killing an innocent person, raping, etc. are exemplars of morally wrong and culpable actions. Assisting a person in need, giving to famine relief, etc. on the other hand are examples of morally right and praiseworthy actions. This essay is an attempt to undertake an inquiry into the source of moral knowledge. Three sources, experience, reason, and intuition have been identified. Views of philosophers like G.E Moore, WD Ross, Immanuel Kant, JS Mill, Plato, Samuel Clarke, Aristotle, Hume, and Anthony Ashley Cooper have been discussed to gain clarity about the issue.

Keywords: Source, Knowledge, reason, experience, intuition

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1.　Introduction

Moral epistemology has been a matter of concern for centuries, and the question pertaining to the source of moral knowledge is one of the most significant and intriguing questions in the domain of moral epistemology which has perturbed philosophers as well as the commoner. There are different senses in which 'moral knowledge' is generally understood. For instance, A.J. Ayer is of the opinion that there are four senses in which one can understand moral knowledge. As a starting point, it is understood as knowledge of propositions expressing definitions of ethical terms or judgments about their validity. Furthermore, moral knowledge involves understanding the propositions relating to moral phenomena experience and their causes. Thirdly, it can be understood as knowledge of exhortations to moral virtue. Lastly, moral knowledge can be understood as knowledge of moral judgments. (A.J Ayer, 1952,103). According to A.J Ayer, it is only the first sense (which comprises definitions of ethical terms) that can be considered philosophically relevant because it is only this sense that constitutes ethical philosophy. Other senses in which moral knowledge is understood do not constitute ethical philosophy but rather constitute the science of psychology or sociology.

The significant question raised by Ayer in this context concerns the feasibility of reducing ethical statements to empirical statements. The answer which philosophers give in response to this question is relevant for determining the source of moral knowledge. Statements of ethical value can, according to subjectivists and utilitarians, be translated into empirical fact. In the viewpoint of subjectivists such as Hume, actions are right, and ends are good according to the feelings or emotions of approval that certain individuals or groups have towards them. Utilitarians like J.S Mill and Bentham define rightness and goodness in terms of utility, pleasure, or happiness, which results from them. Utility theory holds that good is that which maximizes happiness for most people. Moral knowledge is derived from experience, according to these philosophers, who reduce ethical terms to empirical facts. Moral sentimentalists like Anthony Ashley Cooper also consider experience to be the source of moral knowledge.

Non-naturalist G.E. Moore argued that both utilitarian and subjectivist positions (naturalisms) are wrong due to the naturalistic fallacy that they commit and the open question argument. Among Moore's contentions is that it is illogical to derive good as a normative property from pleasure or happiness as a natural property. Moore termed this fallacy 'naturalistic fallacy'. The concept of 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is', since any attempt to define evaluative and normative properties in terms of natural properties would leave room for interpretation. A naturalistic view can be true in two different ways, according to Moore. To begin with, naturalism is true if moral terms like 'good' has the same meaning as simple terms like 'pleasant' that pick out naturalistic property. Furthermore, naturalism can be true if the concept of 'good' refers to a complex naturalistic term, such as 'is the object of your desire'. Moore was of the view that both these possibilities can be refuted if one takes cognizance of the following form of argument:

In considering the question: "Is pleasure pleasant?" it may very well be said that when one understands this question, one will no doubt answer yes to it. In contrast, one can ask the question: 'Is pleasure good? '. In spite of the fact that one understands this question perfectly well, one still doubts whether it is answered correctly. The question of whether pleasure is always good is debatable.   In Moore's view, good isn't the same as pleasant on account of the open nature of the question. It is evident that anyone considering whether pleasure is good is not just wondering whether it is pleasant. Good and yellow are simple concepts, according to Moore, and as such cannot be defined. A proposition asserting what is intrinsically good cannot be proved nor disproven, according to Moore, because it is inherently good. According to intuitionists like G.E Moore, the source of moral knowledge is intuition. There are many objections advanced against intuitionism. Critics of intuitionism argue that intuitions lack an authoritative foundation in the sense that they cannot give an objective assessment of right and wrong. Further, when two intuitions conflict with one another then it becomes difficult to adjudicate and decide what to do. In her paper. In "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect", Phillipa Foot have enunciated thought experiments in which two intuition are seen to come in conflict with each other. In one of the thought experiments, "the axe murderer" thought experiment, one is to

imagine a situation in which, when one answers the door, one finds an axe-wielding man who has come with the intention to kill and is asking for a friend who is inside the house. This scenario puts the moral intuition that 'Lies are always wrong' at odds with another moral intuition, the belief that innocent life should be protected. The question that can be raised here is, what should the person answering the door do? Should she tell the axe-wielding man the truth and let her friend be killed or should she lie to the axe-wielding man and save her friend's life? (Foot, 1967). This is one of the challenges which the theory of intuitionism needs to answer.

When deciding about the source of moral knowledge, philosophers can also take the rationalist position by saying that reason provides it. In terms of reason, one can either describe moral knowledge as the outcome of deductive or inductive reasoning by an agent or as the knowledge that is derived from the faculty of reason and is apriori. Here, it is worth mentioning that there cannot be rigid watertight compartmentalization between reason as a process or reason as a faculty. Some philosophers like Kant and Samuel Clarke consider both faculty of reason as well as reasoning process as the source of moral knowledge

Philosophers may therefore approach the question of how moral knowledge is derived differently depending on the position they take regarding morality. There are different approaches to the origin of moral knowledge, which are discussed in this article.

2. Insight into moral knowledge derived from experience

Morality is concerned with action, and this cannot be denied. All our actions happen in the empirical domain. There are some voluntary actions that are not moral. There are yet some voluntary actions that are moral. Consequently, the question arises: How does the experience give rise to morality?

In the history of philosophy, there have been many philosophers who have contended that moral knowledge is closely tied to natural facts and has its source in experience. According to Aristotle, moral philosophy aims to lead human beings to the 'good life'. For Aristotle, 'good' is what leads to human flourishing and happiness. It is inherent in human nature to seek to 'live well'. When analyzing a plant or animal's needs, one can determine whether those needs are

being met in abundance, and can have an idea of what it takes to 'flourish'. Living involves making choices and taking actions as well as maintaining relationships with others and maintaining a healthy mental state. Human desire, need, and reasoning abilities are central to Aristotle's view of moral truth. Aristotle also believed that experience is the source of our knowledge. He, however, pointed out that our newly acquired knowledge should be further evaluated and validated by the use of abstract reasoning.

David Hume was another influential philosopher who regarded human nature as the source of moral knowledge. *It is clear that Hume's empiricist approach can be seen in his A Treatise on Human Nature, especially his books two and three, and in his Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751).* He has emphasized many times in his writings that reason cannot provide moral knowledge. One of Hume's famous arguments in this regard is as follows:

"All claims that can be known by reason are either empirical matters of fact or conceptual truths (such as "all bachelors are unmarried," or "all cubes have six sides").

Moral claims do not represent empirical matters of fact.

Moral claims do not represent conceptual truths.

Therefore, reason cannot give us moral knowledge." (Landau, Russ Shafer(Ed.) 2007, 4)

Based on the empiricist principle that the mind is passive, Hume argues that reason cannot prevent or generate affection or action by itself. The basis of morality cannot be logically based on reason because it is about actions and affections. Reason can influence our behavior in only two ways, in a philosophical sense. In the first place, reason can ignite passion by informing us that something exists that is worthy of our passion. In addition, the reason is able to provide us with a method of exerting any passion, by teaching us how causes and effects are related. It is an intellectual failure rather than a moral one if reason fails in either of these areas by mistakenly choosing the wrong means or mistaking one unpleasant object for another. Hume also maintained a distinction between facts and values. His belief was that one could not rely on premises about what was or was not true to draw conclusions about what ought or ought not to be true.

Rather than being derived from reason, moral distinctions are derived from what Hume calls the "moral sense." One of Hume's very famous sayings is "reason is and ought only to be, the slave of passion" (Hume, David, Book I, Section: 3.1,1975)   Description of action, character, or sentiment as good or bad; as virtuous or vicious, depends on the pleasure or pain of a particular kind which the action, character or sentiment evokes. According to Hume, moral distinctions are determined more by man's natural sentiments than his reason. Pleasant sentiments demonstrate traits that are useful, such as prudence, courage, kindness, and honesty. (Hume, David, 1998, 160) We acknowledge and applaud these virtues for their contribution to society. (David Hume, 1998, 109). Nevertheless, Hume was well aware that this does not apply to all pleasures and pains. It is impossible to attribute moral judgment to the pleasure of drinking good wine, for example. According to Hume, it is "only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil" (Hume, David, Book III, Part I, Sec. 2,1975).

As a final point, Hume argues that we should not embrace moral relativism because moral distinctions are grounded in our sentiments/feelings. A central aspect of Hume's moral theory is the benevolent nature of humans, which he defends against the idea of self-love. In self-love or psychological egoism, the ultimate concern for one's own happiness and preservation is taken into account for every moral sentiment." (David Hume, 1998, 109). A social virtue or virtues are defined based on whether they are useful to the individual or to society, according to Hume's moral theory. Our approval of these virtues and concern for society's welfare, however, are motivated by altruism. Humanity and sympathy are deeply ingrained in all our sentiments. (David Hume, 1998, 117) The love of mankind motivates a man to value and praise what is beneficial to him and others. Considering the importance of desires and aversions in moral evaluation, Alan Goldman argues that Hume's theory implies that desires and aversions are the main motivating forces for moral behavior. (Alan H. Goldman, 1988, 55).

There have been other moral sentimentalists besides Hume, such as the third Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson, who

believed that moral knowledge derives from sentiments.An analogy is often drawn between beauty and morality by moral sentimentalists to explain their position. Those who are moral sentimentalists believe that when we observe something beautiful, such as a natural object or a work of art, we are inclined to be positive about the thing. In the same way, when we believe someone is virtuous, we are also inclined to be positive about them. Sentimentalism sees sentiments as essential aspects of morality and aesthetics, which are experienced when evaluating an object in an informed, reflective, and unbiased manner.

It may be helpful to understand how sentimentalists approach the question of where moral knowledge comes from by considering the moral sentimentalist theory of Anthony Ashley Cooper. The third Earl of Shaftesbury, best known as Anthony Ashley Cooper, was arguably the most influential moral sentimentalist of his age. It was in his essay "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" that he introduced the concept of moral sense. It is the "affection" behind the action that inspires moral evaluation according to Shaftesbury. In the view of Anthony Ashley Cooper, such affections can be re-enacted into a second-order affection as a result of further reflection. Anthony Ashley Cooper writes:

> There are other kinds of creatures capable of forming general notions about things, besides those whose appearances are evident to the senses. Through reflection, the actions themselves, as well as affections like kindness, gratitude, and pity, come to be Objects. Having already felt an affection, this reflected sense of liking or disliking then causes a new liking or dislike to emerge. (Shaftesbury, 1699–1714: 16)

This sense of right or wrong is defined by Ashley Cooper as a second-order liking, which explains and perhaps consists of moral approval. This sense is either innate or natural, and can only be displaced by something contrary to our habit or custom (Shaftesbury, 1699–1714: 25), although occasionally "rage, lust, or any other counteractive passion" can do the trick (Shaftesbury, 1699–1714: 35). According to Shaftesbury, moral sense favors harmonious and beautiful motives that encourage good behavior, such as personal or public affections of the whole system of rational creatures. Also, subordinate self-interests are essential, since society suffers when

individuals fail to defend or protect themselves. Virtuous acts are not only about doing the right thing, but also about exercising moral sense and acting for the sake of something commendable and honest (Shaftesbury, 1699–1714: 18). However, Ashley Cooper does not detail how right and wrong work or how they can guide behavior. In general, moral sentimentalists compare beauty to morality. Similarly, Ashley Cooper has drawn a comparison in one of his works:

> As with ordinary bodies or common sense objects, mental or moral subjects exhibit the same characteristics. Depending on the measures, arrangements, and dispositions of the separate parts, their shapes, motions, colors, and proportions will result in either beauty or deformity. The regularity or irregularity of a subject's behavior or action is of necessity likely to cause an apparent difference in our understanding of them. (Shaftesbury, 1999, 172)

As a criticism against moral sentimentalists, moral rationalists argue that since sentiments are relative and vary, they cannot be considered to be a ground of morality which is considered to be objective and universal. Sentimentalists respond to this criticism by arguing that unbiased, informed, reflective consideration of a situation will not change the sentiment a person experiences. It is sentimentalists' view that informed, reflective, and unbiased sentiments are consistent and unbiased and can serve as the basis for moral judgments because of their persistence and constancy. In addition, moral sentimentalists have been criticized for refusing to incorporate uniformity into moral knowledge, even though their sentiments are informed, reflective, and unbiased. There are some moral principles that are invariable, such as the principle that murdering innocents is wrong. A sentimentalist will counter by pointing out that certain aesthetic judgments are just as widely accepted as moral judgments.

Experience, according to philosophers such as David Hume and other moral sentimentalists, is crucial in acquiring moral knowledge, and lack of experience can be detrimental. In this context, Peter Railton has argued that the breadth of our experiences can enable us to gain valuable moral insights, which hitherto would have been unknown and we would have been impoverished, had we not had those experiences. Further, it has been argued by Railton, that at a

collective level, it is the experiences of vivid groups which lead to moral progress which further leads to the formation of civilization. Peter Railton remarks, "We are quite sure that we have gained moral knowledge from experience — both as individuals and as a society — but not sure we can explain exactly how" (Railton, 1986, 61).

In addition to its evidential role in gaining moral knowledge, Sara McGrath believes that experience is capable of also serving an enabling role since experience can sometimes be an essential factor in putting a person in a position where moral knowledge can be acquired. For the acquisition of various moral concepts, experience may be necessary. In order to acquire the concept that murdering an innocent person is wrong, a sensory experience or encounter may be necessary. Actual events can also affect one's moral judgment by motivating one to make moral judgments he would not otherwise make. Experience is important in acquiring moral concepts, but it also plays a psychological role in motivating moral judgments. It is possible to conclude that a particular form of execution is morally wrong, for instance, after witnessing it. Einstein was a staunch pacifist before Nazism came to power in Germany, believing that force cannot be justified under any circumstances. As Nazism rose in power, Einstein's perspective changed and he became convinced that such force was justified at least in some cases. (Rowe & Schulmann (Ed.), 2007) In a letter, he clarified his stance: "there are circumstances in which in my opinion, it is necessary to use force…such a case would be when I face an opponent whose unconditional aim is to destroy me and my people" (Quoted in Rowe &Schulmann). For argumentation purposes, we can suppose Einstein's absolutism was false. However, his later view, that violence can be tolerated under certain conditions was true and something he knew, so his view of violence was the truth. The fact is that Einstein might never have come to realize this if he had not lived through the Nazi era; if that is the case, then his experience of the Holocaust influenced his perspective on the world.

Based on Peacocke's observations:

We may formulate...principles and distinctions we would never have considered otherwise by analyzing historical data and current situations. Moral emotions follow the same logic. We may reach moral conclusions we might not otherwise have reached because of

our moral indignation or sudden guilt over an act we have committed. (Peacocke, 2004, 526)

3. **Moral knowledge from intuition**

The idea that moral intuition plays a vital role in moral knowledge was first developed by philosophers like Thomas Reid, Francis Hutcheson, and Anthony Shaftsbury. The revival of intuitionism in the 20th century was credited mainly to philosophers such as H. A. Prichard, W. D. Ross and Moore. Philosophers like these rejected the ethical naturalism of subjectivists and utilitarians, contending that moral knowledge is derived from intuition.

 If we discuss philosophers who believe intuition is a source of knowledge, it becomes incumbent to ask what intuition is in the first place. A person's intuition is generally regarded as their moral conscience, which helps them distinguish right from wrong. Philosophers have given the following definitions of intuition:

> Some power of immediate perception of the human mind. A power of immediately perceiving right and wrong. A judgment that is not made on the basis of some kind of explicit reasoning process that a person can conceivably observe….The judgment flows spontaneously from the situations that engender them, rather than from any process of explicit reasoning.

> We come to recognize (the obligation) immediately or directly…This apprehension is immediate, in precisely the sense in which mathematical apprehension is immediate…..the fact apprehended is self-evident (Smythe & Evans, 2007, 234).

When philosophers of religion or theologians discuss intuition as the source of moral knowledge, they tend to give it religious connotations. Intuition in this context has been considered to have its ultimate source in God or some form of divinity. Though it might be significant to study the religious connotation of intuition in other fields of study, in my philosophical endeavor, I will constrain myself from delving into such a notion of intuition which somehow gets

colored by religious connotation. Throughout what follows, I aim to reflect on and explore the moral intuitionist theory of W. D. Ross and G.E Moore, its most influential proponents.

3.1 G.E. Moore's moral intuitionism

One can come across many philosophers who contend that morality is different from the factual state of affairs, and one cannot derive 'ought' from' is'. G.E. Moore can be said to be a pioneer in exemplifying the fact/value divide through his theory of intuitionism. An important point that can be raised here is that if nature and morality are entirely distinct and heterogeneous, there can be no common factor uniting them. Then in that case moral knowledge will be sui generis, a knowledge of its own kind, whereby approaching moral knowledge via empirical knowledge will not be appropriate. In this context, philosophers like Moore probably developed the theory of intuitionism.

In Principia Ethica, Moore argues that the concept of "good" refers to an indefinable, unassailable property only known through direct experience. According to Moore, the word 'good' is similar to the word 'yellow,' but different from the word 'horse'. The concept of the word 'yellow' is simple and unanalysable. The meaning of this word can only be understood through familiarity with the color. It is possible to identify yellow and know what it is, but it is not possible to define it. A horse, on the other hand, can be defined as having four legs, a flowing tail, etc. Horses do not necessarily need to be seen to understand what the word means. A concept like 'good' can be known but not defined, just like the concept of yellow. The idea of good, according to Moore, cannot be further broken down into simpler ideas; it stands on its own. Good, according to Moore, is a simple non-natural quality. To define good in terms of its natural property is to commit the so-called "naturalistic fallacy". It was because of his conception of 'good' as unanalyzable and indefinable that Moore got labeled as an intuitionist.

Moore, in his works, acknowledges that he is a moral intuitionist. He, however, declares that his intuitionist theory differs from other philosophers' intuitionist theories. As Moore writes in the preface of

his masterpiece, Principia Ethica, ".....I beg it may be noticed that I am not an 'Intuitionist', in the ordinary sense of the term". (Preface x, 1960). Two aspects to Moore's intuitionism differ from what he refers to as 'intuitionism proper' or the common doctrine of intuitionism. Intuitionists hold that propositions about what ought to be done and what ought to exist are known intuitively and cannot be disproved or proved. In Moore's intuitionism, however, propositions asserting what ought to exist are the only propositions that are considered to be known through intuition and are incapable of proof or disproof; propositions asserting what kind of action ought to be done are causal generalizations whose truth and falsity is determined via empirical investigation. Moore believed that propositions asserting what ought to be done are capable of proof and disproof and are, therefore, not intuitions. Secondly, when intuitionism proper proclaims that ethical propositions are intuitions, they also imply that such ethical propositions are cognized in a particular manner by involving the exercise of a special faculty; but when Moore proclaims ethical propositions or propositions of intrinsic value as intuitions, what he asserts merely is that propositions of intrinsic value are incapable of any kind of proof or disproof. An ethical proposition or an intrinsically valuable proposition, in Moore's view, is incapable of any kind of proof or disproof. The truth of these propositions can be discovered without inference from other propositions, as they are self-evident by themselves.

According to Moore, intuitionism is connected to his method of isolation, which he describes as a means of discerning things' intrinsic value and a pre-requisite for discerning moral truths or falsities. According to Moore, intuitions are not infallible. When faced with a dilemma about the truth of a particular proposition of intrinsic value, one should use the method of isolation. Method of isolation consists of holding a particular state of affairs before one's mind and considering the value that could be attached to it if it existed in absolute isolation. This process would lead to the performance of an act of intuition or reflective judgment, which would further lead to the instant apprehension of the truth of the proposition, asserting the inherent goodness or badness of the considered state of affairs. (1960, 180). Using the method of isolation, Moore believed all those who arrive at the same conclusion about

propositions with intrinsic value would reach the same conclusion about their truth or falsity.

According to Moore, a fundamental proposition of ethics is similar to the fundamental and ultimate propositions of empiricist beliefs, which are considered axiomatic. In both cases, propositions are known non-inferentially and are incapable of proof or disproof.

In his ethical writings, Moore provides insight into our understanding of propositions asserting the intrinsic value of things. Moore, however, has provided no clear idea of how we come to know about the idea or property signified by the term 'good'. There does not seem to be any question about how we acquire knowledge about goodness. We all seem to know what goodness is all the time. Moore writes: "Everybody is constantly aware of this notion (denoted by 'good', although he may never become aware at all that it is different from other notions of which he is also aware." (1960, 17) Elsewhere he says: "It seems self-evident that our duty is to do what will produce the best effect upon the whole, no matter how bad the effects upon ourselves may be and no matter how much we ourselves lose by it" (1960, 143). Moore seems to be giving the impression that moral knowledge is a form of immediate knowledge known intuitively.

3.2 W.D. Ross's Intuitionism

W.D. Ross's moral theory, as outlined in The Right and The Good, was a major contributor to intuitionism. According to Ross, a mature, morally competent, clear-headed, and unbiased person intuitively knows what is good. The following are the prima facie duties Ross outlines in his works: (a) The duty pertaining to fidelity involves keeping promises and the act of truth-telling (b) The duty pertaining to reparation means righting the wrong we have caused others, (c) The duty of gratitude, which recognizes the services of others, (d) The duty of justice, (e) The duty pertaining to beneficence, (f) The duty pertaining to self-improvement means improving the virtue of intelligence, and the duty of nonmaleficence means avoiding or preventing others from harm. (Ross, 1973, 21).

Ross does not rank the above-mentioned prima facie duties in order of importance. Based on Ross's perspective, a mature person can intuitively discern that these prima facie duties are true and follow them appropriately according to the circumstances. There are a

number of prima facie duties discussed by Ross which represent general moral principles. According to Ross, prima facie duties differ from final duties. At the end of the day, one's final duty is his or her moral duty, i.e., the duty one should carry out. The prima facie duties can sometimes conflict with one another, resulting in only one prima facie duty as the final duty. An important question that can be raised here is how a person comes to know that a particular duty is his /her prima facie duty. According to Ross, one can know about one's prima facie duty merely based on one's intuition. The moral principles Ross describes are self-evident; when they are understood, they become immediately apparent. Ross compares moral principles to axioms in mathematics. If a person denies that two plus two equals four, then the person probably has not understood the proposition 'Two plus two equals four.' Similarly, if a person denies that it is prima facie wrong to lie, it is likely that they have not understood this proposition.

There are several essential differences between Ross' intuitionism and that of Moore's. The non-natural property of goodness is intuitive for Moore. As Ross does not accept the existence of non-natural properties, moral intuition cannot be applied to them. Moral intuition serves two purposes, according to Ross. In the first place, intuitions are used to determine prima facie duties. The moral order the prima facie duties express, which is determined by intuition, forms part of the fundamental structure of the universe, as is the axioms of geometry, according to Ross. Underlying prima facie duties are moral principles that are as certain and self-evident as mathematical axioms are. According to Ross, moral principles are not evident from the moment we are born. Moral principles are analogous to mathematical axioms. Those who are mature in thought and who give it enough time will be able to discern moral principles. It is through contemplation of particular cases that an agent can visualize the self-evidence of general principles. It is only when we mature that we see, at least prima facie, that keeping all promises makes our acts right and that it is necessary to keep all promises.

As Ross explains, the second use of intuition is to decide what course of action to take when prima facie duties contradict each other. If the duty pertaining to non-maleficence conflicted with the duty

pertaining to beneficence or keeping promises, what should we do? Ross believes that one should apply one's intuition to the particular case whenever there is a conflict… There must be a thorough examination of all the case details, plus an analysis of the interactions between the various prima facie duties. Choosing the right answer is not a mechanical process. One merely needs to rely on one's intuition.

Moore uses the method of absolute isolation to decide about the things which have intrinsic value. On similar lines, Ross engages in thought experiments of simple kinds. One of the thought experiments enunciated by Ross is as follows: Taking all other things equal, the fulfilment of a promise would result in 1000 units of good for John while breaking the promise and doing something else would produce 1,001 units of good for Sue. According to Ross, it would not be self-evident to think that good should be done for Sue here. Only in the case of much greater disparity can the breaking of a promise be considered. Through thought experiments, thus, one can intuitively have moral knowledge, and one can also decide about the right course of action.

According to Ross, intuitions, which provide moral knowledge, are not infallible. The infallibility of moral intuition is also rejected by Ross, as it is by Moore. In the same way that one comes to reject a sense perception when it conflicts with another sense perception, Ross believed that one can reject an intuition when it conflicts with another intuition. A critique of intuitions derived from philosophical theorizing is unlikely, in Ross' view. In Ross' view, any theorizing can contribute to our conceptualization of moral knowledge, but this role is limited in scope. Ross contends that no theory is likely to be as evident as our most deeply held moral convictions. Ross writes:

> Science relies on sense perceptions as data, and well-educated, thoughtful people rely on moral convictions as data. Both the former and the former have to be rejected for being illusory; however, the former must be rejected if it conflicts with more accurate sense perceptions, and the latter must be rejected if it conflicts with other convictions that stand up better to reflection. Moral convictions, developed over many generations through moral reflection, are a very delicate source of moral distinction, and theorists cannot treat them without respect. A person's moral

awareness must serve as the foundation for his moral decisions, though he must compare them first and eliminate any contradictions. (1973, 41)

One cannot deny that intuition has been considered the source of moral knowledge by many thinkers and has been a favored opinion amongst both classical and contemporary philosophers. Intuitionism, however, has some obvious problems, according to critics. Intuitionism, for instance, has failed to agree on what the moral good is, which supposedly is self-evident. In his teleological view, Moore emphasizes the promotion of happiness and the appreciation of beauty. Ross, however, emphasizes prima facie duties. Another problem with intuitions is that one cannot be sure whether one's intuitions are correct. Further, there is no clarity about the nature of intuitions. Critics question whether intuitions are a gut feeling or the voice of God. It is further argued that people who intuit and use reason may arrive at different conclusions and that it is difficult to resolve these disagreements. A logical positivist holds that individuals' intuitions are meaningless since they cannot be tested.

4. Moral knowledge derived from reason

Moral knowledge has been attributed to reason by many philosophers throughout history. The reason is generally defined as the capacity to make sense of things consciously, apply logic to formulate principles, establish and verifying facts, and change or justify practices, and beliefs based on existing or new information. In moral philosophy, reason has been used extensively to arrive at moral principles or to make moral judgments. While discussing reason as the source of knowledge, one needs to be clear about the sense in which reason is used as a source of moral knowledge. Reason can either signify the process of reasoning, or it can signify one's rational faculty. One can either say that moral knowledge is the result of a discursive reasoning process which can be either deductive or inductive or, one can say that moral knowledge is discovered by the agent's faculty of reason.

4.1 Reasoning process as the source of knowledge

The concept of moral reasoning refers to individual or collective practical reasoning regarding what is morally right for an individual or group of people. Moral reasoning aims to arrive at moral truth. Moral reasoning can thus be considered one of the sources of moral knowledge. In the scientific domain, reasoning is used to arrive at scientific principles or to test scientific hypotheses and theories. Analogous to the scientific domain, the method of reasoning is used in the domain of moral philosophy either to arrive at general moral principles or to make specific moral judgments. One can generally identify two kinds of reasoning: deductive and inductive.

In logic, deductive reasoning is considered a fundamental form of valid reasoning. Deductive reasoning involves starting with a general statement or hypothesis and then evaluating the various possibilities to arrive at a specific, logical conclusion. Deduction is used in the scientific method by applying hypotheses and theories to specific cases... Using deductive reasoning, one can draw moral judgments from general moral principles. In the moral domain, the following argument can be considered an example of deductive reasoning:

Premise 1: Any act of racial genocide is morally wrong

Premise 2: The Nazi extermination of racial minorities during World War II was an act of racial genocide.

Conclusion: The Nazi extermination of racial minorities during World War II was morally wrong.

In contrast to deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning begins with specific observations and makes broad generalizations based on specific observations. The method of inductive reasoning is used quite extensively in the domain of science to formulate hypotheses and theories. Even if all premises are true, inductive reasoning can lead to incorrect conclusions. A logical argument, such as "Shyam is an uncle", and "Shyam is bald." is an inductive argument. There is no logical connection between the premises and the conclusion of an inductive argument. Inductive reasoning in the domain of morality consists in beginning with an issue and then observing various examples and situations in which the issue is raised. Then an attempt is made to formulate a moral principle that is both useful and correct

for resolving the issue in question. For instance, after observing all the examples and situations in which killing occurs, one can formulate the moral principle 'Killing of innocent creatures is morally wrong'.

If one reflects on the work of some of the pioneer moral philosophers like Immanuel Kant and J.S. Mill, then it will not be difficult to see how these philosophers have employed reasoning methodology in their moral philosophy and how moral knowledge can be considered to have its source in moral reasoning.

Reflection on Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy clearly indicates that Kant employed the method of deductive reasoning in his moral philosophy. For Kant, the source of moral knowledge (morality) cannot be external to the agent and must lie within the rational moral agent, which is the supreme moral law or principle. In Kant's view, the moral law is to act in accordance with practical reason. "Categorical Imperatives" issued by practical reason command us to obey them, according to Kant. In Kant's categorical imperative, there are three formulations:

1. Principle of Universalizability, 2. Humanity as an end in itself principle, and 3. Principle of the Kingdom of the End. Essentially, the first formulation of the categorical imperative states: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction". The second formulation states: Always treat humanity as an end, not just as a means, whether it is in your own person or another's. As a final formulation, Kant states: "Therefore, every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends" (Kant, 1785)

In Kant's view, morality's ultimate principle can guide people to make the right decisions in every situation. There is only one pertinent aspect of moral law: it is general in that it has the formal property of universalizability, which means it can apply to any moral agent at any time. Based on Kant's discussion of moral concepts, he derived a preliminary statement about moral obligations. Kant defined right action as those that practical reason would will as a universal rule.

According to Kant, the three formulations of categorical imperative provide a concrete, practical method for evaluating particular human actions of several varieties. Therefore, moral knowledge about what is good, what is the proper course of action in a particular situation, and what is an agent's duty in a particular situation is ultimately derived from the moral law. Our fundamental duty, according to Kant, is thus the command of reason, a categorical imperative; all specific duties are applications of this fundamental duty. From Kant's moral law, we understand that lying or stealing is immoral, and acts of charity or compassion are moral. Only actions embodying the maxim that can be willed to be universally valid are moral.

Unlike Immanuel Kant, who relied on deductive reasoning to arrive at moral knowledge, John Stuart Mill relied on inductive reasoning. He also believed in the 'Greatest Happiness Principle' or utility. A person's actions are right if they promote the greatest happiness for the most significant number while they are wrong if the reverse is true. In Mill's view, the 'Greatest Happiness Principle' can be used to resolve moral disagreements and value conflicts. Three stages are involved in Mill's proof of the 'Greatest Happiness Principle'.

Mill begins by stating that visible objects can only be proved by real people seeing them. The only evidence that a sound is audible comes from people hearing it, as do the other sources of our experience. The only evidence that anything is desirable comes from people's actual desire for it (Mill, 1871).

In the second stage, Mill claims that individual happiness is good for each individual, while general happiness is good for the collective (Mill, 1871).

In the third and last stage, Mill asserts that actions should and do aim for general happiness.

It is possible to formulate Mill's utilitarian principle this way:

> Happiness is desired by almost all human beings
>
> Each person's happiness contributes to the morality of that society
>
> Therefore, the highest principle of morality is happiness.

It can very well be argued from the above-mentioned reasoning that it is through inductive reasoning that Mill and other utilitarians arrive at the 'Greatest Good Principle' or the principle of morality they hold to be the highest. Mill's proof for utility consists in inferring a general principle of utility from specific observations about the majority of people.

4.2 Moral knowledge derived from the faculty of 'reason'

In the previous section, we discussed how moral knowledge derives from reasoning. Some moral philosophers, however, are of the opinion that the reasoning process is not necessary to acquire moral knowledge; a person's being rational is enough for her to have moral knowledge. The philosophers are probably trying to emphasize the fact that our faculty of reason is ultimately responsible for moral knowledge. The source of moral knowledge is generally assumed to be apriori and thus self-evident in this approach. In the history of moral philosophy, philosophers like Plato, Immanuel Kant and moral rationalists such as Samuel Clarke, Joseph Butler, Richard Price, Ralph Cudworth , and John Balguy, to name a few, endorsed the view that moral knowledge is a priori and originates from reason alone.

An example of transcendent values (moral knowledge) can be found in Plato's theory of the Forms. Moral values are represented by forms - justice, courage, kindness, etc. Values, like all Forms, are independent of human opinion and exist outside of space and time. Moral values and things in the empirical domain, such as human actions and motives, are revealed by participating in the Forms. Our moral nature is derived from the Forms. Plato argues that the Forms are perfect due to their participation in the "highest" Form, the Form of Good. What makes all 'values' valuable? What are their strengths? The 'Good' or 'Value' is what they have in common. There is no higher form of knowledge than knowing what is 'Good'.

Moral truth is regarded as 'transcendent' if it is distinct and different from the empirical world and in some way, superior to it. For Plato, the source of moral knowledge is undeniably our faculty of reason.

Kant argues in *Critique of Pure Reason* that God, Freedom, and the Soul are transcendental and therefore, unknowable. According to Kant, knowledge of entities that transcend this world is not humanly

possible: it is neither possible via experience nor by reason. In Critique of Practical Reason, however, Kant mitigates his earlier claim and argues that Freedom is knowable because it is revealed by God. God and immortality are also knowable. Kant believed that belief in God, freedom, and soul are "subjectively necessary" beliefs, items of faith essential for action, or as he put it, "postulates of reason". Kant thus creates space for morality in Critique of Practical Reason to give room to faith. This quantum jump makes clear that morality and naturalism are on different tracks, according to Kant. Morality, according to Kant, is the result of rationality and reason. Previously, it was discussed how according to Kant, morality is a matter of deductive reasoning wherein moral judgments about what is right, what one's duty, etc., are deduced from the moral law. However, Kant thinks that moral law itself cannot be known through deductive reasoning but through the faculty of reason. In his work, Kant talks about the principle of autonomy, by which he that each of us is capable of figuring out what is right or wrong on his or her own without appealing to external authority, just by using the faculty of reason.

Like Plato and Kant, moral rationalists like Samuel Clarke also hold that moral knowledge has its source in the faculty of reason. Moral rationalists claim that morality originates in reason and can be discerned through reason alone. Moral rationalists like Samuel Clarke and Richard Price draw an analogy between morality and mathematics to elucidate their position… It is pertinent to note that mathematical knowledge has been understood as the paradigm of apriori knowledge and moral rationalists tend to view moral knowledge as apriori when they draw analogies between mathematical knowledge and moral knowledge.

Like 2 + 2 equals 4, it is also self-evident that killing an innocent person without explanation or provocation is wrong, according to moral rationalists. Killing an innocent person is wrong and three plus two equals five is not something we learn from experience. Both propositions cannot be denied upon understanding the relevant terms… Moral truths, like mathematical truths, are universal and can be held in any possible world, according to rationalists. An insight into one of the most influential moral rationalists of his time,

Samuel Clarke can throw some light on the position of the moral rationalist.

Eminent philosopher and theologian Samuel Clarke formulated his rationalist ethics in one of his two main works, *A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion,* and *the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation.* Many rationalists of the 18th century somehow conceived reason as a divine light working within man. Samuel Clarke, however, can be given the credit for having humanized reason as reason was no longer conceived as a divine light working within human beings but was conceived as a human faculty. Moral values and principles constitute what Clarke calls the law of morality and are a component of nature.

Human expectation of happiness and avoidance of suffering cannot be reflected in the notions of good and evil, according to Clarke, because they are logical consequences of reality and represent a fundamental structure that encompasses the fundamental relationships between beings and their differences. In accordance with this metaphysical structure, all events and actions are either consistent or inconsistent. If there is consistency, then the event, action, or being under consideration is considered to be fit; if there is any inconsistency, then it is indicative of unfitness. Our mental faculties enable us to discover the harmony of relationships and differences and to understand the resulting moral categories on which ethical principles are based.

According to Clarke, fitness signifies a moral category – the category of "good". Unfitness, conversely, signifies the moral category of "evil". The human mind, according to Clarke, is capable of recognizing whether the entity's actions and its relation with other beings fall into the category of being fit or unfit. Additionally, it can recognize the relationships and actions of others and pass moral judgments accordingly. In his rationalist ethics, Samuel Clarke also talks about the concept of obligations. According to Clarke, the first and basic (primary or formal) obligation of human beings is general in nature; only such actions are to be undertaken which are consistent with the law of morality and which are decoded by means of reason. In one of his writings, Clarke writes about formal obligation:

> So, in general, it appears that men cannot avoid assenting to the eternal Law of Righteousness; namely, that they cannot but acknowledge that governing all their actions through the Rule of Right or Equity is reasonable and fit. It is also a formal obligation for every man to conform himself to that Rule in fact and continually in order to attain this Assent. (1732, 199)

Elsewhere Samuel Clarke writes:

[I believe it is more fitting and reasonable to preserve the life of an innocent. In any case, if I happen to have power over a man at any given time; or if I am capable of delivering him from any imminent danger, despite never having promised to do so; then that I should suffer his perdition or death without any provocation. . . It is the same as denying the Truth of these Things for a Man of Reason... as if a man who understands geometry or algebra would deny the most obvious and known proportions of lines or numbers, any more than to say that a square of equal base and height is not doubled by a triangle of equal base and height.   (1738, 609)

As criticism of moral rationalists who draw an analogy between mathematics and morality, it has been argued by Sara McGrath that moral truths cannot be considered as self-evident like mathematical truths because the disagreement and perplexity which afflicts moral thinking does not afflict mathematical truths like 'two plus two equals to four'. Moral rationalists respond by arguing that high-level mathematics involves disagreement and perplexity. When it comes to basic mathematical truths like '2+2=4' is concerned, there is no disagreement. The same applies to morality, where there is no disagreement and confusion about basic moral truths. For example, killing innocent people without justification is morally wrong. Another thing that can be said here in the context of a comparison between mathematical and moral knowledge is, that process by which one arrives at a mathematical truth is the deductive process of reasoning. There may be disagreement during the process of knowing, but at the justificatory level, there is no disagreement. It is also possible to extend this analogy to moral knowledge. The process of learning moral truths might be accompanied by disagreement, but moral knowledge cannot be disputed on the justification level.

Reflecting on the position of the philosophers who have conceived reason (either rational faculty or reasoning process) as the source of knowledge, one thing which can definitely be said about morality/moral knowledge is that it is not something that can be imposed on us from outside by an external agency but is something which comes naturally to all of us.

5. Conclusion

When one tries to review the various viewpoints with regard to the source of moral knowledge, it may appear that three somewhat opposite approaches seem to be emerging. Based on the first approach, moral beliefs are regarded as quite similar to common beliefs; moral knowledge, as per this view, can be obtained through experience just as we can learn about the world around us. In the second viewpoint, moral knowledge is regarded as an immediate and self-evident phenomenon derived from intuition. The third and final approach claims that moral knowledge comes from reason, either in the sense of rational faculties or reasoning processes.

Considering the views of all philosophers who have discussed the source of moral knowledge, one can clearly see that neither experience nor intuition nor reason alone seems to be sufficient for moral knowledge. Those with an intuitionist viewpoint believe moral knowledge is derived from intuition, but again there is a disclaimer that intuition is not to be regarded as infallible. To validate intuition, intuitionists ultimately rely on their experience. Further, when inductive reasoning is considered the source of knowledge, there is an indirect admission of the role of experience in obtaining moral knowledge. When one considers the viewpoint of empiricists then, it can be seen that empiricists like Aristotle also go on to speak about the role of reasoning in validating one's knowledge. Moral knowledge can thus be obtained only via an interplay of various faculties and processes, which must include intuition, reason, and experience. In my opinion, intuitive belief can be considered to be the starting point in the process of acquiring moral knowledge, but it should not be considered self-evident. With both reason and experience, our initial hunches or intuitive belief can be granted the status of knowledge.

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