

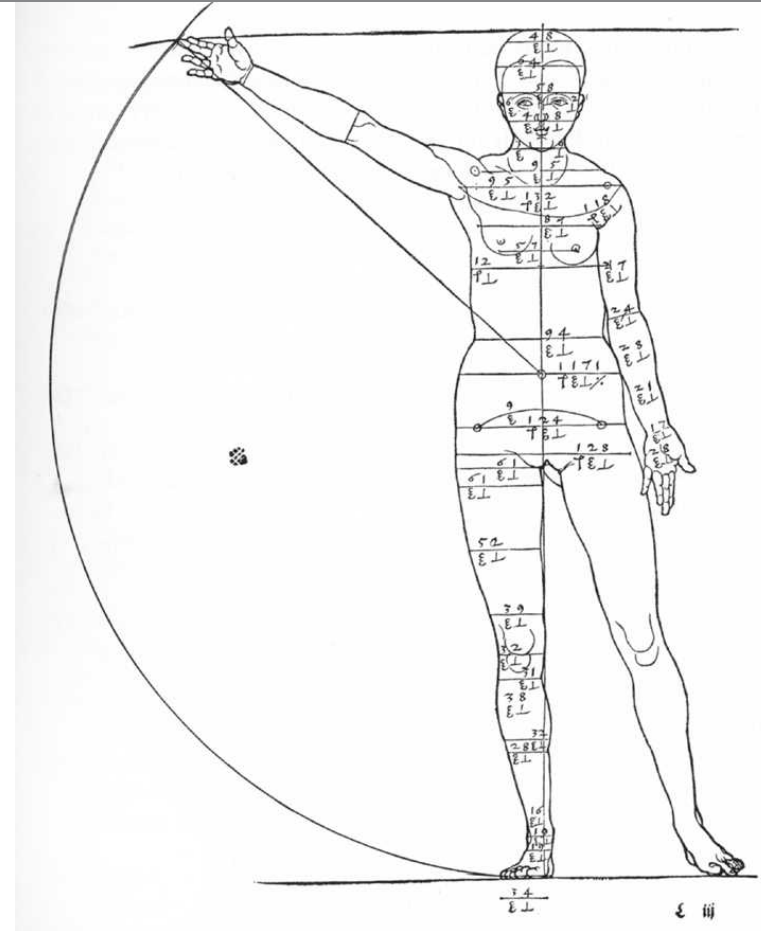


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Understanding Ethical Reasoning

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NORMENBEGRÜNDUNG
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Human beings pursue happiness, and all our happiness-conducive deliberate activity is pleasant and therefore intrinsically desirable. This assumption about the *conditio humana* has an important implication for the understanding of morality. We therefore can maintain the moral stance for a lifetime only if moral agency is pleasant and intrinsically desirable.

Morality's pleasure is what we may call *modal pleasure*. Modal pleasure is a *mode of activity*—as opposed to mere sensations of pleasure. A person enjoys modal pleasure when she successfully exercises her capacities (or skills).

Thesis: The moral stance is a necessary condition for the successful exercise of our happiness-conducive human capacities—above all for our personal autonomy—and is therefore in every individual person's interest.

The Moral Stance

When we deliberately perform moral actions for their own sake, we have taken the moral stance. The moral stance is a person's capacity and enduring motivation to recognize common goods, to accept moral demands and to respect other person's happiness-conducive interests.

People have various motivating reasons for moral actions, such as, for example, the interest in successful economical cooperation, the desire for social recognition, religious belief, altruism. However, we perform moral actions *for their own sake* only if having taken the moral stance.

Three Aspects of the Moral Stance

- (1) Having taken the moral stance we put constraints on our self-interests. Thus moral agents are capable of having second order volitions. The moral stance includes the particular capacity of practical reasoning. Through practical reasoning we form intentions, which consist of a belief and a desire.
- (2) As moral agents we recognize *common goods*, which moral actions aim to protect.
- (3) Moral experiences produce a specifically moral familiarity between persons, which is an intermediate inter-personal, emotional stance between contractual obligations and private familiarity (friendship, love). Morality is a *mode* of people's *encountering* with each other. As moral agents we share the desire for the common experiences of respect, solidarity, sincerity, and trust.

Moral Demands

- (i) Moral demands aim to *protect common goods*, such as bodily integrity and autonomy. For this reason, arguments for ethical claims have to rely on general evaluative assumptions, which ideally every person can agree upon. Since the acceptance of a moral demand expresses the will of a person, the general evaluative assumptions of ethical arguments—that we might also call ethical principles—are common agreements.
- (ii) Moral demands are *evident*: What we owe to each other is obvious because we all know the common goods, which moral demands aim to protect. Morality is, as Kant says, a matter of fact of reason.
- (iii) Moral demands are *universal*; they hold for any person and any action in any situation—regardless of any particular property of an individual person.
- (iv) Moral demands are *categorical* (or unconditional, respectively); moral actions do not depend on any particular condition and they are not primarily a means for achieving a certain end, but they are rather an end in itself.

The Structure of Ethical Arguments

- (1) (\forall common good CG, \forall person, \forall vulnerable property V): If an abstract entity CG is a common good and if (logically speaking) a particular instance of the common good CG, that is, every individual person, has the vulnerable property V, then every person *wants* to protect the vulnerable property V of any other person. (The *antecedens* of this premise contains an evaluative as well as a descriptive statement.)
- (2) The entity CG is a common good and every individual person has the vulnerable property V.
- (3) Therefore every person wants to protect everyone's vulnerable property V.
- (4) If every person wants to protect everyone's vulnerable property V and if performing actions of the kind A is necessary and adequate for the protection of the vulnerable property V of person A, then person B (and any other person) *ought* to perform actions of the kind A and must not do opposing actions of the kind non-A.
- (5) Performing actions of the kind A is necessary and adequate for the protection of person A's vulnerable property V.
Therefore person B (and any other person) ought to do actions of the kind A.

An Example

- (1) If human dignity is a common good and if every individual person has the vulnerable property that she can suffer from poverty, then every person wants to protect everyone who now lives in poverty from future poverty.
- (2) Human dignity is a common good and every individual person can suffer from poverty.
- (3) If we want to protect everyone who now lives in poverty from future poverty and if donating five percent of our gross income to global organizations, which reliably and efficiently help people who now live in poverty, is necessary and adequate for protecting these people from future poverty, we ought to donate five percent of our gross income to global organizations, which reliably and efficiently help people who now live in poverty.
- (4) Donating five percent of our gross income to global organizations, which reliably and efficiently help people who now live in poverty, is necessary and adequate (and even sufficient) for protecting these people from future poverty.

Therefore we ought to donate five percent of our gross income to global organizations, which reliably and efficiently help people who now live in poverty.

