

TALLER DE ÉTICA CONTEMPORÁNEA

A Third Way in Ethical Theory: Neither Consequentialist nor Deontological

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Sumilla

The two dominant paradigms in ethical theory are the various forms of consequentialism and of deontology. Consequentialism grounds the assessment of such items as acts or rules or institutions in some kind of impersonal value of those items' total consequences. Deontology holds that the "right is prior to the good", and so grounds the assessment of such items in factors that are allegedly independent of any kind of value or goodness. In this series of seminars, we shall first explore reasons for thinking that both of these two paradigms are inadequate, and need to be replaced with an alternative – that is, a third way in ethical theory. Then we shall investigate how such a third way might be developed.

In particular, in looking for this third way in ethical theory, we shall consider some reasons for rejecting the kind of "virtue ethics" that seeks to ground the assessment of acts, decisions and the like in the notion of a person's moral character. Instead, we shall explore the prospects of a non-consequentialist but value-based ethical theory – an ethical theory that grounds its assessment of items like acts and institutions in values, but does so in a way that crucially differs from consequentialism. Specifically, instead of taking the value of an item like an act to be derivative from the value of its total consequences, the act itself may have various kinds of value; and it may be the values exemplified by the act itself – rather than the value of its total consequences – that determine how the act compares to the available alternatives, how weighty the reasons are in favour of the act, and so ultimately whether or not the act should be done.

To develop this kind of theory in full detail, we would need a rich account of all the different kinds of value that there are, and of how these different kinds of value are related to each other. We shall close by inquiring into these values – or in other words, into the varieties of goodness; in particular, we shall explore some reasons for thinking that there are many more varieties of goodness than philosophers have typically supposed, and that these many varieties of goodness have a number of systematic relationships with each other.