
This new work by Kupperman aims to give some insight into what a plausible ethical theory should take into consideration and be underpinned by. Kupperman does this by reviewing the main competing schools of ethical theory, pointing out their flaws and their best elements, thus coming to the conclusion that each of these theories can be combined into a form of multi-level indirect consequentialism, which addresses the best of these elements whilst trying to avoid the flaws that each of these individual ethical theories is open to. The proposal to “create” a new moral code by bringing together these competing strands of ethical theory is nothing new, but still a very ambitious project.

The book is split into two parts. Part one opens with some terminological clarifications and examines “ordinary elements of ethical thought” (p. 3) derived from intuitions. It also “concerns elements of ethical thought that are noticeable in some cases but can seem invisible in others” (p. 5), such as when in ethical dilemmas agents fail to consider certain morally relevant factors and, thus, come to ill-informed decisions. Part two “concerns the contest of ethical theories” (p. 6), before coming to a conclusion of “multi-level indirect consequentialism” or “policy consequentialism”.

Kupperman’s argument is that since intuitions vary through time and from person to person, we thus are forced in a move towards some kind of ethical theory for the sake of consistency and objectivity. Kupperman’s focus here begins in part two, and is mainly on Kantianism, Contractualism and Consequentialism. The arguments he supplies in his criticisms of these theories are nothing new and have been widely discussed for decades. He does not shed any new light on any of these debates. His main criticism of these theories (and thus why we must reject them as the sole source of morality) is that Kantianism provides no justification as to why rules should play such a central role in decision-making; contractualism does not have the resources to fully determine what counts as “reasonable” (p. 78); consequentialism does not have the resources to fully determine what counts as “reasonable” (p. 78); consequentialism can lead to obligations that violate our moral intuitions.

In the first half of part two of the book, Kupperman gives a quite lengthy rundown of how these three ethical theories have evolved and changed throughout time, providing a succinct summary of the history of ethical theory. His aim in this regard is to show that these ethical theories do not have a fixed nature as they are constantly evolving, adapting, and changing. From this he then attempts (much like Parfit in his yet to be released work) to show that these theories are not so much in direct, mutually exclusive competition with each other, but, rather, each contains elements which complement each other from a correspondingly different angle of interpretation. It is from this angle that Kupperman argues for a consequentialist ethical theory of a particular sort:

**LC1.** If what would have the best consequences is not the best thing for X to do, there must be a reason.

**LC2.** There are constraints, depending on the seriousness of what is at stake, on what can count as a reason for X’s not doing what would have the best consequences.

**LC3.** The only possible reason for not doing what would have the best consequences would be one that appeals to systems of attitudes, habits of mind, and/or policies (of which morality is one) that themselves promote important values (most of
which can be put under the heading of human flourishing. These systems
temselves are open to question, and it counts against any one of them in its
present form if its existence (as prevalent in a society) is not for the best (pp. 123,
124).

Kupperman comes to the conclusion that consequentialist considerations have "special
importance", and thus consequentialism should ground the underpinnings of this theory,
though qualified by "systems of attitudes, habits of mind, and/or policies (of which moral-
ity is one) that themselves promote important values (most of which can be put under the
heading of human flourishing" (p. 123). In this way, his multi-level indirect consequential-
ism is a form of restricted consequentialism, the consequentialist elements of which can be
trumped by the indirect qualification just listed. The focus of the latter half of part two is
on how these "qualities of life" can restrict/trump consequentialist considerations in some
instances. It is these "qualities of life" considerations (and trump cards) that Kupperman
believes differentiates his ethical system from other rule-based moral codes.

However, Kupperman is careful to add that this multi-level indirect consequentialism
"also will lack any sense that, when consequences do count, they count in a precise way". Indeed, we will be very far away from Jeremy Bentham's "calculus of values" (p. 141). Thus, it seems that Kupperman's theory still has to deal with the same problem other ethical theo-
ries have had to: how to actually calculate the right course of action when so many "quali-
ties of life" must be weighed up at the same time. Ironically, the difficulty of calculating the
right course of action is the basis of one of Kupperman's criticisms of "pure" act consequen-
tialism and one reason why he rejects it repeatedly throughout the book. Still, Kupperman
uses Donagan's example to show how hard and fast rule/maxim-based moral codes are just
as imprecise (Alan Donagan, The Theory of Morality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1977)); "someone can say 'promises ought to be kept', but if we keep a promise to meet a
friend for coffee with the foreseeable cost of someone's life ..." then that person could fea-
sibly say "I didn't mean that you should keep a promise in a case like that....but that does
not mean that any of us will be able to spell out exactly what the tacit built-in exceptions
to the rule will be" (p. 159).

In a way, the cornerstone of Kupperman's consequentialist theory (his multi-level indi-
rect consequentialism) is its lack of specificity. However, this is a double-edged sword. On
the one hand, the imprecision and vagueness involved in assessing qualities of life consid-
erations that constrain consequentialism allows him to escape the so-called "consequential-
ist dilemmas", without committing to hard and fast rules and weights. Yet, on the other
hand, this vagueness and imprecision can be seen as a fault: his theory lacks cogency and
coherence, and leaves one confused and unsure about which course of action would be the
most moral to take. Thus, it seems that the redeeming feature of Kupperman's theory is also
its downfall, leaving it with the same problems that have plagued other ethical theories all
this while.

Kupperman's own proposal at times also seems to fall prey to the very criticisms he
throws at other ethical theories. One example of this is when he says that "ideas of fairness
are contestable, and consequently a reasonable test of any idea of fairness is its conse-
quences, whether it makes things better or worse" (p. 180). However, isn't fairness itself one
of the "qualities of life" that is meant to constrain consequentialist reasoning? And aren't the
other "qualities of life" also contestable and, thus, would have to be subject to a