

J. J. Prinz's Moral Relativism and the Possibility of Moral Convention

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1. Introduction

Introduction (1/4)

◎ Jesse J. Prinz's moral theory

- > Emotionism about morality
- > A culture-relativistic consequence
- > seems to obscure the difference between morality and local custom or convention

→ Close examination into the relationship between Prinz's relativistic morality and convention

Introduction (2/4)

◉ Comparison with two different notions of convention

- Lewisian convention (David Lewis)
 - Based on rationality
- Natural convention (Ruth G. Millikan)
 - Not based on rationality

Emotion-based morality might be a kind of natural convention

- special focus on the relationship between natural convention and Prinzian morality

Introduction (3/4)

- ◎ Looking into borderline cases
 - A) The moralization of convention
 - B) The conventionalization of morals
- In both cases there seems to be *moral conventions*, or rules that are both moral and conventional
- Yet both the moralization and conventionalization is merely superficial

Introduction (4/4)

- ◎ Printian morality and convention
 - In what terms are they different?
 - How essential is the difference between them?
 - Can There be *moral convention*?
- ◎ considering these questions will help us in understanding the variety of our cultural phenomena.

2. Constructive Sentimentalism and its Relativistic Consequence

Prinz's Moral Theory(1/2)

- ◉ Prinz's moral theory (called *constructive sentimentalism*)
 - Belongs to moral emotionism
- > Moral emotionism
 - Morality emerges from our emotion
 - Prinz... A naturalistic motive for emotionism
 - Cf. Hume's Law
 - Morality can be located in the world via empirical facts that we have certain kinds of emotions.

Prinz's Moral Theory (2/2)

- > Appeal to the notion *sentiments*
 - dispositions to have emotions
 - based on some physical states which manifest themselves as an occurrent emotion when a certain condition obtains
 - Moral sentiments: dispositions to have emotions like gratitude, dignity, guilt etc.
- > Relativization of moral properties to an observer's moral values
 - Moral properties emerge from moral sentiments of an observer

...moral relativism is implied

Relativistic Consequences(1/4)

- Prinz' s moral theory implies that moral properties are relative to individuals
however, **sentiments possessed by individuals may actually converge.**

Why?

...cultural education is important

Relativistic Consequences(2/4)

- ◎ The role of culture in relation to morality
 1. The cause
 2. The effect
 3. The raison d'être

→these aspects show only that morality is actually socio-cultural

Is socio-cultural character of our morality an intrinsic feature of morality?

–should be understood as intrinsic

Relativistic Consequences(3/4)

> Prinz holds that...

- Ought judgments presuppose that an appraiser who forms a judgment and an agent whose behavior is judged share moral norms.
- Moral obligation, then, can hold only after being adopted by some people at the same time; that is, the existence of a group of people who share moral norms is needed as its basis.

Relativistic Consequences(4/4)

◎ Prinzipal morality...**socio-cultural**

- actually there are links between culture and morality
- some fundamental moral concepts essentially presuppose the existence of the group of people sharing the same moral values
- Although Prinz's moral theory manifests itself as individual relativism, in fact it rather has a **culture-relativistic** character.
 - Moral properties emerge from the sentiment of each individual, but the sentiment is based on their culture.

3. Prinzian Morality and Convention

Is Prinzian Morality Conventional?(1/3)

- ◉ Is it appropriate to describe morality as relative to an individual or culture?
 - > Consider conventional rules:
 - E.g. rules about good manners
 - In general, we give priority to keeping moral rules even if it costs a breach of conventional rules.

Is Prinzian Morality Conventional? (2/3)

- > According to Prinz, moral rules and conventional rules are distinguished by whether sentiments are involved or not.
 - Why moral rules are treated more seriously than conventional rules?
 - Because it is motivated by sentiments.**

Is Prinzian Morality Conventional? (3/3)

> Yet here a question arises:

Is it sufficient for the distinction between morality and convention to characterize moral rules as ones whose observance is motivated by sentiments?

> we need to see what motivates us to follow conventional rules.

Lewisian Convention and Prinzian Morality (1/2)

◉ Lewisian Convention

- > The main idea: when several alternative ways are available, rational agents can accomplish coordination in a certain way without explicit rules by inferring each other's intention or expectation and acting accordingly
 - E.g. traffic: left/right?...agents may form expectations “*He will drive on the left*” “*He may expect that I will drive on the left,*” etc. and act accordingly.

Lewisian Convention and Prinzian Morality (2/2)

> Lewisian conventional rules...followed on the basis of rational mutual expectations.

→ **different from Prinzian moral rules**

- Lewisian conventional rules are followed for **the reason that coordination is needed**.
- Prinzian moral rules are obeyed from **emotional motivation** whether any other persons actually conform to it or not.

> Yet, There are some conventions that cannot be captured by the Lewisian concept.

Natural Convention (1/3)

◎ Natural Convention

...patterns which are **reproduced** and **proliferated**
due to weight of precedent

> Reproduction

- A certain type of the manner in which patterns proliferate.
- Reproduced patterns **counterfactually depend on previous models in certain respects.**
- e.g. having a meal with chopsticks (what if it had been a folk?)

Natural Convention (2/3)

◎ Proliferation due to weight of precedent

- to be proliferated **just because of the existence of precedent, not because of some intrinsic features of the pattern.**

- e.g. boy scouts lighting fires by rubbing sticks

... In our society, several different ways of lighting fires are known.

There are other ways to perform the same function.

They choose rubbing sticks (instead of using firestones or matches) just because they have precedents of rubbing sticks.

→the proliferated pattern has **arbitrariness in relation to function**, and the arbitrariness is **known to people**.

Natural Convention (3/3)

> Why is a pattern proliferated just because of the existence of precedent?

...because **simply following precedent** has some practical advantages.

- save time and effort
- promote social coordination
- we often follow conventional patterns **just because of the mere existence of precedent, knowing that the pattern is arbitrary.**
- The notion of natural convention captures a **practical** aspect of our convention.

Natural Convention and Prinzian Morality(1/3)

◎ Proliferation of moral behaviors

- New members of a culture are imbued with moral sentiments through moral education including manipulation of emotions.

→people who have acquired moral sentiments will show emotions like anger or contempt toward bad behaviors done by new members.

They have now become new moral educators, because moral sentiments evoke the emotions such that **motivate them to disseminate the sentiments themselves.**

Natural Convention and Prinzian Morality(2/3)

> here, **weight of precedent is not an effective factor in proliferating patterns of moral behavior.**

- In order that a pattern may proliferate due to weight of precedent, it is necessary that there are other patterns which performs the same function and that this fact is known to people.
- We cannot presume, however, that people know other options for morally good behavior.
- e.g. “You should not kill others”
- When we try to promote our own moral views, being motivated by moral sentiments, it is not necessary, or rather obstructive, to know that there are other possible moral values.

Natural Convention and Prinzian Morality(3/3)

- > In Prinz's theory, morality is explicitly relative **only when viewed from the meta-moral level at which we do not commit ourselves to any particular moral value.**
- > From the fact that other possible patterns of behavior are not necessarily known, it follows that the proliferation of patterns of moral behavior is not due to weight of precedent.

4. A Possibility of Moral Convention

Moral Conventions?

- ⊙ Examine borderline cases between morality and convention
 - > Moralization of convention
 - e.g. conventional rules about etiquette
 - > Conventionalization of morals
 - What if a person recognizes possible alternative rules which function equally as her moral rule?
 - Moral Conventions?

Moralization of Convention(1/3)

- ⊙ What differentiates Prinzian moral rules from conventional rules is
 - Motivation from moral sentiments
 - Any rule can be moral one if tied to moral sentiments, irrelevant to its content
- ⊙ Can we change a certain rule which is followed as mere convention into a moral rule by tying it to moral sentiments?

Moralization of Convention(2/3)

- ◎ Prinz admits that the *moralization* of convention can sometimes occur
 - > e.g.
 - i. some people moralize conventional rules about etiquettes
 - ii. a child who becomes to feel guilt for not practicing the piano because of the education given by her parents
 - **education** can moralize an arbitrary rule for the educatee

Moralization of Convention(3/3)

- ◎ moral-like conventional rules and moral rules
 - different in their relations to **grounding norms** (norms that tend to be regarded as needing no justification)
 - moral norms are themselves grounding norms or derived from grounding norms
 - moral-like conventional rules are derived from grounding norms and premises about local customs
 - Moralization of conventional rules is **superficial**

Conventionalization of morals

(1/3)

- > Although morality need not be accompanied by the knowledge of the arbitrariness in relation to function, this fact does not exclude the possibility that one commits to a certain moral rule while knowing the arbitrariness
- > When a person recognizes possible alternative rules which function equally as her moral rule, Is this rule both moral and conventional for her?

Conventionalization of morals (2/3)

- ◎ Recognition of alternatives to her moral rule
 - possible only when viewed from the meta-moral level
 - enables to treat the rule *as if conventional*
 - In some occasion where moral promotion does not matter, she might treat the rule like conventions
 - Yet, committed to her moral rule, she thinks the rule as the only desirable one, even if she knows that the rule is arbitrary in relation to function
 - this rule is actually not interchangeable with alternatives from her point of view

Conventionalization of morals

(3/3)

- ◉ The knowledge of arbitrariness of a moral rule ***in relation to function*** does not make the rule truly conventional
 - Although alternative rules have the same function as this rule, they do not possess a moral feature from her perspective.

5. Conclusion

Prinzian Morality and Conventions (1/2)

- ◉ The similarity
 - > cultural relativism
- ◉ The difference
 - The knowledge of the arbitrariness of the rule in relation to function
 - Conventional rules: known
 - moral rules: not necessarily known
 - ...because moral rules are obeyed from motivation based on moral sentiments, which is not necessarily accompanied by the knowledge of the arbitrariness.
 - C.f. Seriousness of moral rules

Prinzian Morality and Conventions (2/2)

- ◎ Borderline cases
 1. The moralization of conventional rules
 - Conventional rules which are derived from grounding norms about morality and auxiliary premises about local customs
 2. The conventionalization of moral rules
 - The knowledge of arbitrariness of the moral rule in relation to function only enables one to treat the rule *as if* a conventional one
- **Both are merely superficial**

The Variety of Our Cultural Phenomena (1/2)

- > Prinzian morality, Lewisian convention, and natural convention are transmitted and propagated by different mechanisms.
 - Lewisian convention : rational mutual expectation
 - Natural convention : a strategy to follow a rational disposition to simply reproduce precedents
 - Prinzian morality : the self-propagating character of moral sentiments

The Variety of Our Cultural Phenomena(2/2)

- > C.f. Epidemiology of representations (Dan Sperber)
 - there are various ways in which a representation (a cultural item) is transmitted and we cannot capture the processes by a single model.
- > To investigate intrinsic characters of the cultural aspect of humans, it is important to recognize the variety of our cultural phenomena and give them some efficient models.

**Thank you very much for kind
attention.**