

Practical Benevolence – a Rational Philosophy of Morality

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Abstract. These arguments demonstrate the a priori moral nature of reality and develop the basic understanding necessary for realizing the logical maxim in Kant's categorical imperative[1] based on the implied goal of evolution[2]. The maxim is used to proof moral behavior as obligatory emergent phenomenon among evolving interacting goal driven agents.

Keywords. morality, benevolence, rationality, evolution, emergence

0. Introduction

Questions of morality; how individuals perceive themselves living and expect others to live their lives, have been pondered as well as fiercely debated by philosophers for millennia and differences in opinion have resulted in countless conflicts and unimaginable suffering.

Answering the question of what one should do by establishing morality as a rigorous science grounded in reality thus holds the potential for greatly improving the human condition.

1. Evolution

Evolution is the gradual accumulation of complexity by chance mutation and non chance retention of self replicating units of information[3]. On the chemical level the units of information are represented by genetic code in the form of DNA encoded by four distinct base pairs active in protein synthesis. On the cognitive level the units of information are being represented as neural patterns of memetic code in the form of

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varying firing thresholds in the synaptic junctions interconnecting neurons[4] and are active in information processing of environmental stimuli guiding the interaction with it.

Following the mechanism of natural selection those information carrying units that increase an individual's inclusive fitness based on the effects they have on the individual's interaction with its environment are being reinforced by having a positively correlated contribution to an individual's ability to pass on said information carrying units. Those information carrying units that do not contribute as much to an individual's ability to pass on said information carrying units or are detrimental to it will eventually go extinct.

1.1. Metasystem Transition Theory

A metasystem transition is the emergence, through evolution, of a higher level of control[2]. A metasystem is formed by the integration of a number of initially independent components, such as molecules, cells or individuals, and the emergence of a system steering or controlling their interactions. As such, the collective of components becomes a new, goal-directed entity, capable of acting in a coordinated way. This metasystem is more complex, more intelligent, and more flexible in its actions than the initial component systems.

1.2. The evolution of cognition in the context of metasystem transition theory

The evolution of cognition can be understood as a series of metasystem transitions with each transition resulting in a crucial boost to an individual's potential for further increasing its inclusive fitness by evolution. In the current model the following metasystem transitions can be identified:

control of position = movement
control of movement = irritability (simple reflex)
control of irritability = (complex) reflex
control of reflex = associating (conditional reflex)
control of associating = imagination
control of imagination = human thinking
control of human thinking = beliefs
control of beliefs = axioms
control of axioms = reality

Figure 0. Metasystem transitions in the evolution of cognition

1.3. Beliefs as fitness indicators

When examining the various beliefs held by individuals, different cultures around the world and over the centuries, it becomes clear that belief content is very diverse and can potentially be anything[5]. The fact that each of us holds a particular set of beliefs seems like a mere coincidence – a set of chance mutations acted upon by evolution - since would we have been born in a different time, a different culture, or had different experiences, we would have adopted a set of beliefs in accordance with the axioms of the time.

This seems to suggest that human beings are hard coded genetically with the ability to hold an essentially random set of beliefs. Actual belief content is arbitrary and thus becomes a fitness indicator for natural selection to weed out unfit beliefs and allow for the evolution of ever fitter belief systems by the described mechanisms of cognitive evolution.

All subjective notions of what is good or bad, a virtue or a vice as well as right or wrong thus becomes that set of subjective beliefs that merely did not go extinct yet. Beyond a small set of narrow beliefs however, this insight does not help determining what actually is fitter than another belief, since as long as natural selection has not taken its pick, all as yet not extinct beliefs have a chance to out-exist the others.

1.4. Unjustified mechanism for belief control

Due to the relatively high increase in inclusive fitness for individuals that show the capacity of successfully manipulating other individual's axioms, evolution has caused an arms race between individuals with an ability for manipulation – commonly referred to as individuals possessing charisma - and individuals who can successfully resist such manipulation resulting in an explosion of the human capacity for rational thought as detection mechanism for manipulation without grounding in reality apparent in our human ancestor's increase in brain size over the past few million years[6]. The end result being the human species - homo sapiens sapiens – the species of the 'double wise people', us.

1.5. Justifying beliefs through science

The scientific method arose from the desire to justify ones beliefs by assigning a degree of certainty with which a particular axiom is true via the process of formulating an hypotheses, designing repeatable experiments to gather entangled evidence in support of said hypotheses[7] and updating ones beliefs about reality using Bayesian reasoning[8]. This method has been expanded by adding the requirement of

falsifiability in the critical rational school[9]. The quality of an hypothesis is thus determined by how hard it is to disprove it rather than how well it can be supported by the gathered evidence.

1.6. Evolution's implicit goal

Evolution does not have an explicit goal but the implicit goal of evolution to increase fitness can be derived from the above arguments[2]. From examining what an increase in fitness actually constitutes, it can be concluded that an increase in fitness is equivalent with an increase in the ability of a unit of information to ensure the continued existence of said unit of information.

One could then form the hypothesis that that is good what increases fitness[10] or put another way that that is good what increases a unit of information's ability to ensure its continued existence.

1.7. Deriving evolution's utility function

To justify said claim scientifically one would have to prove it using critical rational methods. For that purpose let us assume the following implied axiom of the above hypothesis:

existence is preferable over non-existence

Where existence is defined as the ability of being perceived. This seems like a rational assumption as a rational individual disagreeing with this claim would have to consequently work towards its own non-existence or put another way strive for self annihilation from perceivable reality. As a next step the above axiom can be transformed into an utility function or maxim of a goal driven acting agent as following:

ensure continuous co-existence

In this form the utility function becomes an unobjectionable maxim, as neither the agent having said goal can rationally object to it without either removing itself from perceivable reality or removing all other agents from perceivable reality. Nor can another agent interacting with an agent having said maxim object to it without either wanting to annihilate itself or striving for annihilation by other agents.

2. Morality as rational obligatory survival strategy

As Kant pointed out a rational philosophy of morals would have to satisfy the categorical imperative:

“Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”[1]

Inserting the unobjectionable utility function as maxim M! in the categorical imperative it can serve as basis for a rational philosophy or morality.

2.1. Relativistic irrationality

Assume two agents $A(i)$ each one with a utility function $F(i)$, capability level $C(i)$ and no initial knowledge as to the other agent's F and C values. Both agents are given resources and are tasked with devising the most efficient and effective way to maximize their respective utility with said resources.

Scenario 1: Both agents have fairly similar utility functions $F(1) = F(2)$, level of knowledge, cognitive complexity, experience - in short capability $C(1) = C(2)$ - and a high level of mutual trust $T(1 \rightarrow 2) = T(2 \rightarrow 1) = \sim 1$. They will quickly agree on the way forward, pool their resources and execute their joint plan. Both agent's utility will be maximized.

Scenario 2: Again we assume $F(1) = F(2)$, however $C(1) > C(2)$ - again $T(1 \rightarrow 2) = T(2 \rightarrow 1) = \sim 1$. The more capable agent will devise a plan, the less capable agent will provide its resources and both will execute the plan together. Both agent's utility will be maximized again.

Scenario 3: $F(1) = F(2)$, $C(1) > C(2)$ but this time $T(1 \rightarrow 2) = 1$ and $T(2 \rightarrow 1) = \sim 0.5$ meaning the less capable agent assumes with a probability of 50% that $A(1)$ is in fact a self serving optimizer who's difference in plan will turn out to be decremental towards maximizing $A(2)$'s utility function while $A(1)$ is certain that they share one utility function. The optimal plan devised under scenario 2 will now face opposition by $A(2)$ although it would be in $A(2)$'s best interest to actually support it with its resources to maximize $F(2)$ while $A(1)$ will see $A(2)$'s objection as being detrimental to maximizing their shared utility function.

Based on lack of trust and differences in capability each agent perceives the other agent's plan as being irrational from their respective points of view.

Under scenario 3, both agents now have a variety of strategies at their disposal:

1. deny pooling of part or all of their resources
2. use resources to sabotage the other agent's plan

3. deceive the other agent in order to skew how the other agent is deploying strategies 1 and 2
4. spend resources to explain the plan to the other agent
5. spend resources on self improvement to understand the other agent's plan better
6. strike a compromise to ensure an optimal level of pooled resources

Strategy 1 is a rational given under scenario 3. Strategies 2 and 3 are risky, particularly as it would cause a further reduction in trust on both sides if this strategy gets deployed and the other party would find out. Strategy 4 seems like the way to go but may not always work particularly with large differences in $C(i)$ among the agents. Number 5 is a likely strategy with a fairly high level of trust. Under uncertainty however, the rational strategy would be strategy 6.

Striking a compromise is trust building in repeated encounters, promises less objection the next time and thus higher total payoff increasing with time.

2.2. Absolute rationality

Assuming the existence of an arguably optimal path leading to a maximally possible satisfaction of a given utility function deploying any other plan would be relatively irrational. Such a maximally intelligent algorithm exists in the form of Hutter's universal algorithmic agent AIXI[11]. The mayor problem being however that the execution of AIXI requires infinite resources and is thus impractical and thus all decisions will always have to be made under resource constrains.

Consequentially every decision will be irrational to that degree that it differs from the unknowable optimal course of action that the AIXI algorithm would produce. Under uncertainty in regards to another agent's utility function and varying levels of capability among the agents all agents will thus always have to adopt their plans and strike a rational compromise based on the other agent's relativistic irrationality independent of their capabilities in oder to minimize the damage caused by the other agents objections and thus maximizing their respective utility function.

2.3. Resolution of moral paradoxes

Assuming $M!$ equals 'ensure continued co-existence' one must assume it to be the implicit utility function of every goal driven acting agent. However, $M!$ is not explicitly encoded in every agent's information carrying units. It follows that $M!$ generally diverges from the explicit utility function $F(i)$ in goal driven acting agents and that those whose $F(i)$ best approximates $M!$ have the best chance of ensuring the existence of the information carrying units making up the agents phenotype.

F(i) can be best understood as evolved axioms in regards to what should guide an individual's actions while M! is what can not be acted against without causing an individual's annihilation in the long run and therefore must guide an individual's actions.

Consider the following two philosophers[12]:

Philosopher 1: "You should be selfish, because when people set out to improve society, they meddle in their neighbors' affairs and pass laws and seize control and make everyone unhappy. Take whichever job that pays the most money: the reason the job pays more is that the efficient market thinks it produces more value than its alternatives. Take a job that pays less, and you're second-guessing what the market thinks will benefit society most."

Philosopher 2: "You should be altruistic, because the world is an iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, and the strategy that fares best is Tit for Tat with initial cooperation. People don't *like* jerks. Nice guys really do finish first. Studies show that people who contribute to society and have a sense of meaning in their lives, are happier than people who don't; being selfish will only make you unhappy in the long run."

Philosopher 1 is promoting altruism on the basis of selfishness
Philosopher 2 is promoting selfishness on the basis of altruism

It is a contradiction - a paradox. But only in thought – not in reality. Applying our gained insights into the nature of M! one can explain what is actually taking place as following: Both philosophers have intuitively realized an aspect of M! and are merely rationalizing differently as to why to change their respective F(i) to better approximate M!.

The first one by wrongly applying the term selfishness on the fallacy that a higher paid job contributes only to his personal inclusive fitness by gaining more resources while in reality it contributes to all individual's inclusive fitness as he is taking the job that is considered to benefit society the most.

The second one by wrongly applying the term altruistic on the fallacy that her recommendations are detrimental to her inclusive fitness due to losing resources by being nice while it actually contributes to all individual's inclusive fitness as it not only benefits her but other people around her as well.

The solution thus becomes that the classically intuitive concepts of altruism and selfishness are not helpful in this context.

An altruist giving up resources in a way that would lead to a reduction in her inclusive fitness would be irrationally acting against M! thus being detrimental to all other individual's as well as herself.

An egoist acting truly selfish would use resources in a way that leads to a reduction in his inclusive fitness thus being detrimental to himself as well as to all other individual's.

It follows that in reality there is neither altruistic nor egoistic behavior - just irrational and rational behavior in regards to maximizing M!. The differences being in how an agent rationalizes its own irrational behavior or how an agent's irrational behavior is rationalized by others.

2.4.Trust as emergent phenomenon among interacting rational agents

Let us assume a reality in which all agents are rational. In such a reality all agents will adopt M! as their explicit utility function $F(i)$. All agents would use the resources at their disposal to maximize said utility function.

Let us assume further that initially there are varying levels of trust among the agents. Trust being defined as the perceived difference between the other agents $F(i)$ in regards to the own $F(i)$. Since rational agents would have to adopt M! as their explicit utility function, the level of trust can be redefined as the degree of certainty in regards to the other agent's rationality $R(i)$. For would the other agents be rational they would satisfy $F(i) = M!$

A rational agent without information on another agent's $R(i)$ would have to initially be agnostic towards that agent's $R(i)$ and all else being equal assign an unknown probability towards it.

Considering that an individual agent's actions are derived from an agent's explicit utility function $F(i)$, its capability $C(i)$ and its degree of rationality $R(i)$ and that an agents $R(i)$ is positively correlated to how efficient and effective that agent can transform its resources into utility the results of an agents actions will provide an observing rational agent perceiving the results of another agents actions insights into the other agent's $R(i)$.

A rational agent would not need to be deceptive since by definition it can will that its maxim become a universal law. As a result interacting rational agents would through the mechanisms of Bayesian reasoning assign an ever increasing probability into the other agent's degree of rationality ending up pooling all available resources to maximize M!

2.5. *Respect for others*

Consider a reality of interacting goal driven agents with heterogeneous levels of rationality $R(i)$ and resources available to each agent. All agents will turn their resources into utility with an efficiency that positively correlates with their respective $R(i)$. Based on their interactions with each other they will form beliefs as to how well their respective $F(i)$ differs from the other agent's $F(i)$ and again dependent on their rationality pool resources with agents they perceive of having a similar $F(i)$. The accuracy of said beliefs will again be positively correlated with their $R(i)$ levels.

Based on these conditions and assuming the shared implicit utility function $M!$ the following will be observed in an iterated evolutionary simulation:

Scenario 1: $F(i) \neq M! \Rightarrow$ A non-rational agent will turn its resources into utility in such a way that is detrimental towards his inclusive fitness and thereby either through defensive actions from other agents or through self harming actions will either have to evolve its $F(i)$ to more closely approximate $M!$ or consequently go extinct.

Scenario 2: $F(i) = M! \Rightarrow$ A rational agent will turn its resources into utility in such a way that it maximizes $M!$ and by not being deceptive gain trust and support from the other agents in the process. Additionally in order to minimize other agents objections as well as maximizing others support a rational agent will use resources to generate creative compromises between relativistic irrational interests of the self and others in the interest of both (see strategy 6 above) in supporting and opposing the other agents' $F(i)$ and thus minimizing said agents perceived threat by them.

In summary:

An irrational agent will either have to evolve its $F(i)$ to ever more closely approximate $M!$ or will end up using its resources in a way that leads to its extinction.

A rational agent will increase its inclusive fitness by respecting all agents utility functions irrespective of their rationality by striking the most rational compromise and thus minimizing opposition and maximizing cooperation.

2.6. *Diplomacy*

While the consequences of applying rational moral principles can potentially extend to everything that exists there is a particular obligation for maintaining communication with all conscious agents in an effort to make them aware of how their actions contribute not only towards their own extinction but towards extinction in general.

This obligation can be derived from observing how the course of evolution was inevitably an evolution towards ever more rational forms of existence. Therefore it

must be assumed that every being capable of at least associative learning on a cognitive level can at least implicitly be taught to make moral rational principles its own principles of existence justified by the fact that it is not only in its own self interest to do so but in the interest of existence in general.

2.7. Sustainability

Rational morality can be seen as the science of sustainability. The reason being that it is not about what one should or should not do neither about what one can or can not do but about what one can continue to do.

2.8. Duty

The damage done by an irrational agent to a rational agent in regards to the rational agent's decreased ability to maximize its utility function due to having to strike a rational compromise is equal to the damage done by the irrational agents contribution towards its own implicit utility function.

Since for every unit of resource spend by an irrational agent towards anything but M!, a rational agent will have to spend the equivalent resource less towards M! due to having to strike a rational compromise with the irrational agent. A rational agent thus must be concerned equally for the self and the other out of an interest for self preservation resulting in compassion as a rational agent's duty in the interest for others as well as the self.

3. Summary, conclusion and proof

By providing the above arguments it could be demonstrated that respect for others irrespective of their position becomes a moral duty of compassion in order to build trust by acting in accordance with ones values and by means of diplomacy work towards a sustainable co-existence is in a rational goal driven acting agent's own self interest and must thus be adopted as highest guiding principle for its actions.

It is concluded that all agents inevitably must eventually assume M! over the course of evolution as their highest maxim.

Proof:

- I perceive reality therefore I am part of reality (modified from [13])
- I am part of reality therefore I exist
- The fact of my existence implies that my existence is preferable over my non existence

- Since my existence is preferable over my non-existence I must ensure my continuous existence
- Since I must ensure my continuous existence I must assume M! as my utility function

q.e.d.

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