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Choosing from a Moral Point of View[1]

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Abstract

The notion of a moral point of view has a distinguished pedigree. But it has been integrated neither into economic modeling nor political philosophy. We make a preliminary attempt to do this. Specifically, we ask: "What is meant, in general, by a moral point of view? What elements are common to all notions of morality?" In asking these questions we do not seek agreement as to the content, and status of morality. Rather, we are interested in squaring the notion of moral points of view with the decision theoretic models at the base of rationality theory. Further, we are concerned to identify those elements which generate the substantive implications of adopting a moral point of view so that one can eventually analyze which aspects of a moral point of view are required by a modern democracy. We sketch a few of the consequences for social decisions if individuals, either unorganized or within a society, chose from such a point of view rather than some other?"

1. We are very grateful for the wonderful hospitality shown to us at GATE/CNRS where the staff and economists let us enjoy our sabbatical working on this problem. Our conceptualization of the problem, and certainly also this paper, were also enriched by our interactions with a number of colleagues and graduate students including William Galston, Alan Martina, Michael Slote, Karol Soltan, Michael Cain, Rob Kleysen, Catherine Eckel and Thomas Schwartz. Conversations with Sarah Oppenheimer were instrumental in improving the argument. We are, of course, also lucky to have colleagues who have been helpful in our formulations of these problems over the years in conversations too numerous to recall accurately. And finally we must acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the National Science Foundation (grant #01523490), and the Universities of Maryland and Manitoba for their continued support.

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Choosing from a Moral Point of View

"How could you possibly have done that?" says Sheila to her friend Betsy, "You really did the wrong thing."

"I don't really know," comes the answer. "I guess I just wasn't thinking about it clearly; I didn't have the right perspective on it."

Sheila is obviously talking about some bad choice made by Betsy, but it is hard to conclude much more from those few lines. She could be talking about Betsy's purchase of a hair dryer without some essential feature, or a decision to take Sheila's car without permission. In either case, it would not be surprising were Sheila to continue advising her friend as follows "You should have considered your decision from a different point of view! Think about . . . "

Economists assume that an individual making a choice has a unique set of values, but recent evidence does not bear this out (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981 & 1986; as well as Shafir and Tversky, 1994; but also see Sen, 1977 and Margolis, 1982 who were early dissenters from the classic economic point of view). Indeed, Betsy's response indicates that the (offending) choice was made on the basis of a 'perspective' or 'point of view' which led her to the wrong decision. The implication: a different perspective might have led to the right choice.

Points of View

Frankena (1983) has discussed'point of view' at some length. He notes the concept has two 'straightforward senses' (p. 41). One can adopt a point of view by adopting a particular model or theory. 'From the point of view of quantum mechanics, events are probabilistic.' But one can also adopt a fuzzier point of view: 'We can consider the problem from a psychological point of view.' Here we point to a list of suggested variables or aspects which ought to be considered, but not a full blown 'model' of the situation. Unless explicitly discussed, we, following Frankena, refer to this second notion of a point of view.

It would appear that individuals have numerous ways of looking at their alternatives. Points of view matter: they can affect choices. Indeed, if salespersons couldn't influence buyers' decisions they would be nothing but salaried 'clerks' and working on commission wouldn't make sense. If points of view didn't matter, spin-doctors would not confront the public on TV trying to place the best face on some action of their patron. Pollsters would not have problems finding the right wording for their questions nor would they be able to pull down big fees for knowing exactly what questions to ask and in what order.[1] Thus, it becomes relevant to ask how one looks at a situation when making a decision. By the same token, it could be important, to develop different ways of looking at important decisions.

But if different points of view are possible, one is led to ask whether some points of view are "better" than others. Some philosophers argue that there is a special 'point of view' which ought to be applicable to certain kinds of choice problems: choices involving moral questions (Frankena, 1973, 1983; Hare, 1955; Rawls, 1970; Gauthier, 1993; Nagel, 1991). Here we will

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1/ Note the contrast with a computerized search for information or answers. Assuming that the questions asked of Jeeves, say, are fast enough for the information not to be updated, there is normally no 'path dependency.' The answers depend upon the questions themselves, not their order.

attempt to sketch the meaning, the content, and the possibility of agreement on something which has been called a 'moral point of view' and to draw out its relevance for understanding 'the good state.'[2]

We are conjecturing that the point of view an individual adopts can affect her choices. A choice problem can be characterized as a decision maker facing alternatives from which some subset must be chosen.[3] To make a choice, a decision maker must perceive alternatives, but any perception requires a point of view. If economists are to be believed, the choice will be a function of the chooser's values and her corresponding evaluation of the implications of the alternatives. Based on what she knows about the alternatives and the decision context, she chooses to maximize her 'welfare' according to her evaluations. Such a formulation, however, is too simple: psychologists have shown (for recent reviews see Rabin, 1998; Quattrone and Tversky, 1988; Grether and Plott, 1979; Simon, 1986) that, with shifts in neither the information conditions nor the alternatives, changing the wording or order of presentation of the choice problem changes people's choices.

One can explain this by positing that there are a variety of points of view one can adopt to make sense of a problem, and the decision maker (perhaps unconsciously) adopts only one of them. But, in any given situation, it is not easy to specify exactly how a particular point of view comes to be adopted.[4]

In any case, it is important that one distinguish a change in point of view from a change in the information which the individual has in mind at the time of the decision. New information can certainly change the individual's understanding of the relation between her choice and her welfare. One function of the salespersons alluded to above is to provide such new information. But an individual may change her evaluation of the alternatives without a change in the information held. Hence some salespersons are simply persuasive by virtue of their ability to make customers see their purchases in new lights. One can also change one's point of view without any external input, by thinking about the situation. Thus, one can consider the mental images of related problems one has stored. (The citations above report on a vast literature

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2/ This is in sharp contrast with Buchanan and Congleton (1999). They argue that the contractarian tradition cannot admit of advising citizens as to what might be good. As should become clear in this essay, nothing could be further from the truth.

3/ Technically, it could be that there are a set of possible alternative actions, and all that is being chosen are weights for the alternatives for a probabilistic choice. But such a problem could be thought to be misspecified by our initial description, for then the alternatives of choice would best be thought of as the possible weights, and not the discrete actions themselves.

4/ One possibility, which conforms to the cognitive understanding we develop in Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 2000, is that we cannot help but 'update' our understanding of the status quo via processing new sensory input. As anomalous information is processed, alternative frames and points of view are brought into focus in conjunction with an instinctive, or natural, updating. Of course, not all changes in points of view would come about this way.

describing how experiments demonstrate that changes in perspectives alter choice behavior.[5]) This insight raises the question of how a characterization of points of view might lend insight into decisions.

The Need for a Moral Point of View

A theory of choice needs to deal with how different perspectives affect choices.[6] This is true for any sort of decisions, but, for those interested in ethics, not all decisions are created equal. For some choices, there is little point in worrying about the point of view taken. Betsy's choice of a hair drier is of little concern to most ethical philosophers (with the possible exception of those concerned with the ethics of environmental impact). In general choices of interest to ethicists turn on the breadth of the effect of the choices. Decisions which affect only oneself (e.g. the flavor of one's toothpaste) and which do not affect one's overall well being will be of little interest to others. Which point of view is taken in those decisions will not concern ethicists. But when one person's decision affects the well being of others, ethical antennae perk up.[7]

There is a long tradition in philosophy to try to convince people to look at certain decisions from a given point of view. When decisions affect others, i.e. what we might call moral decisions, they call out for an analysis of what might constitute the appropriate point of view. To understand why this is the case, one must first identify the nature of moral decision problems.

The Nature of the Moral and The Importance of a Moral Point of View

If there is some distinction between decisions with and without moral content, then we must identify the former as those which should be taken from a moral point of view. For our purposes we characterize decisions with moral content as those in which the alternatives have

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5/ The fact that we have numerous preference structures to apply to any decision problem is related strongly to our discussion in Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 2000.

6/ An early piece exploring this possibility is Sen, (1977) but also see Margolis (1982). Sen has recently revisited the problem in Sen, (1997)

7/ Of course, one can make decisions about narrower or broader things. At the most general level, one can consciously adopt a perspective about how one is to lead one's life, broadly construed, or, at the other end, how one is to reach one very specific decision. And a point of view can be taken when confronted with the task of making a narrow decision or a global one.

consequences which affect values of persons other than the decision maker.[8] It should be noted that our characterization of moral decisions implicitly takes sides in an ethical skirmish.[9]

Our definition, requires not only that we consider consequences, but insists that we build in consideration of *consequences for others*. Some theorists (see Slote, 1988 for a discussion of one large subset of such theorists, often referred to as virtue ethicists) would include how one comports oneself as a fundamentally moral question. Thus, for some, the types of thoughts and the types of activities one engages in are all part of pursuing 'the good life.' Choices, in that tradition, can be judged as more or less moral on the basis of their virtue. In spite of this, we have chosen to consider morality as triggered by concern for the the welfare of others. This is in the grand traditions of the welfarist schools which underlie most theories of democracy.[10]

But why, then, is morality important? Why should we consider the consequences for others? Gert (p. 9, 1998) gives a variation on one of the classical answers:

> Hobbes is one of the few philosophers who realized that the moral virtues are praised because of the calamities everyone avoids if people act morally . . .. Nietzsche was certainly right when he maintained that morality is what the vulnerable use to protect themselves from those who might prey upon them. Unlike Hobbes, he did not seem to realize that everyone is vulnerable. This vulnerability explains why even those who are not always prepared to act morally favor having morality taught to others.
>
> Anyone who takes the trouble to look at what is normally considered to be morality realizes that morality is best conceived as a guide to behavior that rational persons put forward to govern the behavior of others, whether or not they plan to follow that guide themselves.

For Gert there is social value to morality. Morality (in others) makes life better during times of vulnerability. But it is not just the vulnerable who are helped by ethical behavior. The quality of life in society is changed for all if all behave morally. This is one of the insights of Hobbes. Nor are the benefits of moral behavior restricted to preventing harm and protecting the weak. Many public goods or social dilemma type situations are much more easily solved - or at least ameliorated - if people behave morally (Hardin, 1982, 1986).

8/ But, of course, there are decisions which have effects on animals other than humans, and even on the order of ecological systems. And a more complex view of the individual, one assuming that the individual can remake himself, would lead to the notion of a moral obligation to oneself. Thus, for example, a hermit, living amidst poppies, perhaps *ought* not to become a heroin addict. Adopting a moral point of view about heroin consumption decisions would presumably then at least decrease the probability that she choose to consume heroin. Nothing we say should be dependent upon the precise boundaries we draw here.

9/ But it should also be said that we are concerned here in defining the characteristics of a moral point of view which would hold in virtually any moral philosophy. Most philosophers have gone further in their specification of the characteristics of morality. Here we define the 'core' of the concept, rather than developing a full-blown conception of a particular moral point of view. As such, our specification will rule out some preference structures and will let us focus on the residual. It may well be that certain socio / political arrangements are better served by some moral points of view than others, but this needs to await a further essay.

10/ These schools obviously include utilitarianism of all sorts (e.g. rule utilitarians) as well as Kantians. These are the handmaidens of most modern theories of democracy such as those resting on notions of contracts.

But this sort of incentive is likely insufficient to motivate people to do the right thing, since each individual would be able to benefit from the 'ethical' behavior of others while, perhaps, privately benefitting from selfish immoral behavior which had little impact on the overall comity of the society. Moral behavior, in general, is itself, a classic public goods or Prisoner's Dilemma problem (Olson, 1967; Hardin, 1971).[11] In other words, individual ethical behavior cannot be explained by the desirability of the consequences which would flow were all to behave ethically. The adage "What if everyone else did that (i.e. behaved badly)?" may serve as a moral lesson for an individual but it may not be strong enough to motivate ethical behavior.

If the above observation is correct, and if the quality of life in a society may be improved by moral behavior, a fundamental problem for any society is how to motivate such behavior. Creating institutions which encourage such behavior would be of social value.[12] Cultivating an appropriate point of view may help induce the desired behavior.

Morality and The Content of Moral Points of View

Given our discussion, for an action to be called moral behavior, we require that the choice be undertaken after adopting a moral point of view.[13] A moral point of view would be one which explicitly models the situation so that the expected effects of one's actions on others are taken into account. More broadly, for behavior to be defined as moral, it must involve a considered and reasonable reflection on the consequences of one's action, and must consider others' interests in a sympathic way. Unjustifiable partiality, must not play a role in the decision. Minimally, we argue, this involves five formal properties: *inclusivity, sympathy, realizability, knowledge, and justice*. These properties must be fleshed out.

Inclusivity

Whose welfare must be taken into account in making a moral choice is a matter of some dispute. A moral point of view need not include consideration of any specific group of individuals. But given that we are discussing the political and economic character of a state, we may wish to distinguish between those perspectives which consider the welfare only of relations which are personal (e.g. family ties), as opposed to those which are more distant (e.g. neighbors,

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11/ But note: There are other relevant models. See Chong (1991) and Frohlich and Oppenheimer (1971), Schelling (1973), and Frohlich, Oppenheimer, T. Hunt and H. Wagner (1975) for examples. The general conclusions for this case, would tend to be similar.

12/ Of course, we have not shown that in fact behaving morally will fundamentally alter the welfare of individuals in society. That is a burden of other sections of this paper.

13/ In addition, behaving in accordance with a moral point of view will be shown to be sufficient for moral behavior. Hence, moral behavior will be ipso facto motivated in accordance with an adopted moral point of view. Also, as can be inferred from the previous discussion, involuntary actions, cannot be judged one way or another. For example, a person might sneeze reflexively when entering a chemistry lab. This might startle a colleague who tips over a retort which starts a fire which destroys the lab and kills a few workers. The sneezer can't reasonably be condemned for the death and destruction of her action. We assume agents to be capable of free will and their actions to be morally judgeable only in cases of exercise of that will. An interesting, if somewhat convoluted essay on the link between freewill and morality is contained in Nozick, 1981.

fellow community members). Of course, one might be quite capable of adopting a moral point of view within a limited sphere of relations: say, within one's family.[14] The individual may be said to be partial toward (or against) a set of persons with whom she is quite closely related. But in considering social and political behavior, we would want to think of problems involving individuals who are not part of this 'inner circle' or 'privileged set' of friends. The sort of moral concern with which we wish to deal is therefore broader than one impacting only the merely personal relations of an individual. A moral point of view must apply to a wider class of others: it must specify a relation of (perhaps limited) responsibility.

But how are the various levels of relationships to be taken into account? Familial relations, friendship structures, neighbors, community members and the like often define a pecking order of concern; they tend to play a role in determining the weights assigned to others' welfare. Cousins may be less seriously your responsibility than brothers or children. But among those outside of these or other well defined personal relations, we may be at a loss as to the weight to assign others' interests: there is no clear statement as to how to decide which individuals to help, given the limitations on one's resources, etc.

Perhaps in modern democracies, with information about the entire species available to all at the touch of a button, morality has come to require something like **universality** as a principle of inclusion. If a group believes that only they can feel pain and pleasure, then moral behavior need only take their own group's welfare into account. But this may be too narrow a view. Serious claims for ethical principles have tended to be more inclusive and universalistic. When one person has an obvious concern for her own welfare and her welfare is a function of another's, there is a moral issue at the core. So, for example, when, as Aristotle noted, the welfare of the slave is tied to behaviors of the master, this must impact our conversation as to what is moral for the master.

At one end of the spectrum it is easy to identify immoral behavior. One can draw a line at the point at which an individual shows ***no concern*** *for some others involved in a decision.* That posture would violate what counts as moral. Morality requires some general *inclusivity*. The problem is not just distance from self. The question of positive valuation of those whom one can help or hurt is central, regardless of distance. So, for example, examining the record of the Rwandan holocaust Philip Gourevitch remarks, "And strange as it may sound, the ideology – or what Rwandans call 'the logic' – of genocide was promoted as a way not to create suffering but to alleviate it." (1998, p. 95) It was advocated as a way of preserving the welfare of the Hutu for the Hutu. Only the Tutsi were excluded from that moral concern. But the record indicates that doubts regarding the morality of the actions were there, even as the politics meted out death.

The notion of concern for one's own 'welfare,' or of being more or less better off, may define the most extensive perimeter of concern. In our culture, morality is restricted to "beings' with sophisticated sensory apparatus and consciousness. It does not extend, to inanimate objects. Of course, ontology varies across cultures. Among some peoples, animals, and plants, are

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14/ A number of famous Nazi leaders were reputed to be very devoted and wonderful 'family men.' They may well have been very moral members of their respective families.

viewed having concern for their own welfare states. Among others, it is the sentient characteristics of all higher animals that relate to welfare. The boundary, therefore, between moral and amoral behavior will shift with this ontological understanding.[15] In our musings here, we require inclusivity to cover only human welfare, but this barrier can easily be modified to include other sentient beings.

Sympathy

But more than inclusivity is required if a concern for others' welfare is to qualify one's behavior as moral. After all, one might relate to others in a perverse way: sadistically, or malevolently (see Frohlich and Oppenheimer, et. al, 1984 for experimental evidence on behavior of this sort). Morality restricts not only what individuals must consider, but also how individuals must take these factors into account. Taking a moral point of view requires that the choice must be well intentioned towards others.

Nor is this requirement of concern a heavy one. It is near undeniable that individuals are capable of good intentions towards their fellows. There are numerous traditional and contemporary arguments as well as overwhelming evidence that individuals do care about others' welfare. Early on, Hume argued that empathy plays a vital role in our moral comportment (see Baier, 1981). Recent findings in cognitive psychology identify empathy as an element in our dispositions in early infancy and can be demonstrated via experimentation in a variety of contexts (Goldman, 1993, pp 140 - 152). Given early seemingly empathic actions, like mimetic crying of infants, it now appears that empathic tendencies are either innate, or at least follow hard on the early nurturing by others. Unless extinguished, normal humans appear able to evoke empathy under a wide variety of circumstances.

Frankena (1983) describes his minimal requirements for a moral point of view on the basis of this 'caring for others.' As he puts it (p. 71) ". . . it is just a Caring or Non-Indifference about what happens to persons and conscious sentient beings *as such*, of the kind that goes with the imaginative realization of their lives . . .."[16] Therefore, our second requirement of a moral point of view is that:

> An individual must place some positive value on the consequences of her actions not only for herself but also for others.

But is it enough that some theoretical level of positive valuation be placed on the consequences for others?

Realizability

15/ Far more sweeping conclusions follow from this. For if the boundary between moral and amoral behavior shifts with ontological understanding then the nature of those shifts become a moral matter. Indeed, we shall later wish to require that a morality acceptable to a democratic culture requires an ontology that is inherently *interpersonally correctable*.

16/ It should here be noted that in contrast with us, Frankena permits negative caring, or hatred in this aspect of his definition.

One could consider the welfare of others, but find that the effect on others' welfares does not counterbalance one's own interests. For a moral point of view to have been adopted, the perspective must involve a sufficient weighting of others so that under some possible circumstances, the individual would change her choice. Otherwise, there is no necessary link between adopting a moral point of view and behavior. That is, operationally it is required that the individual be willing to consider giving up some gains for herself to increase the welfare of someone else under some realizable circumstances.

Note that this perspective is compatible with a subsequent 'rational calculus' to maximize welfare based on the values which attach to the elements of the decision as seen from that perspective.[17] Seen this way, adopting a moral point of view is similar to choosing the set of values which are to be operable or applicable to a decision problem. Once that view has been adopted, and assuming that an altered course is called for, one is faced with the problem of choosing from the specific alternatives in that situation: whom to help, in what fashion, to what extent, at what cost, etc.[18]

Of course, the extent to which others' welfare enters into the decision may vary. One can characterize this variation abstractly on a numerical continuum. A purely self-interested individual with no regard for others places a parametric weight of zero (0) on the welfare of every other individual. A completely impartial individual places a value of one (1) on each individual's welfare (including her own). And, of course, all other values on that continuum are possible parametric weights for the welfare of others. These weights may presumably vary, not only across individuals, but within individuals across situations and be different within an individual for different others.

Given the private structure of one's life, it is not surprising that different persons who adopt moral points of view might act very differently. Some would choose to be very helpful to others whom they casually meet, and others may seek out targets with specific properties for their help. For example, a person who loves the work associated with business may express her willingness to help others mainly by trying to set up their own businesses. Another person may help others by helping the homeless. Hence, adopting a moral point of view by taking into account others' welfare falls far short of prescribing a single best action.

But there is another sense in which the notion of a moral point of view is under specified. A mandated concern for others' welfare has direct implications about one's responsibility to be informed and knowledgeable.

17/ However, one may be aware that the values which one is maximizing within that perspective are, themselves subject to some sort of meta - choice process (see Sen 1977; Margolis, 1982).

18/ In a rational choice mode, this would be assumed to be done in a manner which was consistent with marginal calculi. Any rational calculus must allow the individual to assess the value of the consequences of her actions. Since the effects of the actions we are concerned with are on others, this involves interpersonal comparisons of values and welfares. (Chapter 1 of Sen, 1973 and 1970, have a most interesting discussion of the fundamental requirement for interpersonal comparisons of welfare in virtually any moral theory). One question, which is implied by this is how to aggregate preferences given the interpersonal comparisons (see Frohlich, 1974).

Knowledge

Since any meaningful concern for others' welfare requires knowing how one's choices affect both one's own and others' welfare the individual has an obligation to acquire a modicum of knowledge about the consequences of alternative choices for the relevant individuals' welfare.[19]

What exactly that modicum should consist of turns on such matters as the relative costs of information and the potential benefits flowing from it. Here, we are merely flagging the obligation to acquire some adequate level of information. But it should be clear that the knowledge condition is not trivial. An individual seeking to be moral must know the differences her actions could make in the outcomes as evaluated from the point of view of relevant other affected parties. And it should be noted what is being called for is counter-factual: what difference would it make were one to do x rather than y. Of course, the greater the distance between the counter-factual and the experiences of any actor, the relevant others, or the target of one's actions, the more likely one will have disagreement and perhaps even conflict about the appropriate moral action and the appropriate responsibility to gather information.

Perhaps more problematic than the responsibility of gathering the information is the question of *what is appropriate information*. Thus, take Jane, an addicted - and perhaps pregnant - smoker. When we say that Jack (her husband), is taking a moral point of view when he acts to impede her smoking, what is the basis of his information? It is *not* her first hand (strongly expressed) desire to continue smoking? Thus, it must be some other (third party?) information. In his case it is likely scientific studies. But clearly, this avoids the question of what should count as the epistemological basis for information to be accepted. Were we not dealing with smoking but, say with sodomy, the third party basis for the welfare estimation might be the Bible (and hence revelation) rather than science. Much rides on which *epistemological* judgements are to be accepted as overriding first hand judgements. Modern pluralistic and non theocratic democracies will impose requirements of their own.[20] But this is the stuff of future inquiries.

But there is yet another caveat to be entered. Informed positive concern for the welfare others is still not quite enough. The characteristics we have outlined still do not deal with the distributional issue of how to weigh the claims of one vs another of the others. Another condition needs to be added to our characterization of a moral point of view.

19/ Frankena (1983, 74-75) discusses the problematic individual who loves others, but does not infer from his love that he has any duties toward those whom he loves. This 'loverboy' (Frankena's term) need not make judgements and need not seek information, as he has no perceived responsibilities towards those others. We rule such aberrant behavior out of our definition of moral behavior. Our reasoning is rather straightforward. Concern for others at a minimum means that one ought to consider the harm one might do them via one's choices. Hence, adopting a moral point of view requires that one be concerned for individuals whom one may harm by one's choices of action. Only if such affects as love are separable from concern is there a problem. But were this the case, we would argue, love is not a moral affect.

20/ This raises issues regarding epistemology similar to those we raised regarding ontology in footnote 15. Again, we believe that interpersonally correctable epistemic criteria will be part of what is required as bringing useful moral claims to the table in modern democracies.

Justice

At the simplest, and most traditional level, we might want to specify that from a moral point of view equals should be treated equally (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book 5). We can think of this in terms of the weights a decision maker assigns to the welfare of the relevant others. Yet we may wish to allow the assigning of different weights to different others raising the obvious issue of partiality. Most theories of ethics allow that some partiality is morally justifiable while others are not. The trick is to identify some aspects of situations which render some partiality morally acceptable.

Referring specifically to welfare differences, we would argue that there are a variety of ethical principles which may meaningfully be used to justify differences in treatment of others. "Need" and "just desserts" are two such principles.[21] Thus categories of characteristics which have ethical weight may be defined to establish a metric of entitlement and hence to identify what cases qualify as "equal" Obligations to near kin and friends *may* constitute another class of characteristics which justify unequal weighting. But the goal here is not to fully specify all the relevant characteristics that might qualify as yielding an increased claim to higher weighting. We merely note that there are a number of potential candidates[22] and add to our requirement for a moral point of view a requirement of justice:

> For an act to be considered moral it must conform to some rudimentary notions of fairness such as 'treating equals equally.'

These then are the five formal properties of a moral point of view: inclusivity, sympathy, realizability, information, and justice. Notice that these conditions will not, in general, be sufficient to identify one action as the morally *best* alternative. That would require much stronger conditions. But it appears to us that virtually all conceptions of morality require these properties to be satisfied.

Thus, for example, morality alone may not determine the answer to the issue of how one is to weigh one's own diminution of welfare against a gain in the welfare of unrelated others.[23] And similarly, morality may not be enough to determine the weighting between the welfare of unrelated and related others. Indeed, this is one of the main conclusions of Nagel's (1991, p. 44)

21/ These are discussed extensively in Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1992.

22/ Additional criteria may readily be agreed upon, given the information conditions of modern civilization. Under specifiable circumstances these might include such substantive side-constraints as not to aggravate welfare differentials among others unless they can be justified in terms of some ethical claim (a Rawlsian sort of constraint). We hope to investigate the implications of such cultural lenses will be considered in some detail in future research. Justice and benevolence are often seen as two quite separate criteria (see for example, Aiken, p. 67) but this need not be the case. One may be able, for example, to utilize empathic motives to explicate both.

23/ And weigh them one must. As Nagel states (1991, p. 44): ". . . two general judgments will emerge which there is no obvious way of combining, viz.:

1. Everyone's life is equally important
2. Everyone has his own life to lead.

The second judgement . . . implies some limit to the extent to which anyone's life must be controlled by the first."

work on impartiality and equality: "How large and of what shape is the space left free for each person . . . from the impartial claims of value . . .? An ethical position on this issue requires not only the justification of choices by reference to motives, but the justification of motives as well, and of the relations among them."

This difficulty stems from precisely the respect one must give others, plus the personal attachment one has to one's own life and plans. It is the real cost of the helping others which requires some sort of specification of the relative weights given to self, related others, and unrelated others in the light of the ethical components of the decision to generate a morally acceptable response.[24]

What then do we have here? We propose the bold conjecture that any notion of morality which is held in a society will conform to the above five characteristics. That is, if we examine any consequentialist argument as to what constitutes the right or moral thing to do, it will require that the decision be taken in a manner that is consistent with those five requirements. Another way of putting this is as follows: The characterization of the moral point of view in terms of the five characteristics identified above constitutes the maximal intersection of all consequentialist theories or views of morality.

Adopting a Moral Point of View and Best Moral Choices

We have argued that this characterization of a moral point of view is not enough to define a "best" choice. How, then, do these criteria relate to what might be thought of as 'the best' ethical decision? Choices conforming to the criteria noted above are morally acceptable to the extent that they are not condemnable. Is there a way of refining the requirements of a decision so that we might say that some choice is the morally best? Various philosophers have argued that to identify the best action one needs to take a moral point of view.[25]

Frankena (1973, p. 113-114), among others (e.g. Rawls' closely related concept of reflective equilibria), has imbued the notion of a moral point of view with properties other than those we have identified. He requires that one be willing to universalize one's judgements. He then argues that a moral point of view can be used to identify the truth of 'basic moral judgements:'

> . . . a basic moral judgement, principle, or code is justified or "true" if it is or will be agreed to by everyone who takes the moral point of view and is clearheaded and logical and knows all that is relevant about himself, mankind, and the universe.

Of course, the caveat that one must have complete knowledge is a big escape clause. Our notion of a moral point of view is related, but much less ambitious regarding information requirements. We certainly agree that information is crucial in reaching a judgement, but information of the sort relevant to moral decisions can never be complete. The conditions we set out above are not

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24/ This perspective can only generate a set of acceptable responses, not a unique best response. It is closely related to the position taken by Frankena, (1973, p. 113).

25/ Indeed, much of moral philosophy has concerned itself with meta questions of if one could differentiate true moral principles from other candidates and if so, how.

designed to identify a point of view from which one can identify the 'True Moral Judgements' to be assented to by all. Rather our concern is the considerations to which an individual must attend to make a moral decision. The lack of uniqueness of a choice is certainly in part because the individual must provide some relative weights to her own private needs and the needs imputed to others. Uniqueness is further attenuated by the lack of specification of the information requirements. But leaving out particular names, items, etc. (in the spirit of Hare, 1954-55) might help. Moral considerations of a general sort can at best narrow the field to an acceptable range of possibilities.

For those reasons, we do not conjecture that all could agree on what constitutes a correct moral decision, even were they all to take the same point of view. In general, the relative weights of private needs are especially significant in insuring that when individuals adopt the same point of view, they still may disagree on choices. But we do not rule out the possibility of agreement either.[26]

More generally, one can expect considerable disagreement on the weighting of the private partialities and the impartial impulse to treat equals equally even when all agree that certain partialities are morally acceptable. What we would expect is that individuals can agree as to what does *not* constitute a moral judgement: one which does not take into account the welfare of all relevant others, does not take into account their welfare positively, is not based on an informed judgement, or does not treat equals equally.

Thus, as Kenneth Arrow notes (1973, p. 123) each individual has some subjective combining of the welfares of others *within* the individual himself. Viewed that way, individual preferences can be thought of as a sort of subjective social welfare function. (Also see the discussion in Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1999). When making a moral decision each individual is making a decision which is somewhat analogous to a political decision, and which, if it is to be moral, must conform to the criteria given above. An ideal moral point of view might, in principle, be able to assign appropriate weights to the different persons in an agent's decision process. But what that point of view would be is not our concern here.

Dealing with the Amoral and the Immoral

There is (at least) one other major issue pertaining to decisions made from a moral point of view not dealt with above: punishment, coercion, or sanctions against those who don't conform.[27] Clearly if some choices can be ruled out as incompatible with a moral point of view then the same moral point of view can be used to justify sanctions against non-conformity (if they can be shown, from an appropriate moral point of view to be welfare increasing). After all, if Jane's dismissal of a moral point of view were to have serious effects on the welfare of others, sanctions could well be justified for the welfare of those that weren't properly taken into account. Here

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26/ Indeed, rather widespread agreement on a principle of distributive justice has been found by us and others in a number of countries (Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1992).

27/ A fascinating analysis of this aspect of moral rules and their evolution is contained in Bendor and Swistak, 1997 and their still as yet unpublished papers.

again epistemic questions are raised: how one *knows* what was taken into account and what those counter factual effects would be becomes fundamental (see footnotes 15 and 20). Hence, one finds an almost universal concern, in justice systems, with the notions of intent and premeditation.

But sanctions also imply a potential dark side in the advocacy of a moral point of view: one of coercion, control, and power. Such implications are certainly thought about by others, in both philosophy (Berlin, 1996) and the popular press. Note that Gourevitch, on Rwanda, reports:

> Genocide, after all, is an exercise in community building. A vigorous totalitarian order requires that the people be invested in the leaders' scheme, and while genocide may be the most perverse and ambitious means to this end, it is also the most comprehensive. ... The specter of an absolute menace that requires absolute eradication binds leader and people in a hermetic utopian embrace, and the individual – always an annoyance to totality – ceases to exist. (1998, p. 95)

But of course, the fact that there is a potential for abuse does not mean that all sanctions to enforce a moral regime are inexcusable. There is, however, a clear need for the criteria to be applied to a moral point of view to guard against such abuses. The conditions which we are putting forward do *not* do so. Rather, this is part of our extended research agenda: the criteria for acceptability of a moral point of view for citizens of a modern democracy. As such, we will need to spell out a *moral* commitment both to epistemological and ontological criteria as well as to side-constraints on the behaviors motivated by welfaristic concerns.

In sum, what we have given here is a very weak definition of a moral point of view. It does filter out many preferences and actions yet not so many as to lead to determinate results. It is less specific than a fuller, more demanding definition. But this gives us sufficient latitude to consider the characteristics and consequences of any choices taken from a moral point of view. Some of the indeterminacy will, in the real world, be reduced by society's conventions. This will enable us to inquire how social conditions and institutions affect moral reasoning and decision making, even when all have committed to a moral point of view.

The Moral and The Economic

To understand how our analysis touches on our understanding of economic questions, we examine some areas of inquiry which have been enriched by experimental findings. What we conclude, is that assuming a moral point of view *may* improve social outcomes, but that such a result is not guaranteed. Hence a closer look of the characteristics of the particular situations and the institutional constraints may be required.

Public good problems

Moral Decisions and Public Good Choices without Cost Sharing Arrangements:

Consider a standard public good provision problem, such as volunteers contributing to a cleanup campaign. With no one taking a moral point of view, standard analysis takes the form of a prisoners' dilemma game. In such games each individual has a dominant strategy to 'defect' (that is, not to contribute to the provision of the good). The result is a 'suboptimal' outcome for the group: the public good which is desirable is not supplied. Typically the analysis takes the

form of making the following sort of assumptions. The public good is valued by everyone to some extent, but not as much as the marginal cost to any individual who makes a 'private contribution.' That is, the cost of the contribution is carried completely by the individual contributor, but the benefits of the act are distributed among the recipients of the public good (Hardin, 1971; Binmore, 1994). In these cases, we have a prisoners' dilemma game. An alternative framework could be employed: that of a repeating prisoner's dilemma game, with much the same analysis (see Ledyard, 1995).

Now consider the change if individuals adopt a moral point of view. For simplicity's sake, imagine that they weigh each of the other's welfare as equal to their own. With this extreme form of 'impartiality,' each takes on the group's value in terms of their own valuation. Another way of viewing this, is that each members' contribution now would be *n* times as valuable, or each member of the group is a utilitarian. Many objections have been raised to such extreme valuations, including bankrupting of the altruist (see, for example Williams, 1973). But such an extreme position does have the attribute of solving the prisoners' dilemma game.[28]

Anything less, however, will not do the trick except under special circumstances. So for example, consider a situation where individuals adopt moral points of view which are less extreme. Let us say, for example, that the individuals were to weight the welfare of the totality of other group members as equal to themselves (this would be similar to valuing each of the *n-1* others as *1/(n-1)* as important as their own welfare. Now a contribution, which has the same privately imposed cost as earlier brings in double the value of the situation where individuals only consider their own benefits. Under these assumptions, the group will be able to overcome the prisoners' dilemma only if the value of the good per unit of contribution, *to each individual* is at least ½ the size of the cost of the contribution. In public goods situations with other supply characteristics (such as a provision point or some other curvilinear cost or benefit functions) different special conditions have to obtain for moral behavior to yield provision of some (or an optimal amount) of the good. But it should be clear, that the mere institution of decisions taken from a moral point of view will in general not be enough to guarantee optimality.

Of course, there are other ways to flesh out moral points of view. If for example, members of the group adopt 'moral rules' such as 'do your share' the problem would be solved. But in a more modern setting, where heterogeneity of values must be expected, most mixes of implementing the moral points of view must be expected to leave most problems unsolved.[29]

Interestingly, much of the data from experimental tests of the theory indicate that something is wrong (a good summary, with a fine bibliography is in Ledyard, 1995). Apparently under some conditions individuals do not behave as selfishly as the theory would indicate. And this holds in both one shot, and repeated situations. Communication has been found to have major consequences: often leading to very close to optimal outcomes (see Isaac and Walker, 1988;

28/ See Frohlich, 1992 for an articulation of the theoretical argument and Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1996 for experimental results bearing on this question.

29/ A number of scholars have dealt with the issues of morality within the modern culture of the heterogenous liberal state. Two that stress the diversity's effects are Habermas (1996) and Galston (1999).

Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1996 as well as Ledyard, 1995). It would seem that communication increases the commitment to community, to helping each other, and to not taking advantage. This is so even when the communications are anonymous (Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1998). Perhaps part of the efficacy of communications stems from their capacity to improve sympathetic understanding as well as to decrease information costs regarding the welfare of others. Dawes' (1980) finding that discussions must be germain to the problem if increased contributions are to be realized, reinforce this interpretation.

Political Institutions and Cost Sharing

What then can we expect to be the effect of a centralized decision by a group of individuals to adopt a moral point of view on social outcomes? The effects which stem from adopting such a view, depend upon the socio-political arrangements which constitute the environment of such decisions. One cannot guarantee that the group decisions, even when based upon a moral point of view will generate substantial ameliorations of typical problems without cost sharing institutions. After all, even with cost sharing arrangements, there is no insurance that one's own contribution will make a great enough difference in the supply of a public good to motivate the act.

Political institutions (and their concomitant taxes) are the standard mechanism for cost sharing in public good projects. But such institutions can do more than provide the mechanism for cost sharing. They also affect the ethical agendas of individuals by proposing public good projects which would otherwise not be considered. Some moral inclinations may be tucked away in the interstices of the individual's mind only to be evoked when an appropriate situation is encountered, say by observation or public discussion. In some such cases political institutions may not have to play a major role. For example, helping a little old lady across the street may happen after one merely 'runs into' the little old lady and observes her problems. But the same cannot be said for other sorts of moral decisions: say deciding to send clothing to Albania for the refugees from Kosovo. In the latter case, social institutions gather information and disseminate it so that you know there was a problem and could understand what might be done. In many such cases involving the helping of others with whom one has a relatively distant relationship, social institutions determine which moral problems are brought to one's attention. Hence, institutions affect which problems warrant the adoption of a moral point of view. They can change the 'perimeters' of inclusion of others in one's calculus.

Incentive Compatible Policies

In Frohlich and Oppenheimer (1995) we report experimental findings showing that incentive compatible policy can generate deterioration in outcomes after the policy no longer applies. In other words, incentive compatible devices can be seen as rewarding selfish behavior with socially improved outcomes. It appears that subjects who experience this effect later reduce their resort to a moral point of view with its attendant any other-regarding calculus in subsequent decision making. The incentive compatible device obviates the need for subjects to flex their 'moral muscles,' and the result, in parallel with the physical analogy, is flabby morality.

More specifically, those experiments were repeated prisoner's dilemma games in 2 phases. In Phase 1 two treatments involved playing either with or without an incentive compatible device.[30] Phase 2, for both treatments, were without an incentive compatible device.[31] In Phase 2, the repeated prisoner's dilemma game results are better when there was *no* prior experience with an incentive compatible device. We can reinterpret those results in terms of the arguments here.

It appears from the discussions, and from the questionnaires, that individuals playing a repeated PD partially 'solve' the game by adopting a moral point of view in their decision making. The introduction of an incentive compatible device removes their need to bring to bear a moral point of view, and, apparently, leaves them less likely to adopt one in the future. Specifically, from their responses, the subjects who had previously experienced the incentive compatible device, stop searching for information on how their behavior will affect others, and seem to decrease the weights that are assigned to the effects on other parties. In sum, the results show four things: the power of adopting a moral point of view, the fragility of the motivation behind such behavior, the variability of moral sentiments across individuals, and the sensitivity of moral behavior to social institutions.

Economic Justice

Experiments by a number of researchers (Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1992; Bond, 1991; Lissowski, 1991; dela Cruz-Doña and Martina, 2000) have shown that individuals in numerous countries, and under a variety of conditions, who spend the time and explicitly consider the issues of fairness in economic distribution from behind a veil of ignorance, overwhelmingly agree to support an income floor as their preferred pattern of justice in distribution.

The analysis of transcribed conversations indicate that subjects spend considerable time exchanging information about the welfare impacts of various distributional policies. The motivation, judging by these conversations, seems to be strongly oriented toward the welfare floor of others and the balancing of a variety of weighting principles. Most specifically the subjects seem to try to balance the principles of need, 'just desserts,' and economic efficiency. When subjects actually produce income and have it redistributed subsequent to their adoption of a distributive principle the productivity of highly taxed individuals does not seem to slacken off and that of transfer recipients seems to increase over time. All subjects expressed support for the transfers to others also continues unabated (see especially dela Cruz-Doña and Martina, 2000 and Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1992) even when they experience high taxes.

Earlier, p. 14, we noted that one extreme position in the weighting of others is to give them equality with oneself. Similarly, thinking of justice, the fifth aspect of a moral point of view: treating equals equally, might be satisfied, in the extreme, by treating everyone equally. At some abstract level this can occur by thinking of individuals as all faced with possible life chances (as Rawls thinks about the problem). But empirically this does not seem to be the way subjects

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30/ The communications conditions were also manipulated. The results reported here were not dependent upon those conditions. Also see Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1996 and 1998.

31/ Nor is there any form of communication.

interpret the moral imperative. Virtually all subjects in justice experiments identify situational categories within which individuals are treated similarly, or within which they are given equal weights. This is in sharp contrast with the equal weighing of all and reinforces our earlier notion of ethical factors which create categories of entitlements which constitute an ethical metric..

We found that when given the opportunity to focus on a particular ethical problem and discuss it, subjects were eager to consider non-self-interested points of view. They were willing to consider thresholds of transfers which would impose real potential costs on themselves (i.e. would be *realizable* as we describe it above). The result was, unanimously, preferred to outcomes which would have been generated without the agreements, even though the agreements were reached at substantial cost.

The increases in productivity with high taxation rates indicate that feelings of 'group solidarity' and 'comity' might be substitutes for economic incentives to create motivation of workers. However, we also found (Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1992) that when subjects were simply asked to work under identical distributional rules which were imposed by the experimenter and *not* chosen after deliberation, that productivity was lower and fell off more. This is in keeping with the multi-generational experience of Israeli Kibbutzes. For many years these cooperatives were among the most productive forms of industrial organization in their sectors. This might be attributed to the founders who were party to an original contract and decision - in contrast to their offspring who simply inherited the decisions of their elders.

Economic Organization

In a set of experiments which expanded upon some of the findings in Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1992, Frohlich et. al., 1998 pursued the implications of this for the structure of firms. What was discovered in those experiments was that individuals happily gave up higher pay opportunities for a more egalitarian work environment. Again, there was no evidence of the prisoner's dilemma aspects of production (the possibility of free riding on the efforts of others) affecting the behavior of the individuals. Rather, productivity, and expressed satisfaction, were both higher in situations where the workers were able to 'buy out' the employer's contract, and work in their own firm.

Conclusions: Designing Political Institutions

Some would have one believe that human nature is so flawed that there is little possibility that run of the mill individuals will make judgements which would conform to our characterization of moral. Some economists, for example, judge moral behavior as stemming, instead, from the incentives which social organizations give individuals to accommodate the interests of others. And indeed, to prove their point, economists developed a set of experiments, called dictator experiments, which left individuals with no social incentives to accommodate the interests of others (see Hoffman, et. al. 1996). They conjectured that anonymity would allow individuals to indulge their purely selfish motives. But the results from these experiments seemed to belie that pessimistic view of human nature (see Roth, 1995 and others; for an example, see Frohlich, Oppenheimer and Moore, forthcoming). Many of the results show subjects willing to take heed of others' welfare in their choices, even when they are anonymous.

Others would have us believe that self-interest is at the root of many of the dilemmas we face and if we could induce moral considerations, all problems, in some spheres, would disappear. We have shown that morality can help, possibly, but that even with a moral point of view, problems and dilemmas can persist. Political compromise and tactical maneuvering would still be needed to overcome the lack of unanimity of vision, given the heterogeneity of judgements one could expect even from a moral group of decision makers. But even there, some forms of moral reasoning can be expected to improve decisions from the perspective of group welfare.

Given the possibility of moral behavior, but its non-definitive character, major questions remain: can it be fostered, if so, how? What sorts of moral points of view are compatible with our pluralistic modern societies? Are some particular points of view more conducive to acceptable outcomes, and if so, how might these be preferentially induced?

Were one to accept the standard economists' notion that individuals have unique, and stable sets of preferences, there would be little hope of engineering of environments to encourage altruistic preferences. But the results of psychology experiments hint that the outlook is not so dim. The work of Tversky and Kahneman (1981) and others who have followed their lead has shown that behavior is subject to considerable variation in response to subtle cues. Political philosophers and others are obligated to discover what sorts of environments might encourage moral behavior, and what are the consequences of such encouragement. Institutions, it has been conjectured, make a difference in the manifestation of moral or altruistic tendencies. There is some indication that incentive compatible mechanisms more generally do so also (see Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1995).[32] Specifically, markets have been found to submerge the tendency for non-egoistic behavior (see the discussion in Mueller, 1989).[33]

Indeed, viewing an interaction as a market exchange can submerge ethical considerations to a shocking degree. For example, we know of an independently wealthy social activist who worked very hard championing the causes of the poor and the oppressed. She did community organizing in poor black neighbourhoods establishing daycare centers. The pay was not great, she both money and had other talents, and so it seemed clear that her actions were ethically motivated. One day she found herself in need of a dining room table and proceeded to the local flea market. There, at a stand presided over by an obviously poor, frail, old black man, she discovered a solid oak dining room table exactly of the sort she wanted. True it was grimy and shabby looking, and painted over, but she could see that it was of excellent quality, and with a little work could be made to look very fine indeed. And the price was only $45, well below its true market value. And so she proceeded to bargain with that little old man, brought the price down to $40, and walked away with a real deal. The bargain she struck might, in contrast to her behavior in her work, be thought of as ethically questionable. In her market exchange, she never thought to take

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32/ Moreover incentive compatible devices, by their very nature would not be able to deal with issues of fair distribution.

33/ Of course, the friction between market and moral behavior has been at the center of conversation since Aristotle, and constitutes a part of the religious dogmas of Christians, Jews, and Moslems.

a moral point of view, although, if we had had the presence of mind to call to mind the moral imperatives inherent in the situation, she might well have changed her behavior.

If individuals can adopt differing preferences over a given set of alternatives, there must be another element in choice beyond preferences. We would posit that variable to be representations (see Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 2000) and frames, or, in moral discussions, what has come to be called points of view. It is our conjecture that individuals can have their points of view questioned, and that some institutions lead individuals to adopt points of views which are more benign and productive of social progress than others.

One of the strongest arguments for democratic institutions has been that the voter is the consumer of the programs provided by government and, as such, is in the best position to judge. Of course, recent positive and normative analyses have pointed out myriad problems of aggregating voters' preferences. There are also the difficulties of getting information contents high enough for informed judgements, and there are institutional impediments to the implementation of policies. All of these place huge caveats on the argument that democracy is the best form of government. But the alternative forms of government are still less attractive. Hence, it may be important to examine how one might structure democracy to foster values and perspectives which militate towards better social outcomes.

On some counts democracy can be seen to be, by its very nature, disposed to induce some aspects which we have argued are necessary for a moral point of view. It promotes inclusivity to the extent that all are franchised. In open democracies, information is presumed to be a requirement of informed voting and so it, too, is encouraged. One might even argue that justice (as we have characterized it, is encouraged by the equality of the franchise. But sympathy is not, necessarily a concomitant of democracy, for example, when it descends into narrow interest-based politics. And selfishness, even in a democracy, can certainly threaten realizability.

Clearly democracies can vary in the extent to which they promote citizens' considering decisions from a moral point of view. One question for the political philosopher is the identification of the social institutions that best promote this stance. Another is the evaluation of states regarding the extent to which they achieve decision making from that perspective. But those questions evoke yet other questions which must be answered antecedently, and are problematic for democratic theory itself:

1. If individuals can have different preferences which affect their evaluations of their own and others' welfare, there is a fundamental problem in democracy. How should one evaluate the responsiveness of political and social institutions? Should institutions be evaluated on how well they serve the preferences which are expressed? Or should they be judged on the basis of which sorts of preferences they encourage to be expressed and the subsequent results which follow? Should some preferences have priority in judging the quality of different outcomes?

2. Because morality rules out some decisions, and a moral point of view will exclude some preferences, the expression of preferences from a moral point of view restricts the range of values which will be expressed. This is likely to facilitate the social choice process (see

Arrow, 1963; Sen, 1970). Precisely how does this perspective change the prospects for success in a social choice process?

These questions require examination in the light of new findings in cognitive science as they apply to the question of choice. They point to the potential insight which might be gained by considering political and economic questions from a moral point of view.

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