

Note by Stephan Kinsella (www.StephanKinsella.com):

Per Christian Malloch emailed me sometime in the late 1990s I believe, with some bizarre, mocking, but not entirely unfriendly comments about Hans Hoppe's argumentation ethic (www.HansHoppe.com). We ended up corresponding. He was a very bright young student at Columbia at the time, as I recall. He was also into Satanism, and we corresponded about that too. He was into video games and writing about them, and weird projects like The Chicken Musical.

He must also have been into drugs because he apparently overdosed and was found dead in his dorm room or apartment in November 2000. I found out from an email subject lined "Remembering Per" from one of his friends, who must have found Per's email address list and sent it out. As I recall the others on the list appeared to be a bunch of black-leather wearing Goth types.

This is one of the articles Per sent me. I found it recently and scanned it in, as I am going paperless.

More info on Per is here:

http://www.stephankinsella.com/archive/2004_09_01_archive.php#109465893003515248

Stephan Kinsella, Sept. 2004

Amoralism in one Lesson

by Per Malloch

This brief treatment of the topic of amoralism must of necessity refrain from clarifying asides, from sustained arguments, from other improvements which greater space would allow. Consequently, my aim is not so much to convince the reader to become an amoralist, as to inspire further research on the viewpoint I articulate, as it is represented in varying degrees in the works of Stirner, DeSade, Rand, LaVey and (Benjamin) Tucker.

Rules of conduct, as in the rules of Chess and the rules of morality, are neither true nor false. Rather than descriptions of the world, they are descriptions of possible *ways of treating the world*. No fact, experience, observation or experiment can confirm, falsify or prove them; an action-disposition, a practical orientation, a systematic practice cannot be *proven or disproven*. "Prove to me the rules of Chess and the Ten Commandments!" "Is it true that 'no running by the pool'?" *Prove that it is unethical to murder.*

Rules say what to pursue, how to pursue it, what to pay attention to; they say what is desirable, permissible, relevant or meaningful. But it is always an agent that desires, that permits, that regards (things) as relevant and meaningful (we are speaking of *psychological categories*;) things in the external world have relevance, are desirable, are important only to the extent that people are governed by rules that define them as relevant, desirable, important. In short, a thing becomes 'worth seeking' in being sought; the "meaning of things" is *in our heads* and can be bestowed and taken away at will, most dramatically in the mid-life crisis and the teenage moratorium. Thus, when a man says that he believes human life is sacred, this means only that it suits him to treat human beings with deference; we cannot investigate human beings and come up with an experiment that proves whether or not human beings have the property of sacredness, i.e. whether he is *mistaken about a matter of fact.* *? captures persuasion w/ reason. ? or ingenuit?*

While neither true nor false, a rule can be justified or unjustified to particular agents. To justify a rule is to convince someone to follow it after he asks "why would I want to do as you suggest?" How is this done? Not, obviously, by appealing to the authority of the rule in question, which would be circular and question-begging-- "if you don't do the right thing, you will be immoral!" "play Chess, so as to capture your opponent's king!" "play Soccer, in order to score goals and win!"

but this might be possible ...

Nor can a rule be justified to an agent (who is paying attention) by appealing to some fact or the other. Anyone can see that the superiority of a *method of dealing with facts* (an "ought") cannot logically follow from a fact (an "is.") "It hurts ducks when you shoot them, therefore don't shoot ducks!" [Acceptable only if one accepts the rule that hurting ducks is undesirable.] "It hurts ducks when you shoot them, therefore shoot ducks!" [Only if one accepts the rule that hurting ducks is desirable.] A rule does not follow from a fact anymore than a fact follows from a rule-- "don't hurt ducks, therefore ducks exist." Facts always fall before the immortal question "so what?"

No, to justify a rule one needs to be aware of the rules an agent accepts without question (without further demands for justification.) The agent must be convinced that he cannot reject a proposed rule without also rejecting the rule he accepts. An employer can justify his demands on an employee by appealing to the employee's will to retain his job ("bring me my coffee or you're fired" is a good justification for the rule "it is desirable to bring the boss his coffee" or "it is impermissible not to bring the boss his coffee.") A cripple can justify his demand for alms to a Christian by appealing to the Christian's will to be charitable-- "it is your duty as a Christian to help me."

Everyone accepts some rules without question. A common one is "physical pain is to be avoided at most costs." A consistent code of conduct could be constructed starting from the rule that pain is to be sought rather than avoided, but it would be almost impossible to justify to most people. People just do not like pain. However, there is no rational basis for preferring pleasure to pain. There is no rational basis for accepting any particular rule as beyond question. Why must this be so?

In order to offer a rational basis for accepting a rule, one must appeal to some other rule that stands in no need of justification as far as the person one is trying to convince is concerned (appeals to facts are useless.) If one cannot do this there will be an infinite regress of justification. In either case one or more rules will stand without justification, yet still be accepted and followed (~~assuming one does anything at all.~~) The choice between these nonjustified rules is made on pure whim. Only once someone has arbitrarily assented to some rules can there be any possibility of justifying further rules to him (or of his justifying rules to himself.)

but is it really arbitrary?
what does this mean?

Morality requires us to sometimes sacrifice our interests to the interests of people we do not care about, merely for their sake. When a moralist suggests that an amoralist give of himself in this manner, the amoralist stares at him blankly; no moral code can be justified to him in its entirety, because he refuses to accept any rule that requires him to serve others for no reason grounded in his own happiness. True, no ethical axiom is more rational than any other, but why anyone would be so stupid as to accept a moral code, willingly allowing himself to be trampled underfoot by anyone who does care to accept his sacrifices, is beyond the amoralist's comprehension. Life can just as well be lived according to the iron rule of self interest-- "act according to rules which will maximize the amount, degree, duration, intensity, level, etc. of physical, psychological and 'spiritual' (aesthetic) pleasure that accrues to you and your loved ones." No watcher in the space between the stars cares which path I take, for indeed it makes absolutely no difference to the ice that will one day preside over the grave of all life; but still, defiantly and without reason, I care what happens to me.

The rule of self interest merely recognizes my ends; it does not fabricate new ones that begin and end in thought (thus subordinating me to the will of its maker,) as every other ethical rule appears to. A rule is justified to me only when I see a causal connection between obeying it and my experience of happiness. Every rule becomes a tool for me to use and discard once its usefulness is at an end. I can treat people as bearers of human dignity, or as pawns to be callously manipulated, or as friendly equals, as I choose; why would I care to treat total strangers as my rightful masters (accepting the moral rule that they were entitled to a certain level of autonomy at my expense, say) if I would be happier in an isolate existence, or even as a stern conqueror?

To be an amoralist is simply to refuse to follow any rule I do not see an advantage in following, as measured by my personal tastes, likes, dislikes, fetishes, psychological aberrations, itching lusts, and whatever so else may thrill within me. Chess and the Ten Commandments are all the same to me; ways of conducting myself that I embrace only when I see a benefit in doing so. Time began when I was born, and will end the day I die. Let everyone who wants my cooperation offer me recompense on terms meaningful to *me*.

scope
man
world } rules

Ethics from an Amoral Point of View

The amoralist accepts or rejects proposed rules of conduct based on his estimation of what the consequences of his following these rules would be for people he happens to care about, primarily himself and his loved ones. Terms like 'good,' 'bad,' 'should' and 'ought' cease to hold meaning for him; henceforth, he asks not why he should behave a certain way, but rather why he *would want to*. The moral person lives according to rules that begin and end in thought (the "will of God," direct intuition of people's "rights," the "moral point of view" which includes impartiality between one's own interests and those of others, and so on;) the amoralist sees the relevance of rules solely in their relation to his visceral experience, his private passions, loves and hates, fetishes, psychological proclivities, response patterns to imagery, and the like. In short, he never does "the right thing" merely because it is allegedly "the right thing;" his ulterior motive is his only motive. well.

How does he reach this strange condition? I shall attempt to show you.

What a rule is.

Amoralism is an attitude towards rules. What is a rule? A verbalization of the attitudes and priorities that underlie certain *ways of treating the world* (techniques, practices, plans.) Systems of rules are games; a game is nothing other than the rules that make it up, as to play a game one need only follow all the rules.

Rules define what ends are desirable (the "object of the game,") what ways of pursuing these ends are permissible (the "moves open to the players,") and, consequently, what features of the world are relevant, important, meaningful ("defined in the game," as for instance the game pieces.) Now take these concepts-- desirability, permissibility, relevance-- and see if they can be operationally defined without reference to the practical orientation of an acting being, the viewpoint of a game player (rule-governed agent.) What is desirable, as defined in a given game, is simply-- what a person who is playing the game will aim at in his actions. What is permissible in a given game is what a person who is playing that game will be willing to do. What is relevant in a given game is what the player will pay attention to.

There would be no desirability, permissibility, or relevance in a world without actors to desire, to permit, and to regard (things) as relevant. The meaningfulness or relevance of things is contained in the way I behave *toward* them and vanishes when my interest in them vanishes; relevance is always relevance-to-someone. I can treat things one way, or treat them another way, as the mood hits me; clearly, what is in flux here is *me*, not the things, which remain the same regardless of what I think of them. Whether X is desirable is not a matter of fact (only whether I regard it as desirable is;) the statement 'X is desirable' is neither true nor false, but rather an expression of a preference for following rules which require one to pursue (and hence desire) X. Thus, whether it is desirable in Chess to capture the king of one's opponent is a matter of fact (one need only consult the rules,) but if a man claims that taking his opponent's king in the way provided for in the rules of Chess is desirable, he is not making a claim about the external world, but only informing us that it suits him to play Chess; playing Chess *just is* regarding the capture of the king according to the rules of chess as desirable when acting.

Since rules describe the ways in which agents can *respond to* or *interfere with* the world, they presuppose a body of factual knowledge about the world (primarily, cause and effect relationships.) But they are not themselves items of factual knowledge. Are the rules of Chess *true*? Meaningless question! People follow the rules of Chess if they wish to play Chess, or, what is the same thing, if they are playing a game that includes playing Chess as a subgame; otherwise they pay them no heed, even if they have all of the knowledge they would need to play.

Moral codes are collections of rules; that is to say, they are games.

There is no fundamental difference between the logical structure of the rules of a board game and that of the rules of a moral code. Of course, moral codes cover a greater variety of situations and set broader goals. Instead of collecting points by running bases, the players of the game of morality do 'good deeds' in order to secure access to the kingdom of heaven or the joys of human brotherhood. Instead of red and black checkers one has 'persons,' 'individuals,' 'races,' 'criminals,' 'sovereigns' and so on. Moreover, moral games make more detailed provisions for the treatment of people who fail to play them correctly, even if they are not trying to play them. The free throws and penalty shots of basketball and soccer give rise to the gallows and the Spanish Inquisition. Nonetheless, the underlying structure of objectives, permitted and unpermitted options, and definitions of relevance remains the same.

Moralists are eager to conceal this fact by phrasing rules as if they were factual statements. Instead of saying "the object of Christianity is..." they will say "man's purpose/the meaning of man's life is..." Instead of saying "Utilitarianism requires that one pursue X" they will say "X is (according to Utilitarianism) good." Eventually, however, these supposedly factual statements disclose their true nature; a Christian is supposed to do this, supposed to do that; a Utilitarian too has this and that to do. If he refuses, what then? He becomes-- un-Christian! Un-Utilitarian! What is good, according to Christianity or Utilitarianism, is simply what one must pursue if one is to be a Christian or Utilitarian-- a "good person," in their parlance. And if one wishes to be a Chess-player, one naturally has to aim at certain things too-- capturing the king in the way permitted by the rules (taking turns, moving the pawn one space, etc.)

The justification of rules.

Why play Chess? Also, why be a Christian or a Utilitarian? This is really the same kind of question.

There are logical relationships between rules. Two rules can differ on what actions are permitted, (most) desirable, or (most) meaningful in the same situation, such that it becomes a practical impossibility to accept both at once. Thus, if I accept a rule that forbids me from swinging a bat, I cannot at the same time accept a rule that permits me to play baseball. The rules are contradictory in that my following both of them in real life would entail a contradiction. Likewise, a rule can be said to 'follow from' another rule if one could not in practice reject the one without rejecting the other. Thus, that swinging a bat is acceptable to me (i.e. that I would not mind swinging a bat) 'follows from' the judgment that playing baseball is acceptable to me (i.e. that I would not mind playing baseball.)

no: to convince someone who values rationality, coherence, consistency, etc.

To justify a rule is convince someone to follow it. How does one go about doing this? First off, it should be obvious that appealing, circularly, to the rules to be justified will not get you anywhere with someone who is paying attention. The rules of Chess themselves offer no justification of Chess, cannot say *why* one would want to pay any attention to them in the first place ("play Chess, so that you can capture your opponent's king!"); they *are* Chess. Appealing to them begs the question at issue, which is why one would want to play Chess.

Moralists proclaim that the man without morals is a monster. A consistent amoralist will not resent this classification, anymore than he would resent being called a "Chessless maggot" by Chess elitists. What is a 'monster,' as moralists use the term? Simply, a-- man without morals, a man who is not *afraid of words*. "So you say I am NAUGHTY, BAD, WICKED" he says, "but why would I not want to be wicked?" It is no answer to say "but then you would be wicked."

Another route could be tried: one could appeal to facts of some kind to show that it would be unreasonable to reject a proposed rule. This approach is doomed from the start since rules cannot be deduced from facts. Hume's Law snarls, "no ought from an is!" Every conceivable way of dealing with a fact is perfectly consistent with belief in that fact (except denying it or pretending it isn't so.) The man who kills rabbits for sport believes in their existence just as surely as the man who takes them home and worships them. One cannot even specify an observation or experiment that would "confirm" or "disconfirm" or "prove" a rule. *Rules are not knowledge. They are descriptions of what one can DO with knowledge.* Rules only "follow from"-- other rules (though knowledge of facts may change the way they are applied.)

sounds too
Rational
? but
who cares
about
consistency?

Moralists have occasionally attempted to circumvent Hume's Law by positing the existence of moral facts. Ghostly attributes of goodness and purpose are tacked on to the things of the world so as to make one way of treating them seem more appropriate or reasonable than another. From an objective recognition of X's goodness it is supposed to "follow" that it is desirable to pursue X. But this is blatant cheating, a linguistic trick. 'X is good/desirable' is no less a rule than 'one must pursue X' (indeed the two are equivalent.) Of course if one regards X as desirable then X can be said to have whatever properties that lead to its being regarded as desirable. But the desirability of X is still entirely *in the head*. My feeling-like-doing-something-to-X is not a property of X even if I have the feeling because of X's properties.

Another route is open: one can show someone that a proposed rule 'follows from' one which he already accepts without question, i.e. without demanding a justification for it. Everyone who acts systematically, who plans some of his actions in the future, accepts some rule(s) or another without question, if only something on the level of "I shall seek physical pleasure and avoid physical pain by whatever means appear to be expedient," so everyone is vulnerable to this technique. For instance, if a man accepts that (his) pain is undesirable to some extent, then to that extent the rule "don't put your hand on a hot stove" will be justifiable to him, as will any rule which people will reliably and painfully punish him for breaking in his society (of course, on another level there may be no justification to him for supporting the existence of these practices of punishment.) Likewise, if a person accepts that "everyone's pain is equally undesirable," then the rule "don't cause more pain than you relieve by your actions" can probably be justified to him.

well...
no

This is, in fact, the only practical method of justifying a rule to people who can see through the glaring inadequacies of the first two methods, neither of which can withstand the skeptic's refrain "so what?" Of course, what rules one will attempt to justify and to whom (including oneself) can only be specified by still other rules. This raises the question: is there a rational basis for picking one axiomatic rule over another? I must answer frankly: no, if a "rational basis" would be a justification. Whole systems of ethics can be spun out from various axiomatic starting points, but no prior rule exists which one could use to justify picking any one of them (such a rule would itself be an axiomatic starting point, or else the beginning of an infinite regress.) And no fact can justify any rule, much less the choice of one rule over another. The choice is made not by reason, but by whim or instinct, though it is later rationalized in order to appease others who are appeased or hurt by one's actions. There is no reason (as distinguished from motivation) for anyone even to prefer life over death; pleasure pulls us toward life, that is all. In the end, we must agree with the postmodernist and admit that life is indeed a meaningless absurdity from which one much wrench what amusement one can get.

Why be moral? Why be amoral?

An ethic is a game (code of conduct) which can guide all of the major choices of one's life. The one fundamental rule of the amoralist ethic is: "Act only according to rules which will lead to the greatest possible amount, quality, intensity, etc. of physical and psychological pleasure for you." The amoralist is like a Utilitarian, except that on the most basic level he counts only his own happiness as relevant. Naturally, he will work for the happiness of certain others that he loves or to whom he feels indebted, but the rules he uses to determine who "deserves" this treatment will have been chosen according to the criterion laid out in the fundamental rule. Every rule other than the fundamental one is a means to an end, to be discarded when it is no longer useful; the ends themselves are: my ends, which are not defined into existence in the fundamental rule, but simply recognized by it.

A moral code requires one to sometimes act in a way which furthers the interests of people one doesn't care about *just because it is in their interest* and not for any future gain, however remote. One has to be nice to people just because they are people-- they have "dignity." One has to help the poor just because they are poor-- they are "entitled" "to a decent life" or to "autonomy." The amoralist is an amoralist because every moral code must obviously conflict with the fundamental rule-- i.e. self interest-- at some point. Given his aims, it simply isn't logical to be moral. "To hell with human dignity, human entitlements, human autonomy, when they get in my way; let the human take care of itself, and I will tend to myself" is his retort.

The answer to the question: why be moral? is also the answer to the question: why be amoral? In the absence of any rational criteria for choosing one moral axiom over another, the amoralist resorts to arational criteria-- his physical and psychological pleasure and pain responses. The amoralist axiom is simply the rational criterion for conscious decision-making on the basis of these responses (i.e. anticipated happiness and suffering.) Now, morality requires certain actions of you even when they are painful and when they will never be repaid. It defines new ends into existence, ends which you have no natural inclination to pursue. Although it is not *irrational* to choose any particular moral code

(since this choice cannot be made by reason at all,) it certainly strikes me as *stupid*. Why knowingly decide to pick a code of ethics which will make you worse off by the standards of your own body and brain, for the benefit of people you don't feel anything for? People who do pick such a code, to the amoralist, are merely chumps who don't see that they are increasing their chances of being exploited by others, or doormats who welcome such punishment.

It might be responded that once a moral code has been internalized one receives some pleasure (or release from pain!) from following it. This must certainly be true, as otherwise people would be incapable of being moral at all. However, there is no empirical reason to think that the pleasure one got from following a moral code (i.e. smugness at being "a good person") would be markedly greater than the pleasure one got from following an amoralist ethic (smugness at "getting shit done and getting paid.") In addition, the pleasures of following a moral code must necessarily conflict with (not merely compete with) the satisfaction of one's natural (more primitive) desires. No such conflict exists for an amoralist, for better or worse.

What actually produces pleasure in oneself is an empirical matter that cannot be settled by aprioristic reasoning. Self interest may recommend taking many of the actions recommended by the various moral codes of the world. In such cases only one's motivations would distinguish one from the ranks of the moral. It is even possible-- though, I think, absurdly unlikely-- that wasting your life trying to save complete strangers from shipwrecks and starvation could trigger special pleasure centers in your brain that rewarded all of your seemingly self-sacrificial efforts handsomely, thus making amoralists flock to the Salvation Army. More seriously, all the compassion and charity in the world is not simply the result of moral codes. In-group altruistic sympathy and even raw, undirected benevolence seem universal enough to lend plausibility to the claim that there are egoistic satisfactions in a limited amount of generosity, and the further claim that the degree to which morality can inspire stranger-assisting activity may have been overestimated.

The content of an amoralist ethic.

Where does the amoralist turn for guidance? One needs to know what will make one happy, and especially what political and social systems are most conducive to happiness. Though I cannot explore this question in detail here, there are several avenues of research:

1. On a philosophical level, Ayn Rand, Friedrich Nietzsche, Anton LaVey, Max Stirner, and Benjamin Tucker have all contributed writings on the ethical codes that might be justified purely in reference to self interest. The ideal for the amoralist is, I think, what is commonly called instrumental rationality, or as Weber called it 'value-rational behavior.'
2. Books on psychology, especially from a Darwinian standpoint, often can be used as sources of insight into human motivation; LaVey's own 'The Satanic Witch,' Desmond Morris' 'Man Watching,' and Robert Wright's 'The Moral Animal' are good sources, and I personally have found the later writings of Nathaniel Branden and John Gray to be helpful as well.
3. The world is full of how-to books. A 'how to draw birds' book I came across contributed more to my life than everything in Aristotle's ethics. Part of being an amoralist is giving up on metaphysical ramblings and actually developing your talents.

Conclusion

The essence of amorality is expressed in Max Stirner's famous maxim "away with every concern that is not altogether my concern!" To be an amoralist is to always regard practices and rules as means to bringing about personal experiences of happiness, excitement, and contentment, never as ends in themselves to be served regardless of one's inclinations. It is to see in calls for self sacrifice the absurdity of willing doormatism and the hidden intent to subjugate. It is to take every moment of one's life as precious and irreplaceably one's own, to say "this will not come again" at every sunrise and to live fiercely enough to be able to say at every sunset "I do love this world, though this may be the last time I ever do see the sun."