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Non-Homogenous Moral Space : from Bentham to Sen

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NON-HOMOGENOUS MORAL SPACE (FROM BENTHAM TO SEN)

Abstract

The notion of moral space covers all *thin* (universal) and *thick* (particular) characteristics that may plausibly be seen as morally relevant. In this paper, I investigate certain properties of moral space so defined. These properties are not easily visible if we analyze moral characteristics individually, but become clear once we consider them collectively. In particular, following Amartya Sen, I claim that the value of moral properties is, in part, a function of positional characteristics. I call this notion *the non-homogeneity* of moral space.¹

Keywords: moral space, non-homogenous space, special obligations, Sen, Pargetter, consequence based moral evaluation

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¹ My paper entitled “Moral Space and Moral Luck and Realistic Obligation” is devoted to the issue of discontinuity of moral space—understood as the property which allows for moral luck. It was given to the International Society for Value Inquiry (with the World Congress of Philosophy) on Aug. 12, 1998. After many years, I now come back to this issue.

Definition of moral space

Moral space may be understood as the set of moral options, similar to a logical space of possibilities, which includes whatever considerations may be morally relevant. There are many other, loosely related understandings of moral space. According to Tilghman, moral space is understood, somewhat metaphorically, as **an arena of action**. Tilghman claims that aesthetic space—for instance a fictitious space in a painting—brings about a moral aspect, which may be called the ‘moral space’ of an artwork.² Another quite intuitive use of the term ‘moral space’ heavily stresses its spatial aspect, defining it as **the part of physical space inhabited by human beings**. Moral space, so conceived, provides a potential moral value to states of affairs taking place in it. Moral space that satisfies this definition can be called *ethos* in its Heideggerian interpretation as *the space where living creatures dwell*.³ Moral space also may be understood as **a domain within the institutional setup of a society** which allows for “shared moral deliberation” (Walker).⁴ Finally, it can be understood as **a geographic or architectural location** that is particularly hospitable to moral conversations; for instance, the Agora in the architecture of Ancient Athens. The latter two senses of ‘moral space’ refer to a social or geographical space (room) good **for** ethical deliberation, whereas the understanding of ‘moral space’ that I present is closer to a more abstract notion of “space” that is created **by** ethics. More precisely, it is a logical space created by the sum of the properties identified as moral.

Non-homogeneity of Moral Space

Let me introduce the following definition of ‘non-homogeneity.’ Any moral space in which (the) moral value (of an act) changes as a function of its

² Tilghman (1988) claims that Caravaggio’s space is “largely constituted by the human figure as an acting moral force.” This means that aesthetic characteristics of space in Caravaggio’s paintings can be fully appreciated only under the condition that we take into account the moral aspect of the human beings he represents.

³ This definition of moral space may be extended to other living creatures when understood as persons.

⁴ Walker (1993). A moral thinker in this conception is envisaged as a “mediator in the moral conversation taking place” within moral spaces.

positional characteristics, such as distance from the moral agent (in a relevant sense of the notion of the *distance in moral space*, to be defined below), will be termed **non-homogeneous moral space**. Alternatively, if moral space is homogeneous, moral value is independent of positional characteristics.

To put it differently, a set of moral properties is *non-homogeneous* if at least one property which is a member of this set is relative to positional characteristics, and it is *homogeneous* otherwise.

We may also speak of homogeneity and non-homogeneity of moral theories. By this terminological convention, a theory is *homogeneous* if it rejects any limitations of the extension of its moral maxims (if applied to the moral agents who enjoy the same moral status, *e.g.*, *to human beings*). This means that in such a theory, all moral requirements pertain to every person if he or she finds herself in relevantly similar circumstances. Theories such as J. S. Mill's utilitarianism and Kant's theory of perfect duties, on their standard interpretations, are homogeneous, whereas Aristotle's ethics of friendship is non-homogenous.

The inherent value clause

For a theory to be non-homogeneous, the positional (or, in particular, indexical) reasons it accepts cannot be purely instrumental. For instance, J. S. Mill accepts partiality towards one's kin and friends, which is a characteristic of non-homogenous theories; yet, he does so merely on rule utilitarian grounds. Mill believes that people are better motivated to maximize the general utility if the people they are trying to help are their kin (Mill 1979). But the overarching goal of Mill's ethics is to promote the greatest utility for the greatest number of people. Hence, his moral theory is best characterized as homogenous since the agent-relative value it incorporates is not inherent but instrumental.

This consideration leads us directly to **the Inherent Value Clause**: For a theory to be non-homogenous, it must accept *inherent agent-relative moral value*.⁵ A theory which maintains that, other things being equal, parents (rather than social workers or strangers) should read stories to their children

⁵ This is the issue I discussed in my paper at the Inherent and Instrumental Value conference, organized by this society at D'Ouville College several years ago.

because this tends to make children happier—is still a homogenous moral theory. This is because the agent-relative rule according to which these are people who should read stories to their children, is accepted only in so far as it maximizes general utility more than any alternative arrangements. Sen calls this kind of merely instrumental agent-relativity by the name of ‘**doer-relativity**.’⁶

In contrast, common sense moral intuitions seem to indicate that in some circumstances it is morally wrong *tout court* to disregard certain positional characteristics of moral agents. The fact that X is my friend may justifiably influence my action towards her, even if this action is not justifiable on universal grounds (whether deontic, act- or rule-utilitarian, or otherwise). According to the inherent value clause, only theories that adopt the stance that positional characteristics may influence the inherent moral value of one’s action (*viewer-relativity* and *self-evaluation relativity* in Sen’s classification) will be seen as non-homogeneous.

Propinquity

An unexpected example of a moral property that leads to the non-homogeneity of a theory of which it is a part is Jeremy Bentham’s notion of **propinquity**. In his discussion of the circumstances relevant for estimating the value of pleasure or pain with reference to a single person, Bentham mentions the following characteristics: intensity, duration, certainty and, finally, “propinquity or remoteness” (Bentham).⁷ By propinquity, Bentham means something other than the certainty or uncertainty of future pleasure, which he mentions as a separate characteristic. Hence, uncertainty is not the only factor that is able to change our attitude toward a given pleasure in the distant future in comparison to a present one. There is, Bentham claims, another factor that could make my 20 utiles today more valuable to me than 27 utiles next year; this is just the proximity of my pleasure today that makes it more valuable to *me today* than a somewhat stronger pleasure in the distant future.

⁶ I present Sen’s position later in this paper, in the section on Sen’s conception of agent-relativity.

⁷ Bentham (1948, ch. 4, sec. 2).

Bentham's criterion of propinquity has been a source of puzzlement for many philosophers, especially utilitarians. Parfit refers to C. I. Lewis's characterization of propinquity (his *principle of fractional prudence*) as clearly irrational.⁸ A resolute rejection of propinquity by contemporary utilitarians comes in part due to historic reasons; in particular, Immanuel Kant's influence on Mill.⁹ Propinquity violates a general tenet of later utilitarianism that we may call "neutrality among the indexical characteristics of different pleasures and pains." The value of pleasure and pain is not supposed to depend on its temporal and spatial location or on the characteristics of a particular agent.¹⁰ This position is quite consistent with later utilitarians' general distrust of agent-relativity and their model of adopting homogenous moral space.

There is a tidy way to demonstrate the connection between Bentham's propinquity in time and agent-relativity. The argument is *Parfitian* in style.¹¹ If I give credence to propinquity, I care more about experiences of mine now than about my experiences in the distant future. This attitude could be seen as violating the criterion of impartiality among different agents, since by caring more about my present pleasure and pain I treat my future and present self (different "momentary selves") unequally. This is how propinquity in time may be seen as leading to a form of unequal concern for different moral patients.¹²

I shall adopt a broad definition of *propinquity* by which it includes not only proximity in time and geographical space, but also **social proximity**, which Robert Parfetter calls, somewhat misleadingly, by the name of kinship.

⁸ Similar objections have been raised towards generalized propinquity, which I introduce below. (It is similar to Sidgwick's "duty of neighbourhood.") He acknowledges that "one cannot easily sympathize with each individual in a multitude" and that "one sympathizes more easily with one's like." But, he claims, "[t]he duty of neighbourhood seems ... only a particular application of the duty of general benevolence or humanity." Sidgwick (1981, p. 251).

⁹ See Mill (1979, pp. 325–326).

¹⁰ See Parfit (1984, pp. 117–136).

¹¹ It refers indirectly to the criteria of continuity and connectedness in personal identity.

¹² John Cothingam claims, to the contrary, that this may be a rather healthy approach. (Cothingam1988).

Pargetter's kinship argument

In a generally overlooked article on moral kinship, Pargetter¹³ demonstrates why 'proximity', cast in terms of morally relevant ties, is an important moral feature. Denotation of his term *kinship* incorporates friendship, family ties, networks of friends and various kinds of communities.

Even Sidgwick (a utilitarian) agrees that non-homogenous moral theories—his *Common Sense Morality*—provide the best approximation of our everyday moral intuitions. As Pargetter points out, although we have a general moral intuition that teaches that to help someone is a good thing, we also have more **particularist moral intuitions** that require a much stronger commitment to help “if the person involved is our spouse, or child, or a close friend.” It goes “against our entire moral fibre to decide to help the stranger rather than our spouse or child or friend.”¹⁴

Traditional universalist ethics, which relies on general moral properties, is hard-pressed to accommodate these intuitions. This is a special problem for consequentialism.¹⁵ One customary reply of moral universalists is that ethics is a domain of universal rational claims, while intuitions which point to the contrary are subjective and hence either confused or irrelevant. Such a regulative definition of ethics is unpersuasive¹⁶ since it does not grasp an important point espoused by Pargetter. He notes that feelings that we have moral obligations toward certain particular persons that are stronger than those held towards others “are as strong and basic as any we experience. If these are to be put aside, why not others?”¹⁷ The last point is important since, as Pargetter argues in the same article, every system of ethics starts with some intuitive assumptions and therefore there is no reason to treat some of these intuitions as privileged over the others.

Within the theory presented by Pargetter, the strength of our moral obligations varies according to our closeness to particular persons in a given situation. (Interestingly, my closeness to different persons “in the kinship

¹³ Pargetter (1991).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Henceforth, I discuss primarily the consequentialist form of moral universalism.

¹⁶ Moreover, this reply is not available to moral particularists, or indeed to the followers of most forms of intuitionist moral realism. I return to this point later in this paper.

¹⁷ Pargetter (1991, p. 346).

sense” is based on different types of kinship—e.g., professional friendship, family ties or shared religious affiliation—and the strength of each varies under different circumstances.) Pargetter’s approach leaves us without a homogeneous theory of what is good, all things considered, independently of any particular features of a situation. As Pargetter put it, “[t]he fundamental judgments of goodness and badness will be relativized to a person at a time,”¹⁸ so that moral judgments depend on positional properties.

Pargetter’s relativistic, or rather *relationistic*, approach does not lead to moral skepticism, egoism or vulgar relativism¹⁹. His moral theory, which is a sophisticated version of utilitarianism, is closer to Einstein’s *relativity theory* in physics than to moral skepticism of any sort, since it allows us to specify well-defined moral duties. It differs from universalistic theories since the well-defined duties present in this theory are relative to the frames of reference in which they are assessed. (Such frames of reference may be provided by non-universal, agent relative characteristics, such as X’s position in the social network, for instance, by his friendships). No description of moral duties is complete if it fails to specify the reference frame in which it is assessed, just like, for instance, position of an object in Einstein’s physics cannot be assessed in abstraction from its physical reference frame.

According to a *relationistic* (rather than *relativistic*, which sounds like moral relativism) moral theory, it may be morally good **of** me to help Frank, a friend of mine, instead of helping Paul, who is a stranger to me but a friend to you, while it may be good **of** you to do the opposite, because of the objectively existing ties of kinship. Consequently, in a relationistic moral theory *the existence of special ties among given persons entails a certain special duty, or reason, to take their good into account as more important than the good of others.*²⁰ I shall develop this view a little further. The special duty of kinship (or *neighborliness*) changes the features of moral space

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 354.

¹⁹ By the fact that Pargetter is not a primitive relativist I understand that he does not claim, as do many students taking their first classes in ethics, that certain things are good for Jack if Jack believes that they are good for him (or, if they accord with “Jack’s values”, or with the values of “Jack’s society”), whereas other things are good for Jane if they accord with “her values.”

²⁰ Obviously, such situation leads to inter-personal moral dilemmas. I discuss this issue in the next section.

(defined as a set of morally relevant properties).²¹ Moral reasons are not impartial over the identities of moral agents and moral patients. Moral ties or, as Pargetter calls them, “objective morally relevant relations of kinship,” produce stronger moral obligations among certain persons and groups than among others. Hence, moral ties can be envisaged as fields, similar in structure to magnetic fields in physics which bind vectors of forces acting in physical space. The moral space, then, is non-homogeneous, creating curved vectors of moral obligation around certain agents.

Is such a moral theory plausible? It would seem clearly implausible unless we had an agent-relative conception of value at our disposal. The structure of such a theory can be best understood using Sen’s analysis of agent-relativity.

Sen’s agent-relativity

Sen does not actually commit himself to accepting agent-relativity of value, but rather considers, with a sympathetic eye, what formal consequences follow from arguments for agent-relativity “if they are accepted.”²² Within an agent-relative system, the goodness of a state of affairs depends intrinsically “on the *position* of the evaluator in relation to the state.” The statement, “y is morally good,” is like the statement, “the sun is setting”: Its truth value depends on the position of observation. Hence, “morally good” is a two-place predicate (y is morally good from position Q), whereas “morally better” is even a three-place predicate (y is morally better than x from position Q).

What philosophers refer to as agent-relative values actually constitute several categories with different formal characteristics. Sen distinguishes three types of agent-relativity, defined as negations of the following neutrality claims:

Doer neutrality (DN): Person *i* may do this act if and only if person *i* may permit person *j* to do this act. $A_i(i) \Leftrightarrow A_i(j)$.

²¹ Moral space can be defined, more precisely, as the complete collective set of properties of those weakly intentional actions which affect persons.

²² Sen (1983, p. 208).

Viewer neutrality (VN): Person i may do this act if and only if person j may permit person i to do this act. $A_i(i) \Leftrightarrow A_j(i)$.

Self-evaluation neutrality (SN): Person i may do this act if and only if person j may do this act. $A_i(i) \Leftrightarrow A_j(j)$.

Sen has discovered an interesting formal regularity. These three kinds of agent-neutrality are *bilaterally dependent* on each other, which means that any one form of agent-relativity entails one other form: “[I]f any one type of agent-relativity is satisfied, at least one other type of relativity will also obtain.”²³

Let me concentrate on the second, most radical kind of agent-relativity. **Viewer-relative valuation** of outcomes is sensitive to differences in the positions that different people occupy *vis a vis* states to be evaluated. Since these positions may differ, it may happen that “different people [correctly] evaluate the same state differently.”²⁴ Morality recommends different and, on some occasions, incompatible solutions because moral statements are “positional.” By *positional statements*, Sen understands statements “reflecting the view of the state from the position of the evaluator.”²⁵ He defines function $G_k^i(x)$, which can be read: “the moral value that in the opinion of person k (parameter) should be appropriately attached to state x (variable) by person i (variable).”²⁶

Sen’s analysis encounters a few serious objections. As Donald Regan observes, the judgments of goodness-from-a-point-of-view must have two properties. First, “they must have significance beyond the immediate context of choosing and judging acts.” Second, they must be “essentially and ineradicably relative.”²⁷

²³ Sen calls these characteristics ‘bilaterally independent,’ but, as Ellen Paul has pointed out to me, this terminology makes little sense, since bilateral dependency is what Sen actually demonstrates. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216. I gather that the word ‘opinion’ in this sentence should be understood as equivalent to ‘a proper moral judgment’; otherwise, Sen would fail to avoid a form of vulgar moral relativism (opinion-relativism), which is his intention.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Regan's first point of criticism of Sen's approach is that "divergent points of view require conflict."²⁸ This issue can be formulated as a problem of **interpersonal moral dilemmas**, which emerge if agent A has the best moral reason to do X and agent B has the best moral reason to do Y, while X and Y are practically incompatible and there is no overarching value V such that we could adjudicate between X and Y (Sinnott-Armstrong). Replying to this objection, Sen declares, plausibly, that the absence of conflict would not be a merit of a moral theory if we accept moral realism.²⁹ Yet, if such a theory is supposed to describe moral obligations that are independent of this theory, and the obligations actually conflict, a moral theory should not skirt this conflict.³⁰ This question does not emerge for a moral anti-realist (or non-cognitivist) like Bernard Gert. But if we believe that there are moral truths to be discovered and that ethics is not a well-entrenched, internalized system of social coordination, Sen's reply is satisfactory.³¹

Regan's other objection is based on his claim that moral judgments, unlike aesthetic judgments, face the following problem. Once we abandon the perspective of universal benevolence, it is not clear why an agent should evaluate a situation from his/her point of view rather than from the point of view of another person. This is a serious objection, which amounts to asking why anybody should act on agent-relative reasons (and whether this obligation is agent-relative as well). There are different ways to tackle this objection. One could try to adopt a complex framework that includes agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons.³² In such a framework, agent-neutral

²⁸ Regan (1983, p. 107).

²⁹ Sen accepts moral realism. He argues: "[W]e are not discussing the choice of an instrument. If the correct view happens to incorporate inter-positional differences and conflict, then clearly it will be incorrect to insist on absence of conflicts" (Sen 1983, p. 126). Yet, he is somewhat agnostic on the issue of moral cognitivism, which may need to be reformulated if we adopt "the positional interpretation of moral statements" (*ibid.*, p. 118).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115. In the last part of this paper, I address a further issue that follows from this point which has been raised by Derek Parfit, but (Boltuc 2007) is devoted primarily to this problem.

³² In a paper, "Death of the Impartial Spectator," presented for discussion at various colloquia, but never finished for publication, I call this approach "meta-impartial observer theory." I am grateful to David Schmidtz, Henry West and David Sobel, who gave me helpful comments on this issue.

reasons may not override the agent-relative ones. If they did, my inherent value clause would not be satisfied and an interpersonal dilemma would not be generated. Instead, the agent-neutral rules must be placed at a meta-level at which they are the **objective rules of the game** that each player has to follow, but the rules do not decide before the game which player should win; the actual play is to decide this.

Within such a meta-ethical structure one would have to justify why agent-relativity is to be tolerated (one could refer to reasons of *personal integrity* or *autonomy*, if one were to build such an argument further). But this reply seems to be missing an important point. The gist of the problem (at least insofar as Sen's criterion of *viewer-relativity* is concerned) is that there is no *a priori* privileged reference frame to adjudicate among different agent-relative and agent-neutral values.³³ If there is no such privileged reference frame, we do not know what the basis of normativity of these various so-called values is, which is the point of Regan's objection.

Sen's reply to Regan's objection is simpler; it is based on an ethics of identity. The reply starts directly with the idea that personal identity³⁴—for instance, one's role as a parent, a friend or a compatriot—results in objective moral reasons. This move shifts justification to normative philosophical anthropology: Reasons come with social roles. Moreover, Sen emphasizes that people are not free to choose moral norms incompatible with their social role. The fact that an agent is not free to follow an ethos unbecoming of his/her social identity is an objective fact, just like any other facts in the world. If somebody is John's mother or a head-physician in a hospital, he or she must follow one of a cluster of ethical directives compatible with their identities. And if John is the patient, those clusters are not identical. Also, if the same person is both the mother and the physician, a third cluster is created that incorporates some of the rights and duties from the previous sets of moral obligations, but not all of them; professional ethics deals with those kinds of issues. Those specific, and often conflicting, identities provide

³³ Having attempted to pursue this path in my earlier conference paper ("Is It Sometimes Required Morally to Be Partial", American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, Seattle 1996), I moved on to endorsing Sen's solution to this problem based on Ch. Taylor and A. Macintyre's version of ethics of identity.

³⁴ Charles Taylor's approach fits with Sen's at this point.

bearers of these roles with reasons to view situations from the point of view of the appropriate person.

Another vital aspect of Sen's theory, which I am unable to discuss in any detail within the confines of this paper, is his 'mixed framework' of broad consequentialism that combines deontic and consequentialist reasons in the moral calculus. Sen claims that although agent-neutrality has been a feature of consequentialism because of historic contingencies, there is nothing in the very structure of consequence-based moral theories that would require agent-neutrality. Sen's mixed framework, called "the system of consequence-based evaluation" or "broad consequentialism," in which value has been defined in mixed consequentialist-deontic terms (such as "goal-rights"), closely approximates Pargetter's version of utilitarianism presented in the paper on kinship and, importantly, it fits with popular intuitions.³⁵

Let me draw some conclusions from this discussion: It seems that Regan's objection is detrimental to Pargetter's point that there are objective, morally relevant relations (such as kinship), since there seems to be no privileged point of view from which this claim can be established. Yet, Sen's reply in terms of ethics of identity is immune to this criticism. Regan's objection may be able to force Sen into a corner, which makes his position less than plausible on other counts. Although an ethics of identity would be endorsed by such writers as Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, Alastair MacIntyre and Virginia Held, it is rejected by many mainstream moral theorists who follow Locke's (or Kant's) universal definition of moral agents. It is not clear that a defense of non-homogeneity of moral space needs to rely on a vision of personal identity (social identity) implied by an ethics of identity, but an argument to this effect goes beyond the scope of this paper³⁶. The goal of this paper is more modest: It is to demonstrate that the structure of a theory that accepts non-homogenous moral space is generally defensible even though such a defense may lack a plausible level of generality.

³⁵ Incidentally, if Sen is right, Jonathan Dancy seems mistaken in believing that agent-relative consequentialism cannot be achieved. See J. Dancy (1993).

³⁶ I discuss some of those broader social issues in Boltuc (2001), which presents a somewhat more popular version of the gist of the current argument.

Parfit's Self-Defeatingness Argument

Sen's positional interpretation of morality does not escape the problem faced by any version of Common Sense Morality (i.e., morality that ascribes a special value to particular moral ties). This is *the problem with practical consistency*. This problem has been given a detailed discussion by D. Parfit in terms of the theory of rationality. Parfit agrees that although Common Sense Morality generates interpersonal moral dilemmas, it does not fail in its own terms. This is because it contains a version of viewer-relativity, which defines its objective from a viewer-relative point of view and does not claim to adjudicate among different agents. However, he argues that such a system violates broader rationality.³⁷

Parfit's main criticism of Common Sense Morality is that it produces the following situation: (1) It gives different agents different aims; (2) the achievement of each person's aims partly depends on what other people do; yet, (3) "what each does will not affect what these others do."³⁸ Actually, Parfit should have also covered cases of direct competition which are clearly allowed by conditions (1) and (2). In these cases, "what each agent does" will affect what others do in a negative way.³⁹ He argues that agent-relative theories, both Common Sense Morality and Self-Interest Theory,⁴⁰ are directly collectively self-defeating because the goals they give to an agent may collide with those given to others and therefore frustrate the goals of the first agent. To put it simply, Parfit claims that Common Sense Morality leads to the frustration of more goals (accepted by it) than would be frustrated by the adoption of an impartial system of ethics. I argue that this is a contingent claim dependent on particulars of the situation and on the method of evaluation of these goals. In particular, Parfit's approach prejudices the case by providing goals with assigned agent-neutral value (as opposed, for instance, to doer-relative evaluations of various states of affairs). Let us focus on a different problem, though.

³⁷ This material is covered in: *ibid.*

³⁸ Parfit (1984, p. 95).

³⁹ Even in reference to coordination games, what Parfit shows later in this section is not that agents do not affect each other, but that (at least in some cases) they affect each other in the wrong way.

⁴⁰ Self-Interest Theory is a version of moral egoism defined by Parfit.

In his critique of Common Sense Morality, Parfit has confused two separate, though closely linked, decision-theoretic problems: coordination problems below the edge of optimal solutions and zero-sum games on this edge.⁴¹ Those who accept non-homogeneous moral space need to agree that in some sub-domains of morality we face competitive situations. We talk about moral conflicts such that the moral reasons that agents have lead to practically incompatible actions and, in such situations, there are no more general principles given by morality that would take precedence over particular moral reasons of the agents. Hence, we lack a principle with the authority to adjudicate between their competing claims; this leads to moral competition.

There is a certain problem with this position. Since such competitions among moral agents need to be adjudicated by non-moral means (hopefully fair ones),⁴² their results may be viewed as morally arbitrary. Such arbitrariness may be morally relevant only if we accept moral luck.⁴³ Hence, it seems that a defense of non-homogenous moral theories requires us to accept moral luck; otherwise, Parfit's point wins the day.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Coordination (or non-zero sum) games are games in which all players can improve their situation. Therefore, they can benefit from cooperation. But in many games there exists the so called 'edge of optimal solutions'—a set of situations in which the players cooperate so well that there are no further benefits from cooperation to be had. If the game is to continue after the edge of optimal solutions has been reached, it transforms itself into a perfectly competitive game. In perfectly competitive games (or distribution games), benefits of one player come at the expense of another player or group thereof.

⁴² Auctions, duels, major league baseball games and entrance exams to Harvard are examples of non-moral competitive games. Procedural fairness of these games is an ethical feature, but it does not make these games a part of ethics since fairness is just one of the circumstances in which the games may take place, whereas the substance of the games is non-moral.

⁴³ This leads us not only the issue of moral luck, but also relates to the problem of moral responsibility in the context of the problem of free will, discussed well by R. Ingarden in his work *On responsibility*.

⁴⁴ This is why it seems that non-homogeneity of moral space requires its discontinuity, which makes moral luck possible. But the issue of moral luck belongs to a different paper, "Moral Luck and Realistic Obligation," which is my next, nearly finished project.

Conclusion

My purpose is not to decide whether moral space is homogenous or not. It is rather to demonstrate that a discussion at the level of properties or sets of moral properties may be fruitful; homogeneity is just an example. If my argument is correct, I have established that according to a defensible moral theory such as Sen's or Parfit's, the structure of moral reasons (or obligations) in an agent-relative theory is "curved" around agents or their groups. Consequently, in this framework, the moral obligations of agent A depend in part on positional characteristics (e.g., the identity of the moral patients toward whom she acts). Theories that accept this last assumption operate within a non-homogeneous set of moral properties; hence, this set exhibits some philosophically interesting properties.

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