

## Conference *The Point of Morality*

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We often refer to morality without committing ourselves to one particular moral view or even moral theory. For instance, people identify questions generically as moral ones and set them in contrast to matters of prudence or politics. Philosophers investigate issues such as moral responsibility, the moral emotions, or the relation between morality and self-interest independently of any particular position about what is morally right and wrong. Such practices call for investigation into how the realm of morality should be distinguished. And they raise the question of how much can meaningfully be said about morality without adopting a more specific stance.

To provide an illuminating answer to the question of what morality is all about can be seen as a major concern in some prominent recent work in moral philosophy. The goal is to provide an account of morality that elucidates its point without a straightforward commitment to some particular normative view. On the other hand, it is suggestive to understand disagreements among various normative theories in terms of competing conceptions of what has come to be referred to as 'the moral point of view'.

This more recent project of capturing morality contrasts markedly with well-known earlier attempts to analyse the concept of morality. From the 1950s through the 1970s many philosophers were engaged in the project of listing individually necessary and, taken together, sufficient conditions for judgements, norms, or principles to be moral ones. Among the most influential ones were characterizations in terms of overridingness and universality. Such formal accounts, including those that mention the categoricity of moral reasons, still have a considerable following. They are motivated by the thought that reference to such features seems necessary for the descriptive task of identifying what may count as 'the morality' of some society or some individual. Interesting and helpful as such definitions may be, they crucially remain silent about why morality should display the alleged features in the first place. For the advantage of neutrality that purely formal accounts seem to enjoy is set off by their failure to address the more fundamental question of what the point of morality is. One major thing that we might expect of a philosophical account of morality, however, is that it makes sense to those who are engaged in the practice of morality.

The aim of this conference is to bring together philosophers from various perspectives to assess the prospects of the project to provide a generic account of morality 'from within'. Issues to be addressed include: What are the respective advantages and disadvantages of specific proposals, both traditional and more recent, for capturing the point of morality? Is there in fact space for an illuminating characterization of the moral between a purely formal account on the one hand and particular normative theories on the other hand? How important is it to find a general account of morality? What exactly are the contexts in and the purposes for which distinguishing the moral from the non-moral plays a role?

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