

# Morality: Theoretical Contrasts from Philosophy and MAC

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**Abstract.** Many schools of moral ideas have different explanations for the connotation, definition, law and application of morality. This paper aims to expound on the morality of ancient Greek philosophy and Kant's ethics and analyze the moral theory of cooperation. From the definition and connotation, the origin, purpose and application show the moral aspects such as the differences and relations, the interdisciplinary communication and exchanges. By comparison, the authors find that philosophy discusses morality more in a speculative way, while moral cooperation theory analyzes morality from the perspective of modern science, such as biological evolution. Both ancient Greek philosophy and the theory of moral cooperation view morality from consequences, but Kant's moral philosophy is from the motivation of action. At the same time, the definition of the moral concept in the theory of moral cooperation is quite different from the views of philosophical schools. The authors think that researchers could reflect on the comparison results and seek new moral ideas and moral explanations.

**Keywords:** morality; philosophy; morality as cooperation.

## 1. Introduction

In today's society, communication between people is more extensive and intimate, and people often fall into moral dilemmas in their lives. Under such circumstances, people need the guidance of appropriate moral theories to support their choices. In the field of ethics, many schools have their own unique moral ideas. Psychology originated from philosophy, but modern psychology combined with science has a great difference from philosophy. In the human inextricable ethical life, this difference also exists. This paper will compare moral concepts from the perspective of philosophy and the perspective of moral cooperation theory. In philosophy, we will choose the source of philosophy -- Ancient Greek philosophy, the landmark in the history of philosophy, and the representative figure of deontology -- Kant as an example to analyze moral concepts. In psychology, We will analyze the moral cooperation theory, the first and only theory that can truly predict moral phenomena in the world, to show the difference and connection between philosophical and psychological ethics, to build a bridge for interdisciplinary communication and integration, and to promote the generation of new moral ideas.

## 2. Method

In the process of literature review, the authors borrowed the works of Aristotle and Kant from the library, and searched "moral philosophy", "moral cooperation theory", "Kant", "Ancient Greek moral philosophy" and other keywords, finally screened out the generalization and understanding of ancient Greek moral philosophy and Kant's moral philosophy by other philosophers in the history of philosophy, and got a detailed understanding of the theory of moral cooperation through online courses. The authors will sum up and show the moral concept of philosophy and psychology of moral theory of cooperation to contrast the two. The paper summarizes the similarities and differences between the two. It gives analysis so as to show a different way of thinking and philosophy and modern psychology of morals exploring different paths, promote the exchange. The fusion of interdisciplinary, create conditions for the birth of new moral ideas.

### 3. Literature review

#### 3.1 Morality in Philosophy

##### 3.1.1 Morality in the Ancient Greek

Philosophy started in Ancient Greek and the discussion of moral problems has already been a hot and significant topic at that time. The term ethics derives from the Ancient Greek word ἠθικός ethikos, which is derived from the word ἦθος ethos (habit, “custom”). Ethics in Ancient Greek is an amount of moral philosophy. Therefore, it's obvious that morality in Ancient Greek is the origin of moral philosophy.

The following part will explore the basic definition of morality in ancient Greek philosophy, with the doctrines of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Before the discussion, it's essential to emphasize that virtue is different from morality. Virtue is moral excellence. For better comparison, the authors tend to take morality and virtue as the same thing in this essay.

“Virtue is knowledge.” Socrates defined explicitly what morality was, and he believed that knowledge could solve all human problems [1]. Specifically, he equated morality with qualities that ensured a happy life and then equated those qualities with the knowledge that ordinary humans could command and make the best use of. Nevertheless, knowledge is obviously an instrumental object, so it is difficult to conceive virtue as knowledge [2]. This is also the incoherence of the system of Socratic ethics, which argues that morality is knowledge but also emphasizes that morality is human good.

Plato was obviously aware of Socrates' problem. Plato's thoughts on this problem were presented in *The Republic* and he gradually developed his own conception of morality. “On this conception (i) human good is virtue, (ii) virtue is, not identical with, but directed by, knowledge, and (iii) the knowledge in question is knowledge of the universal good” [3]. It's explicit that Plato would prefer to equate morality with human good rather than knowledge.

When it comes to Aristotle, the discussion of morality is formally systematized into the discipline of ethics. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's understanding of morality is clearly revealed. He divided morality into “intellectual virtue” and “moral virtue.” “intellectual virtue is for the most part both produced and increased by instruction, and therefore requires experience and time; whereas moral or ethical virtue is the product of habit (ethos), and has indeed derived its name, with a slight variation of form, from that word” [4]. To be simple, for moral virtue, none of them is engendered in us by nature. People acquire morality by first having actually practiced them. Therefore, Aristotle came to the conclusion that “In a word, our moral dispositions are formed as a result of the corresponding activities” [4]. For intellectual virtue, there is no direct definition about it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, Aristotle gave many details of its composition. It contains Art or technical skill, Scientific Knowledge, Prudence, Wisdom, and Intelligence. Relatively, moral virtue contains many concrete moralities like bravery. All in all, to be simple, moral virtue can be taken as a goal and then intellectual virtue is the right means to achieve the goal. What's also worth mentioning is that at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gave a totally different answer about what supreme morality is. That is contemplation. Aristotle wrote, “For contemplation is at once the highest form of activity, and also it is the most continuous...” [4].

##### 3.1.2 Kant's Moral Philosophy

Kant is a landmark philosopher and his deontological moral thought plays an important role in the history of philosophy. In Kant's moral philosophy, morality, as a kind of social ideology, is the objective norm of human behavior. This objective norm starts from the goodwill of human beings and manifests itself in the form of moral obligation.

Kant's moral philosophy has three levels. Kant takes popular moral philosophy as the first level to seek the prior principle of morality from life. At the same time, Kant firmly believes that there is a metaphysical foundation in human nature, and the resulting system of moral philosophy principles is moral metaphysics, which is the second level. The third level is the search for the premise of moral

metaphysics and the criticism of the possibility of moral metaphysics. Kant reveals these three levels to us in his work [5].

The first level is popular moral philosophy. Kant found that in life, people are always demanding about the motives of others to do good. In this way, Kant discovers the principle that true moral action should be “moral for moral sake, duty for duty’s sake” and not for any other sensible, practical purpose [6]. The second level is the metaphysics of morals. Kant thought it necessary to find a universal basis for popular moral philosophy, which lacks a reliable principle of reason as a final judgment, and thus proposed a universal moral law in the form of a mandate: “You must act in such a way that your code of conduct (subjective) becomes a universal law (objective)” [6]. There are three forms of transformation of this universal moral law. The first is to consider whether a certain behavior can become a universal natural law from the natural consequences. However, only in this way can we talk about morality from the effect, and only by analyzing the morality of behavior from the motive and purpose can we get rid of utilitarianism. Kant divides the purpose of morality into subjective and objective ends, holding that the subjective end is always changing, while the objective end is the universal and necessary end with absolute value, that is, as the subject of the will itself, which sets all subjective ends [6]. This is the second form of metamorphosis: the end, not the means [5]. The third form of deformation is: that everyone’s will is the will of legislation [5]. The expression of the highest moral law is self-discipline, where each person legislates for himself of his own free will rather than following the instructions of others. In terms of morality, people are self-disciplined. The third level of Kant’s moral philosophy is the criticism of why morality is possible. According to Kant, “freedom” can be assumed a priori. “We cannot prove it, but we cannot deny it, and the moral law of man is possible because man is free in practice, and practical freedom cannot be known, but it has practical reality” [6]. Therefore, free will is the precondition for all morality to be possible.

Kant bases all morality, all the evaluation of morality and the evaluation of good and evil on free will and has made a very important theoretical contribution in the field of ethics. However, Kant’s moral philosophy has been criticized by many schools of ethics because it only defines the moral attribute of behavior according to the pure accord with moral law and ignores the influence of all empirical factors on moral motivation.

In this part, it is demonstrated that the moral theory from the philosophical perspective of the two perspectives of ancient Greek philosophy and Kant’s moral philosophy. In ancient Greek philosophy, people are not directly talking about morality but discussed virtues such as courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice, discussed the reasonable way to achieve true happiness and good, “the legitimacy of virtue and action is not seen as an instruction type rational Ming dragon, not to be seen as merely guide a quiet a good method, and is seen as itself is a good thing” [7]. Kant’s moral philosophy, on the other hand, emphasizes free will and moral self-discipline from the motive and purpose of behavior.

The ancient Greek moral philosophy takes the Aristotelian ideal presupposition of human prosperity as the theoretical starting point, and moral perfection is associated with the attainment of happiness. Kant once criticized Plato’s moral philosophy, arguing that such moral philosophy defended a selfish moral view that only focused on the actor of morality. Kant put forward an absolute moral law and its three forms of transformation, from the natural consequences, motivation, and purpose of moral self-discipline, three aspects of moral principles, and free will as the premise of the possibility of morality. Kant’s deontological moral view has also been refuted by many schools of ethics [5]. A common criticism is that Kant’s moral philosophy only pays attention to theoretical purity and negates the participation of all empirical factors. Such impartiality and universality are not feasible in daily moral life, and the lack of practice will lead to the neglect of moral conflicts [8].

### **3.2 Morality as Cooperation (MAC)**

#### **3.2.1 Introduction to the Theory**

According to the theory of morality as cooperation, morality is a collection of cooperative rules and many types of cooperation [9]. Hence many types of morality: are evolutionarily ancient, genetic

based, early developing, cross-culturally universal, and vary in predictable ways (reflect the value of cooperation) [10].

Humans and animals pursue include various types of cooperation, and the usual sense of morality is the pursuit of cooperative goals. There are two different types of interactions: Zero-Sum interaction and non-zero-sum interaction. The former is competitive and needs to beware of others. Cooperation is the latter and is mutually beneficial. At the same time, from the perspective of biological evolution, genes can replicate at the expense of other individuals' genes and replicate in concert with others. The major transitions in evolution are all cooperative [11].

There are seven types of cooperation: Kin altruism explains the formation of families. Mutualism explains the formation of fauna. Reciprocal altruism means helping helpers and avoiding or punishing cheats, which can be used to solve the cheats when the benefits of cooperation are delayed. Conflict resolution is shown when organisms have a mutual interest in reducing the costs of conflict in competition. They do ritual contests following their dominance hierarchies. Conflicts over divisible resources can be solved by dividing or sharing and recognizing prior possession. In human societies, each of these seven types of cooperation represents: care for families, helping their groups, trading favors, displaying defer to costly signals of status, deferring to costly signals of status, dividing resources fairly, and respecting others' property [9].

To sum up, there are seven moral domains: Family, Group, Reciprocity, Heroism, Deference, Fairness, and Property. Everyone has the same basic components and moral psychology as a graphic equalizer. Humans have a range of cooperative strategies that motivate their behavior [9].

Morality is about cooperation and harm. Cooperative theory thinks cooperative harm is morally good, competitive harm is neutral, and uncooperative harm is morally bad [9]. Morality-as-Cooperation is the first and only theory to generate genuine predictions about what moral phenomena to expect in the world. It can be used to explain, incorporate and re-analyze "known" morals like filial, piety, honor, guide the search for "unknown" morals, spur the creation of novel morals and so on.

### 3.2.2 Methods of MAC

The theory of MAC is from philosophy to science. It takes the doctrine that morality is a collection of cooperative rules as the core, making many testable predictions that have been tested, and passed tested. Using theoretical analogies, conducting scientific experiments, and doing social research make it different from ordinary philosophical predictions to become a scientific theory. The following part will briefly introduce three main methods used in MAC. That is using theoretical analogies, conducting scientific experiments, and doing social research.

Firstly, how MAC uses theoretical analogies. The most typical example is making an analogy with animals. MAC researched the moral behaviors of animals and used the results to prove themselves. It is easy to find there are many types of cooperation in nature and cooperation is ancient and widespread [12]. Using MAC, people can explain how and why animals care for their families, form teams, return favors, resolve conflicts, and so forth. For example, research reveals emperor penguins executing their huddles with a high degree of mathematical efficiency is the secret to colony health over time in Antarctica's subzero temperatures and gale-force winds [13]. It's a typical example of Kin Altruism (one of seven types of cooperation). The behavior of emperor penguins explicitly reflects that natural selection favors genes that help copies of themselves in other individuals – in their genetic relatives, which is the content of Kin Altruism.

Secondly, how MAC uses scientific experiments to prove its theory. In MAC, If morality is innate, it will have a genetic basis. Therefore, to prove this prediction, there is a lot of experimentation. For example, MAC predicts there will be 'genes for' morality which is opposite to the standard view that predicts that there are no genes, especially for morality. Therefore, MAC takes babies as objects. It builds experiments to test seven specific types of morality in young children. The result shows that social-moral reasoning emerges early in infant development [14].

Thirdly, how does MAC conduct social research? In MAC, cooperation will be regarded as morally good across cultures and moral values reflect the value of cooperation. "We focused on the 60 societies that constitute the Probability Sample Files, a stratified random sample of well attested

human societies, drawn from the six regions of the globe” [9]. Doing research in 60 societies to “test the prediction that the seven cooperative behaviors would be regarded as morally good, and to establish the cross-cultural prevalence of the moral values that result” makes MAC outstanding compared to previous empirical work [12].

Through the above introduction of MAC concepts and theoretical research methods, we can clearly know that MAC theory is a study of the origin and moral dilemmas of human morality and a theory to study human moral problems in a scientific way. The main content of MAC is morality is a collection of biological and cultural rules for cooperation. If it is biological, then there is a genetic basis, which includes two predictions, morality is heritable, and seven different morals are influenced by seven different genes. If biological, then emerge spontaneously. Morality in general, and in seven specific cases, emerges early in infancy. In the perspective of cultural property, cooperative morals are common, most present in most cultures. No culture where cooperation is considered morally bad. Also, cooperative morals were observed with equal frequency across regions. In addition, what makes it different from previous empirical work is its research methods. Its research method is not simply theoretical thinking and discussion but to prove the rationality of the theory by means of theoretical comparison, scientific experiment, and social investigation after the establishment of the theory.

To look at the theory of MAC dialectically, there are good things and bad things. From a positive standpoint, there are three outstanding improvements compared to previous theories. Firstly, MAC has very broad prospects in practical application. MAC can be used to explain, incorporate and re-analyze “known” morals, like filial piety and honor. Guide the search for “unknown” morals, like “gavelkind.” Spur the creation of novel morals. To explain it, it’s known that there are seven basic moralities in MAC. However, it doesn’t mean there are only seven molecules. The elements can be combined. For example, combinations of three, four, five, or even more can eventually reach 127 more detailed moralities. Also, there are negatively-valenced immoral molecules, combinations of positive as well as negative elements and so on. All those prove it is a vibrant theory. Secondly, it is a scientifically proven theory, and it is more a manifestation of the academic characteristics of our time than philosophy. It is not speculation but experimentation and proof. Thirdly, it’s easy for ordinary people to understand its contents and put it into use in daily life. For example, many moral dilemmas in a website named Am I the Asshole can be easily solved by cooperation.

From a negative perspective, there are also shortcomings of MAC. MAC may be the best answer to morality that can be proven so far and has an obvious characteristic of the present time, but it is not the only right answer. It must be imperfect. Its scientific and practical nature should be used for reference in many other theories. However, people should oppose the doctrine of uniqueness that only take MAC as the right theory of morality and constantly doubt, improve and develop recognition. Also, we cannot thus completely refute morality’s philosophical point of view.

### **3.3 A comparison between philosophy and MAC of morality**

In the process of comparison, it is easy to find that philosophy and MAC theory have many similarities in their doctrines and thoughts on morality.

Firstly, “Socrates suggests that, on the contrary, the names of the individual virtues, courage, self-control, and so on, are all ‘name of one and the same thing’” [3]. In Socrates’s theory, he also convinced that there are exact virtues which, just like the seven moralities of MAC theory. It’s clear that if moralities need to be practiced in daily life, they will become practical and not abstract anymore. The difference is that Socrates considered that we should not think of individual virtues as different species of generic knowledge. In MAC theory, there clearly are different species of morality.

Secondly, in Plato’s theory, especially in his cosmology and creationism, the only real life in the real world is the soul, and both humans and animals are merely the results of the fall of this soul to different levels of the earth and the latter is only a further fall of the former. Whether people or animals, all have the feature intellectuality soul in Plato’s philosophy: the freedom to choose and memories of ideas. Therefore, the two souls are no essential difference. According to Plato, the animal is actually in closer contact with the soul and body. They are the same as people, which are all different forms of combination of the soul and the body. As for Plato, the difference between a man and a woman,

an animal, is only the degree and severity of the bondage of the soul. The animal, like the human being, is a prison for the soul. There is no doubt that there must be a rational soul in the animal as well. Therefore, it is relative to MAC theory. In MAC theory, there are countless examples of moral cooperation in animals, such as emperor penguins and cleaner fish. The two theories of morality both recognize that there are some parts of animals that are the same as a human.

Finally, in Aristotle's point of view, having virtue does not make a person happy. However, one must realize virtue, and transforming the state into practicing, realization or action can humanly achieve happiness. Just as an athlete who wants to win the competition must actually win rather than have the ability to win. The idea of this functional argument bears similarities with the purpose of MAC theory. By equating morality with cooperation in MAC theory, obviously, purposefulness can be seen. Morality is no longer a mere character but an object that can bring real interest. Cooperation is not a zero-sum game but a win-win game. Trying to cooperate, to a greater or lesser extent, can avoid the losses caused by conflict and eventually ensures that morality can make people happy.

However, in Kant's moral philosophy, free will is a prerequisite for the existence of morality, and the value of morality is absolute. The two cornerstones of morality are rationality and freedom, among which freedom can be assumed a priori, while rationality can only be used actively by people after enlightenment [15]. Therefore, Kant's moral philosophy does not give a clear answer to the question of whether morality is innate or acquired. Kant proposes a categorical imperative and three derivations to which all moral actions must conform. The purpose of moral behavior is the objective purpose, is the moral itself, is the human purpose, is the will as the subject of all subjective purposes, that is, "personality," rather than any other perceptual real purpose.

But in MAC theory, morality is a collection of cooperative rules. It's the product of evolution and cultural invention. There are many moral rules and even more combinations. Morality is innate (genes, infants) and acquired (predictably, variable, cultural invention). Also, we answer moral questions by choosing the most cooperative option, and the reason to be good is to live a happy and meaningful life.

Except for the content of doctrines, methods to prove them have also changed over time. From simply discussion and thoughts to conducting experiments and doing social research in a more scientific way. It shows that for the arts, scientific methods can also make sense.

#### 4. Implications

By comparing ethics in traditional philosophy with the new MAC theory, it is not difficult to find that the consideration of morality has gradually developed from the thinking and writing of philosophers into a subject that is free from abstract meaning and can be explored through scientific experiments. Whether traditional philosophical thinking or modern argumentation, their commonality is the same. From the purpose of the pursuit of human good, they try to build a creative concept system. The difference between the two is that the former verifies the correctness of doctrines through thinking while the latter verifies the correctness through experimental investigation. Through scientific experiments and social investigation, those objects that were once considered unresearchable, which are beyond the biological basis and only exist in the development of human society, are able to be measured. This is the inspiration that MAC provides for future research.

Obtaining evidence from the objective reality to help the philosophical previous assumptions and theories to seek scientific evidence is also a new perspective provided by the comparison between them. Scientific experiments which focus on nature that are not influenced by human thinking are exploring the root of the universe. However, scientific experiments that focus on human thinking seem to have no right answer, and human civilization is exploring the past and the future of mankind. Therefore, the results of the collision between the two are immeasurable, using science to prove unscientific.

At the same time, there is a huge contrast between the extremely abstract philosophical theories of the past and the easy-to-understand, easy-to-operate and analyzable theories of moral cooperation

formed in the modern era. The reasons behind them, such as changes in the social foundation and human evolution, are also worth analyzing and discussing.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the comparison between ethics in philosophy and MAC theory, it is not difficult to find that no matter in the past thinking about morality or in the modern investigation and research of morality scientifically, there is always a constant element in the view of morality. To some extent, people have a basic unified understanding of thinking about the abstract thing of morality. At the same time, there are several basic and changeless disputes about the thinking and theory construction of moral problems, which are the origin of schools and theories.

At the same time, the vast differences between pure thinking or discussion of moral problems in traditional philosophy and proving predictions of moral theories in modern research by looking for genetic and other biological basis and social surveys also cannot be ignored. The traditional philosophy of ethics tends to measure moralities starting from the purpose. Modern researchers tend to measure them starting from the result. There is no difference between the two different starting points, but the different thinking modes highlighted by their comparison are worth learning.

Among comparisons for changes and progress of the main motivation theory to the *skopos* theory, the real reasons and promotions are less discussed in this essay. Further discussions can be carried out.

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