

# Second Philosophy

---

Led by	Chimeric Thespian
Title	Virtue Pills
Date	30 November 2008

## INTRODUCTION

### **Virtue pills: Would you take a pill to become a better person?**

Socrates prescribed philosophy to those who wanted to examine their lives and become better people.

These days there are pills that can alter human behaviour – help people to become kinder, more humane and pro-social beings. If a person chooses to take a pill to improve their moral behaviour are they acting with moral agency, with altruism towards their fellow citizens?

In a paper published in the *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, Sean A. Spence, a clinical psychiatrist argues that pharmacology should be looking into ways of developing drugs that make people kinder and more humane.

He says that “it is not that taking medicine is intrinsically moral or immoral, it is that a human subject can use medication as a means to assist them towards a moral end: reducing future harm. Such a person exhibits altruism.”

His paper concludes thus:

*“My purpose in pursuing this line of argument has been to open up a space for discussion, specifically concerning the possible improvement of human behaviour. How might we help people to help themselves? How might they sculpt their own futures, constructively? As we have seen, clinical psychiatry illustrates such a paradigm: at times, medications are deployed to reduce the likelihood of harmful behaviours driven by psychosis, addiction, personality or sexual preference. It seems that there are already times when pharmacology is helping people to shape their future conduct.”*

Clinical psychiatry might think drugs are a good way to help people become better people, but what do we philosophers have to say about that?

Firstly, can drugs make us more virtuous? Secondly, can drugs make us genuinely moral people? Thirdly, should we give up philosophical introspection and just take drugs?

## QUESTIONS:

1. Consider the following situations (taken from Spence). In which case may genuine moral agency be invoked?

a) A man lacking insight into his psychotic illness does not believe that he is ill and is formally detained in hospital. Reluctantly, he accepts medication because he ‘has to’. When treated he functions well enough in society. Are his actions moral? Can we say he is responsible for his actions? Or does his lack of insight also mean that he cannot be blamed for his actions, moral or immoral?

b) A second man suffers from a psychotic illness. When this man is ill he can be very violent towards others. The pattern of his illness is that he recovers when treated but then stops his medication and returns to using large quantities of crack cocaine. When this man is in recovery can we invoke moral agency? Can we hold him responsible for stopping his medication and returning to cocaine-abuse?

# Second Philosophy

---

c) Meanwhile, in a clinic, there is a third man. He attracts a diagnosis of ‘antisocial personality disorder’. Now, this man actually requests ‘antipsychotic’ medication as a way of reducing his impulsivity and, in turn, his liability to react aggressively towards others. He has a girlfriend; he does not wish to hurt her. Can we say that this man is exhibiting moral agency?

2. OK, so, say we agree that the third man has taken responsibility and exhibits moral agency by requesting medication to become kinder and more humane. Some might still argue that he is nonetheless not genuinely moral, because he has not acquired the virtue of kindness the normal way, that is through a good education (with a thorough basis in philosophy!), self-exploration and acting from a good will. What do you think? Can pills make the man a genuinely moral person?

3. What about you? Would you take a pill that would help you become more virtuous? If so, why? Under what circumstances? And finally, what would you think about yourself? Are you a genuine, albeit drug-induced, virtuous person?

4. Should we bypass philosophical introspection and just take drugs instead?

## REFERENCES:

A definition of morality at the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/morality-definition>

Kant and Hume on morality:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-hume-morality/>

# Second Philosophy

---

## DISCUSSION:

**Chimeric:** Well, the topic today is about virtue pills. Taking pills/drugs to improve human behaviour, to make a person kinder, or more pro-social. What I'd like to talk about is whether taking pills impacts on moral agency and moral responsibility. We will consider three examples and talk about that. Then, I'd like to consider whether taking pills would make us genuinely moral or not. I mean to say, are we still putting in the work to be virtuous? Finally, I'll ask you a personal question - whether you would take a virtue pill (so to speak) and how you would see yourself and also, should we bypass philosophy and just take drugs to make us better people instead of going the good old Socratic way?

**Chimeric:** Does anyone want to give a knee-jerk reaction to this before we look at the three examples?

**Renald:** To the personal question, Chim?

**Chimeric:** Any knee-jerk reaction

**Tor:** Who gets to design the drugs and whose idea of virtue are we about?

**Renald:** Well, I have several... more than I have knees, actually.

**Shingles:** I personally didn't agree with c, but that's the third example, so I'll wait

**Chimeric:** Yep, Tor

**Chimeric:** Go for it Ren

**Renald:** One is that I don't know yet what is meant by "virtue" and that much else depends on that...

**Chimeric:** Shingles you don't agree with a pill taker being a moral agent?

**Sousinne:** Prudence, temperance, zeal, humility, faith...

**Renald:** Two is that if I go by my own sense of what virtue is, some depends on "work" or experience, at least, and some doesn't.

**Chimeric:** OK - Renald, we should look at virtue then.

**Shak:** The questions are all extremely perplexing. I'm not going to jump in quickly, in case I change my mind!

**Wichard:** Wikipedia has a long list

**Chimeric:** Everyone take a minute to think of a definition of virtue

**Shingles:** The mere act of him requesting treatment could just as easily be shown to be a lack of courage, or self-restraint, its not necessarily more moral, Chim

**Chimeric:** Then I'll ask you to paste here, and we can go from there.

**Simulat:** yikes Sousinne, I sure wouldn't take a pill that made me behave like that :-)

**Dar:** virtue is that which pleases all of the gods?

**Sousinne:** It's a rather classic definition...

**Wichard:** Here's the link: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue>

**Renald:** Three is that if I could take a pill that would make me better able to be virtuous in the kind that doesn't depend on experience, I would in a heartbeat. But, of course, it would have to do so without side effects, and it would have to accord with my ideals of virtue, etc. ;-)

**Shingles:** virtue. I like to think of that as 'that which makes a thing function well'

**Chimeric:** Wichard - do you want to start with the virtue definition via the Wiki entry you've posted?

**Dar:** if I take the pill, and that makes me a worse poker player, can I sue?

**Tor:** Would we be virtuous if we were not in full control of our faculties?

**Wichard:** There are several definitions of virtue and morality

**Shingles:** yes, a great many definitions.

## Second Philosophy

---

**Wichard:** As for drugs making someone virtuous. That depends on our definition of virtuous. Certain drugs can reduce violence, stress, phobias, depression, anxiety, but are they promoting virtue or reducing socially unacceptable behavior? I go with the latter. So virtue must be defined within some social norms. I'd have to work to distinguish virtue from morality. If virtue is moral excellence, then one must be moral to be virtuous; however, lacking in certain morals must render one less than virtuous. One might not have moral excellence, but still practice few vices. Virtue also has implications of habits and the sticky implication that someone could be a virtuous serial murderer. One might practice by one set of rules in public and another in private. Morality has more of the sense of social norms and proper behavior in social settings, more of the rules for behavior than characteristics of personality. Ethics fits in here somewhere, too. So, I must pose the question: What sort of life is worth living?

**Sousinne:** How surprising.

**Renald:** Sousinne, what are you referring to?

**Chimeric:** OK, a virtuous person is a good person, in pursuit of excellence, also a socially functional person, behaves well in society, is kind to others....

**Chimeric:** Anyone else?

**Sousinne:** My definition was simply the seven virtues according to the catholic church... I missed chastity and... ummm...

**Wichard:** follows standards and norms of behavior

**Wichard:** Uses polite and appropriate speech

**Renald:** Somehow, my definition is less specific...

**Simulat:** I wonder what agency means in this context.

**Chimeric:** OK Wichard yes, lives according to the rules of the society in which he/she lives

**Shingles:** perhaps an honourable one. We may still choose what we honour and what we do not. But that the best solution to the problem that I've got, Wichard

**Dar:** couldn't excellence and following standards of norms and behavior include monstrous things?

**Shak:** The virtuous person is the one who succeeds in following his longer term aims, and is resistive to siren winds which would blow him off track. I don't think we can say more than that.

**Sousinne:** Yes, Dar. Society is, at times, a monstrous thing.

**Chimeric:** A moral agent, I think, is one who acts consciously according to moral standards and freely and can thus be blamed for acting badly or praised for acting good.

**Shingles:** For example the Nazi party excelled in efficiency

**Wichard:** Virtues also have cultural contexts: Roman virtues vs. Aztec virtues

**Renald:** That may be why my definition is less specific...

**Simulat:** so is it an idea that depends on people having free will Chimeric? That is, does moral agency assume free will?

**Dar:** silly Aztecs, killing their slaves in church instead of coliseum

**Sousinne:** But... if these behaviour-altering drugs get approved... does anyone doubt it would simply be a question of reducing anger and related activities?

**Wichard:** I particularly dislike the normative view of virtues/morals

**Chimeric:** Yes I think moral agency assumes a will, one wills action and desire, there is choice there

**Wichard:** It lacks the values of excellence that seem included in the Greek and Roman views

**Chimeric:** supposedly....this is what might be interesting when we talk about taking virtue pills

**Renald:** Well, that's a good point, Sousinne. Are we postulating a "magic" pill that addresses virtue in some idealized way, or a merely hypothetical pill along the lines of pills likely to actually be developed?

**Shingles:** and while the will may not have complete freedom, it may have a varying degree of freedom

**Sousinne:** And a population that doesn't respond with anger is a perfectly enslaved population. I don't think we need to say more on that particular idea.

**Chimeric:** Ren - I think current pills improve the behaviour of people who suffer from psychosis and other antisocial conditions

**Dar:** if we had virtue pills we would abuse them

# Second Philosophy

---

**Renald:** Chim, I don't doubt that current pills do great things.

**Wichard:** And then there are sedatives which relax individuals

**Simulat:** hmmm - if I don't think I'm free, but that instead I always do what I do for what seem to me to be good reasons, does that reduce my moral agency?

**Renald:** And, Dar, if they really were virtue pills, how could they be abused?

**Shingles:** I wonder too, what the effect of an overdose of a virtue drug would do, Chim

**Dar:** 5th amendment

**Sousinne:** Current pills make people tired, but they take them because they help reduce symptoms of their disorder.

**Chimeric:** I've forgotten who said they didn't understand the concept of virtue - could that person say whether things are any clearer and maybe we can sort of agree on a vague idea of virtue in order to consider the examples.

**Chimeric:** lol Shingles! Can you imagine!

**Dar:** if you are a cop, and you know some guy killed a guy, but you have no evidence, you could dope him with honesty and get it on tape

**Tor:** What are behavioural norms? In reality there is a distribution of personality types in the population not a single norm

**Reaser:** oh but are cops honest?

**Shak:** We couldn't possibly be justified in giving people pills to help them conform to OUR idea of virtue. It would have to be their own.

**Shingles:** short of becoming the Q'uzidtz Haderack, I don't know, Chim

**Dar:** maybe we should force cops to take honesty pills, or fire them

**Chimeric:** Let's take the most pop idea of virtue then - being a good citizen, being kind, striving to be a better person - and move on to the first example. Is everyone ready for that?

**Reaser:** explored in A clockwork Orange

**Sousinne:** We know that empathic people don't like to hurt others... would you take a pill that made you more empathic?

**Simulat:** wisdom in what Dar says there :-)

**Reaser:** no don't do it, empathy sucks

**Shingles:** I think that would hurt too much, for me to take that, Sousinne

**Wichard:** So are surgeons ethical people Sousinne?

**Chimeric:** hahaha

**Simulat:** do we really want cops who are free to be dishonest?

**Chimeric:** OK, so, I'll take it we are ready to move on to the examples....

**Dar:** empathy really sucks – I wouldn't take it

**Chimeric:** Let's consider this one:

**Reaser:** that is the question of free will

**Renald:** If I were any more empathic... sheesh...

**Wichard:** So it seems that we may have hit upon an unethical use of force as an aspect of virtue pills

**Chimeric:** 1. Consider the following situations (taken from Spence). In which case may genuine moral agency be invoked?

**Chimeric:** a) A man lacking insight into his psychotic illness does not believe that he is ill and is formally detained in hospital. Reluctantly, he accepts medication because he 'has to'. When treated he functions well enough in society. Are his actions moral? Can we say he is responsible for his actions? Or does his lack of insight also mean that he cannot be blamed for his actions, moral or immoral?

**Reaser:** I hear you buddy lol

**Chimeric:** Shingles? You want to respond first?

**Wichard:** Chim, depends on his actions under his psychosis. What might he be doing that is immoral?

**Shingles:** now, if any of these examples invoke moral agency, I'd say this one comes closest to it

**Chimeric:** Let's say he is generally unkind, sometimes violent.

# Second Philosophy

---

**Chimeric:** Why Shingles?

**Chimeric:** Everyone is so quiet suddenly....

**Simulat:** why is moral agency more important than good behaviour?

**Reaser:** good behaviour that is forced makes one into a robot

**Renald:** I thought we were listening to Shingles

**Shingles:** Because he honours the society he lives within enough to accept that they see him as ill or unbalanced, accepting this in a humble manner, he does not allow his pride to prevent him rejoining his peers in a healthier way, Chim

**Dar:** who gives a s\*\*t if the guy meant or wanted to harm others, he's dangerous, fix him or get him out of society. Not about blame, about saving our ass

**Wichard:** I think that moral agency requires that the individual chose to engage in the particular behavior.

**Chimeric:** Well, I think agency is important because if he does something bad we would normally want to blame him for it. Can we blame him if he is not a moral agent? Same goes for good behaviour - we would want to praise him...

**Sousinne:** Are you serious, Dar?

**Shingles:** Dar has a point, there

**Simulat:** Reaser - even within behaving well - we still have to figure out how to do it in all sorts of novel situations so I'm not talking about robots

**Nondescript:** I agree with Dar

**Chimeric:** Yes, I see Shingles, but he's rather passive in all this - does that make a difference?

**Dar:** yeah, on a practical level I don't care if the person next to me doesn't stab me cause they are on drugs or because they respect my right to live.

**Reaser:** yet violent acts are not that common considering the number of humans on the planet

**Shingles:** Ill try to alleviate this in the following examples, but yes it makes a difference, and perhaps its not so passive, Chim

**Chimeric:** OK Shingles.

**Reaser:** excluding war of course

**Renald:** I tend to agree with Dar, with the caveat that there are rarely "clean" fixes available.

**Vajra:** Do "healthy" well functioning people actually make genuine choices as often as they like to believe? If this is required for morality, it is one of the ways morality is much harder than we may think

**Sousinne:** Okay... what constitutes "dangerous", then Dar?

**Chimeric:** I want to get back to Dar's point when we hit example number 3

**Chimeric:** Vajra - good point.

**Wichard:** But the healthy well-functioning individual has intentions and that seems to imply agency

**Shak:** He can't be passive. He needs to decide to take the pills or not.

**Chimeric:** Yes, Wichard I think he does.

**Sousinne:** Yes, must be wonderful to be a "healthy, productive member of society".

**Chimeric:** Shak - in example number 1 he does not decide. He is decided upon.

**Chimeric:** lol Sous

**Shingles:** unfortunately any of us speaking of 'healthy', or 'well functioning' have our own distinct ideas on what these are, Wichard & all

**Sousinne:** After all, if you're not, in somebody's eyes, you get killed because you could well be dangerous, right?

**Shak:** Ooops! Sorry Chim.

**Chimeric:** He decides in example 3

**Dar:** what if he decides to keep taking the pills under the influence of the pills he was coerced into taking?

**Wichard:** But if one's creativity and productivity are impaired by the use of the virtue pills, I'm against them.

**Chimeric:** Well what if Dar?

**Shak:** In that case, we can't use the pill on him.

# Second Philosophy

---

**Renald:** Wichard, that's an essential part of the problem, as far as I'm concerned. What you're referring to are themselves virtues, the pill in question can't be a matter of trading some for others.

**Sousinne:** Sure we can. Or at least, Dar can, since no fix is too extreme when someone is "dangerous".

**Chimeric:** So, does it matter if he decides or not?? Is he a moral agent if he is forced to take the pills? I mean to say, when he takes the pills and he is good, can he be genuinely praised?

**Shingles:** have these virtue pills been tested on animals?

**Chimeric:** Shingles - I imagine the ones that Spence is referring to in his paper have been.

**Dar:** did more rats share food?

**Chimeric:** But I have no idea.

**Nondescript:** What would humanity be without aggression or violence? I for one wouldn't want that

**Vajra:** ok.

**Renald:** All, have we decided to combine virtue with morality for this discussion?

**Shak:** Sous - yeah, I see that. I read the question again. It's a hard one.

**Shingles:** do you mean, is he culpable for his more-moral action if he is taking these virtue pills, Chim?

**Shingles:** I doubt it, Ren

**Simulat:** Why not Chimeric? - And what's with the importance of praise anyway? Do we have to put pride at the center of our existence?

**Dar:** crime and punishment isn't about guilt. It's about protecting society and revenge; who cares if a criminal is morally culpable?

**Shak:** Is the guy behaving virtuously after he's been fed the pill?

**Chimeric:** Yes, can we praise him for being a moral person when he was forced to take virtue pills, he did not choose to. Did not put in the work, so to speak, did not think, hey it is good to be good.

**Shingles:** the former more than the latter I hope there, Dar

**Sousinne:** Dar, according to which view of criminality?

**Shingles:** well, the lawyers will, Dar

**Dar:** my own personal, half baked one

**Renald:** Singles, I'd like to doubt it, but I'm hearing a lot of it.

**Tor:** Chim you can't be a moral agent if you are controlled

**Shak:** I think he is, if the function of the pill is to restore normal human sensitivities.

**Sousinne:** You actually mean that whether there is a moral culpability is irrelevant to crime and punishment?

**Chimeric:** I agree Tor; I think the key to moral agency is "free" choice and conscious behaviour

**Renald:** "normal"....

**Simulat:** why not Tor?

**Dar:** I think it should be

**Chimeric:** Well, I'll move on to example 2 - ready everyone?

b) A second man suffers from a psychotic illness. When this man is ill he can be very violent towards others. The pattern of his illness is that he recovers when treated but then stops his medication and returns to using large quantities of crack cocaine. When this man is in recovery can we invoke moral agency? Can we hold him responsible for stopping his medication and returning to cocaine-abuse?

**Dar:** if someone did some crime, whether or not they are blameworthy, society needs to be protected and victims need satisfaction

**Shingles:** perhaps it is, after all, whether the human laws correspond to morality is not a certain thing, Sousinne

**Tor:** Because moral agency requires free choice Sim

**Sousinne:** Okay... so when the government comes and puts you to jail together with your entire neighbourhood because "there have been indications of dangerous behaviour" from it, you would find that acceptable, Dar?

**Wichard:** Chim, the crux here is his violence which we consider immoral (or there might be other immoral actions). Is drug use immoral? Why?

# Second Philosophy

---

**Simulat:** I think that moral agency is the ability to act in moral situations - and I don't think we have free will  
Tor - but even without free will we can act in moral situations and so are moral agents

**Sousinne:** Let's say they want to execute you, Dar.

**Renald:** Yes... what does the cocaine have to do with it?

**Dar:** no Sousinne, I would not

**Chimeric:** Everyone - let's try and focus on the example I've posted and work through the rest of the questions and we'll go free for all when we are done.

**Shingles:** Yes we can, he has failed to assert himself at all, and let his mental craving for his cocaine induced state dominate his whole being. In a sense, he has allowed a Passion to overcome him. I do not think this can be moral, Chim

**Wichard:** If he uses lots of crack and doesn't hurt anyone else. I don't see the morality issue here at all.

**Vajra:** Some are saying moral agency requires free choice. Some are saying moral agency requires intention. These aren't the same. Which is the one to focus on would you say?

**Sousinne:** Why not? They are protecting society in an efficient way, and moral culpability was irrelevant to you.

**Chimeric:** Wichard - I do not think morality applies to the drug use, if it is a means to a good end - can't be said to be immoral - especially, when we get to example 3, I think

**Wichard:** But usually drug addiction is accompanied by other acts of violence or theft

**Chimeric:** Vajra - I would say intention is based on freedom

**Shingles:** are you sure that is its only origin, Chim?

**Vajra:** okay, Chim. Interesting order

**Nondescript:** It's a choice to take drugs, so yes he is responsible

**Chimeric:** Wichard - so it would be the actions that count, and possibly the general character of the drug addict. Not all drug users are thieves.

**Chimeric:** Shingles - what do you mean?

**Patrick:** Chim, your example is more than hypothetical, in New York a diagnosed schizophrenic is put forcibly confined if he/she does not take anti psychotic drugs

**Wichard:** So, Non, he's still responsible for his actions, his behaviors

**Simulat:** Chimeric - it seems that you are just asserting in various ways that we have freedom, but that is a point that is being questioned, so how do you support it?

**Chimeric:** That's interesting Patrick

**Shingles:** that freedom is the only origin of intention, I asked if you were sure of that, Chim

**Nondescript:** Wichard: yes, I would say so

**Shak:** I'm inclined to agree with Dar that we should not be holding folk responsible at all. We should be addressing harmful behaviour in terms of limiting the possibilities for further injury.

**Shingles:** nice moves, Sim :)

**Chimeric:** Sim - I think we have freedom in so far as in our daily lives we seem to be able to choose things, we have the feeling of freedom.

**Simulat:** Nods to Shak and Dar

**Sousinne:** Shak, what is the probability that you will commit violence in the future?

**Chimeric:** (At the ultimate level we do not)

**Wichard:** Shak, so if he kills himself with crack how should we proceed?

**Chimeric:** (We also may not if we are suffering from some condition)

**Vajra:** so freedom explained in terms of intention, Chim?

**Shak:** Sous, depends on what I think the consequences may be.

**Vajra:** seems circular now

**Sousinne:** Because unless you can PROVE that that probability is exactly zero, you are dangerous.

**Shingles** is suffering from the human condition

**Shak:** Sous, sure, but not too dangerous.

**Simulat:** Chimeric - but there are better ways - I think - of looking at how we really do behave and our feelings that don't involve freedom

# Second Philosophy

---

**Wichard:** It's a dangerous world and I imagine that in some situations we're all dangerous

**Sousinne:** Of course, the only way to prove that zero is by allowing someone else to kill you.

**Chimeric:** Vajra - I'm not quite sure - certainly freedom at the ultimate level is an illusion, but we certainly do go about our lives with the sense of making choices and with the intention of doing one thing instead of another.

**Sousinne:** Would you be willing to do that so as not to be dangerous? For society?

**Dar:** what's with all the slippery slopes, Sousinne

**Sousinne:** No slippery slopes at all, Dar.

**Patrick:** What about giving people pills to make them more empathetic? How would they perform on juries...would they hold others accountable for their behaviors

**Sousinne:** If a human life is nothing but a security risk, we have created a monstrous society.

**Vajra:** sure, Chim...

**Dar:** depends on who the juries empathized with

**Shingles:** they would probably spent a lot of time confused, I think, Patrick

**Chimeric:** I'm going to move on to example 3, which is the most interesting I think - let me know what you think:

c) Meanwhile, in a clinic, there is a third man. He attracts a diagnosis of 'antisocial personality disorder'. Now, this man actually requests 'antipsychotic' medication as a way of reducing his impulsivity and, in turn, his liability to react aggressively towards others. He has a girlfriend; he does not wish to hurt her. Can we say that this man is exhibiting moral agency?

**Wichard:** He is using a biochemical filter to control his actions. This seems moral to me.

**Simulat:** He would be in my thinking Chimeric - but your mileage may differ :-)

**Chimeric:** Yes, I'm with you on this Sim.

**Visual:** what reason is there for thinking that he does not exhibit moral agency? I can't see any.

**Shak:** The guy in the third example is exhibiting moral agency, for me.

**Sousinne:** And, of course, Dar, if we have any sort of moral agency, the crime/punishment systems needs to do just that, punish.

**Shingles:** Is he truly incapable of withholding his violent behaviour without the drugs, is that impossible?

**Wichard:** He has an intention of controlling his behaviors.

**Tor:** He is able to make rational choices, so yes

**Vajra:** Using tools to modify oneself seems in the realm of being responsible for one's actions

**Chimeric:** What does everyone else think? And if you like we can answer this and slide into question 2, which asks about genuine morality.

2. OK, so, say we agree that the third man has taken responsibility and exhibits moral agency by requesting medication to become kinder and more humane. Some might still argue that he is nonetheless not genuinely moral, because he has not acquired the virtue of kindness the normal way, that is through a good education (with a thorough basis in philosophy!), self-exploration and acting from a good will. What do you think? Can pills make the man a genuinely moral person?

**Renald:** I guess the question is, what difference is there between his behavior while medicated versus that of the other two men. Does the difference in morality depend solely on the decision to take the pill?

**Chimeric:** Yes, Wichard, Tor, it seems to be obvious that there is some moral choice being made in example 3

**Salo:** I think it's the decision he makes to take the pill that's moral, not what the pill does to him

**Shingles:** Again, I did not say that the third man exhibits moral agency

**Vajra:** If he has thought about the pills, perhaps. If he takes the without reflecting, then no, maybe

**Chimeric:** Renald yes, what is the difference?

# Second Philosophy

---

**Chimeric:** Yeah, Vajra, I think so

**Chimeric:** Shingles - why do you say that?

**Marya:** I think that's a good point, Salo

**Simulat:** there are many valid ways to learn to be good I'd say Chimera - what's with the pride of saying that you arrived at moral agency the hard way :-)

**Wichard:** So we reach a conclusion like: taking pills is sometimes a moral act.

**Chimeric:** Salo - yeah you said that quite well

**Renald:** Exactly. Because if the first two men are not moral while medicated, then neither is the third man. It's only the third man's decision to be medicated. His behavior while medicated is not moral, in that case, but... an effect.

**Chimeric:** Wichard - I'm not sure!

**Salo:** yes Renald

**Shingles: Chimeric:** 2. OK, so, say we agree that the third man has taken responsibility and exhibits moral agency by requesting medication to become kinder and more humane - I didnt agree to that, but the phrasing of this implies I have, Chim

**Chimeric:** I don't think the pill taking is the moral act....

**Chimeric:** ok Shingles, why do you think example 3 is not a moral agent?

**Wichard:** But after taking the pills, his decisions are not with intention

**Shak:** I agree this guy is acting morally when he takes the pill. The interesting question is, does he behave morally thereafter? And I think he does ...

**Wichard:** Shak, I don't think he does

**Renald:** Of course, we've now gone almost completely toward discussion of morality and away from virtue.

**Chimeric:** I think Shak he does if he continues taking the pill, yes

**Vajra:** A lot seems to depend on how the pills work, actually

**Tor:** Were the first two men capable of making rational choices?

**Shak:** If the purpose in taking the pill was to ease the pull of unusually strong malign impulses.

**Chimeric:** Tor - I think the first might not have been.

**Renald:** Ah... rational choices...

**Visual:** What are the conditions for an act to be moral here?

**Shingles:** [12:46] Shingles: Is he truly incapable of withholding his violent behaviour without the drugs, is that impossible? @ Chimeric

**Chimeric:** I think the second was but he chose to stop taking the medication.

**Dar:** why don't we flip it – can a substance make you immoral?

**Renald** smiles

**Renald:** Vajra, I think so, too.

**Chimeric:** Shingles, I figure in these situations it might be impossible.

**Dar:** what if you were a failed politician, and you killed two other politicians

**Tor:** What about booze?

**Dar:** and, you attribute this behavior to eating too many Twinkies.

**Wichard:** Killing politicians might always be moral

**Dar:** should you get off easy?

**Sousinne:** Then we should ban Twinkies for everybody so as not to make anyone dangerous.

**Chimeric:** Dar - that helps you know - a substance cannot make you immoral, but if you CHOOSE to take a substance that will make you violent, then you choice and subsequent action might well be immoral

**Renald** suddenly feels he's sitting uncomfortably high up.

**Marya:** I'd just like to repost Visual's question if anyone would like to have a go at answering it: "Visual: What are the conditions for an act to be moral here?"

**Renald** nods

# Second Philosophy

---

**Shingles:** then by that reason any human not functioning mentally well can be considered broken and exempt from moral agency. But just where can the line be drawn between broken and well functioning reasoning in terms of mental health, Chimeric?

**Sousinne:** There are many legal systems that let someone free if they had no idea they would freak out the way they did on alcohol.

**Simulat:** even drinking and driving is an immoral act in our culture

**Renald:** Marya, Visual, I don't have an answer, but I think having one is essential.

**Chimeric:** OK - we should start to think about genuine morality now as time is running out. We seem to agree that choosing to take a pill is acting with moral agency. But is the pill-taker genuinely moral? What do you think?

**Sousinne:** Second time it happens, though, they are judged as normal. They should have stayed away from alcohol.

**Vajra:** Visual, earlier people were suggesting either freedom of will or intention were necessary

**Renald:** Chim, I don't even know how to make clear sense of the question, without a lot more determined with regard to morality. But that may just be my ignorance of the subject.

**Shak:** Shingles, an act is moral if it helps you keep to your chosen long-term course.

**Sousinne:** Such as killing a lot of people, Shak?

**Shak:** And if that course is agreed with your community.

**Simulat:** As long as they make the right moral decision when faced with a moral problem I'd say they were really moral - why not?

**Wichard:** The decisions on morality are delicate and contextual; usually the legal aspect are too absolute to use in deciding.

**Chimeric:** Hi Visual - sorry we tried to answer that in the beginning, but it is a huge question - we took the pop line which goes that a virtuous being is just a good person, functional citizen, pursues personal excellence and is pro-social....but we do not all agree on that and we did not get into more details but proceeded with the discussion.

**Sousinne:** So if the community wants to kill a lot of people, helping it is just fine?

**Visual:** ok thanks

**Shingles:** I think that would just make 'moral' to mean 'effective', I don't think the term 'morality' contains that, Shak

**Wichard:** So in war a moral soldier kills as many of the enemy as possible

**Sousinne:** rather the opposite...

**Shak:** Sous, I know it sounds daft, but there's nothing intrinsically immoral about killing a lot of people.

**Chimeric:** I know Ren, it's a hard one. Phrased in another way - do we think the pill-taker is truly a good person or does the virtue-pill taking make us think less of him - in comparison say to a saint? Who is supposedly good and virtuous in character, by hard work, thinks, educates self, etc.

**Sousinne:** No? Did you ask them?

**Renald** looks back and forth between Sousinne and Shak, and laughs

**Simulat:** after all - we are thinking that after taking the pill the person can make their way through the world with its many moral dilemmas and in each case figure out what the right thing to do is, and then does it

**Shak:** Sous, I know it sounds daft, but there's nothing immoral, necessarily, about killing a lot of people.

**Simulat:** isn't that being a moral agent?

**Sousinne:** And it would not be immoral for them to kill you either?

**Marya:** Can you explain why that is, Shak?

**Wichard:** Another scenario: the person commits good acts out of fear of what others will do to him/her if he/she doesn't do those good acts.

**Visual:** I can't see that a pill that controls moods, emotions can remove the ability to make choices or intentional acts, even if they are acting out of fear

**Renald:** Chim, personally I wouldn't hold the chemically-introduced nature of someone's virtue against that one.

# Second Philosophy

---

**Shingles:** And if a pill inhibits his ability to figure things out in his genuine self, it is doubtful that we can give him full agency at all, (to add to Sim's point)

**Shak:** Death is part of life. Civilisation was achieved by war. We disagreed with Hitler and bombed Dresden.

**Chimeric:** Ah, Sim, interesting point - yes, I guess it is a moral agent. But is he a genuinely moral person? Or does the pill make moral but not genuinely so. I mean, good people, do they have an extra high status because they do good without pill help?

**Patrick:** No the immoral act may be having more than the world can feed, educate and provide resources for

**Chimeric:** Wichard - I would say that person, well Aristotle might say that, is not a virtuous person.

**Sousinne:** Ah. I see.

**Simulat:** it seems to me that we are focussing too much attention on motivation, and no attention at all on how people actually make moral decisions

**Marya:** So do you believe the moral question lies in the intent, and not in the act, Shak?

**Vajra:** true, Visual 12:57. It needn't

**Shingles:** 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions'

**Shak:** Gotta go. Bye all!

**Chimeric:** Yes, Visual, some of us agree with you.

**Patrick:** I believe the morality lies in the expected consequence of the act.

**Simulat:** Chimera - I'd evaluate people on whether they actually do the right thing or not

**Shingles:** yes, well put, Visual

**Chimeric:** Marya - good question, some say in intention others in act. I think Aristotle and his virtue ethics are based in intention, while Kant is based on universal rules and Mill on action.

**Chimeric:** Sounds good to me, Sim.

**Shingles:** It must be the effect that qualifies whether the act was good or not, talking of intentions is a really problematic way of analysing, Chimeric and Marya

**Vajra:** why Shingles?

**Chimeric:** Yes, Shingles it is, talking about intention is not a practical way to go about things and I think is a major criticism of virtue ethics, because in the end you don't know what you have to do

**Renald:** If one categorizes different understanding as no understanding, one is inviting more frustration than necessary, I would have said to Sousinne. But she would not have heard, so. :-)

**Vajra:** okay Chim

**Shingles:** because the human is able to deceive his peers, we may not be able to trust that his intentions are what that human states them to be, Vajra

**Vajra:** okay Shingles

**Chimeric:** Well we started at 5 past so I think I'll move on to the last question. Which is a personal one:

3. What about you? Would you take a pill that would help you become more virtuous? If so, why? Under what circumstances? And finally, what would you think about yourself? Are you a genuine, albeit drug-induced, virtuous person?

**Patrick:** Anticipating consequence where possible is an element of acting moral

**Shingles:** oh that's easy, virtue ethics says you should live the good life, Chimeric ;)

**Chimeric:** haha yep Shingles :))

**Wichard:** I'd only take the pill if I enjoyed the side effects.

**Simulat:** Chimera - I might take the pill if I found I was often doing bad things and wanted to change my evil ways

**Visual:** I like to take whatever pills I can, but yes I would take a virtuous pill if it had the consequences of making me happier via making others happier

**Chimeric:** Wichard, yep

**Patrick:** If my taking a pill would improve my chances of acting in a virtuous way toward others I would

# Second Philosophy

---

**Vajra:** I use any tool I can find to help me be better in any respect. But I still don't know if I would take a pill, unless I knew how it worked (or enjoyed the side effects : - )

**Renald:** Chim, if by virtuous we mean moral, I no longer have a knee-jerk reaction -- nor a well-developed one, yet, even after all this.

**Chimeric:** Yes, Sim.

**Tor:** I'm not a pill pusher

**Salo:** I would be too wary of side effects

**Chimeric:** Yep, Vajra.

**Simulat:** after all - alcoholics sort of do the reverse when they strive to give up drinking

**Visual:** LOL

**Shingles:** I might take the pill if it made me stronger or faster without any side-effects. But I wouldn't want any substance to change my thinking in an unanticipated way, Chimeric

**Chimeric:** For those who say they would pill-pop - would you still see yourself a genuinely moral or a virtuous fake?

**Wichard:** But I'm not giving up philosophical introspection or argumentation

**Visual:** genuinely moral

**Patrick:** I will drink to them

**Chimeric:** Yes, Shingles, would not want that either.

**Salo:** I think if I took it, I'd be a virtuous fake

**Shingles:** genuinely moral? Now that is going to be hard to define

**Simulat:** I'd say genuinely moral Chimeric

**Vajra:** Perhaps the pill would help with introspection e.g.

**Chimeric:** Oh, Salo, I think I'm rather with you on that one, only that - it may well be the way of the future....in which case, should we rethink what is genuine and what is fake in this instance?

**Wichard:** OOOOOOOO - oo --oo I can't decide!

**Chimeric:** Sim - why do you say that?

**Patrick:** It depends on your operational definition of moral

**Vajra:** In fact part of the reason indigenous people enjoy plant medicines IS because it helps them with introspection and reflection, I believe

**Visual:** I exercise and don't eat too much junk food because of the way that affects my moods; this is the result of a chemical process.

**Simulat:** because to make any moral decision you have to detect the moral problem and figure out the solution - if you can do that you are genuinely moral

**Chimeric:** Ah, yes, Vajra, good point.

**Chimeric:** yay! Sim! I like that.

**Chimeric:** ok and FINALLYYYYYYY

4. Should we bypass philosophical introspection and just take drugs instead?

**Shingles:** Kant says if you act unpleasantly whilst being drunk, it was still your choice to make yourself drunk and so you're still responsible. Thinking of the virtue pill, Kant would probably say it makes you genuinely moral if you take it, yet I would say it avoids culpability for the actions you performed when you're 'virtued off your face', Chimeric

**Visual:** No, Philosophy is entertaining and engaging so let's keep it

**Chimeric:** Ah, thanks for bringing Kant into that - sounds good to me, Shingles.

**Chimeric:** I'm with you all the way, Visual.

**Renald:** Chim, I don't see it as an either-or situation.

**Chimeric:** Yep, Renald.

**Tor:** I'm a no, too

# Second Philosophy

---

**Wichard:** But Kant requires that “supreme moral principal” is discovered through moral philosophy and based on analysis or practical experience, using rational operations (reason); it is not inferred from sensory data.

**Wichard:** should be "and not"!

**Visual:** Most people don't make moral actions via Philosophical reasoning in the traditional style say of reference to Kant or Mill.

**Simulat:** does philosophy help with moral decisions? :-)

**Shingles:** I'd be up for drinking the juice of Sapphu (Dune reference)

**Visual:** It certainly helps with moral justification

**Renald:** If this pill made one behave morally without benefit of introspection, then it essentially robs that behavior of morality. It becomes accidentally moral. Which is fine, I guess. But I'd rather a pill that made one's introspection more effective and it's conclusions more compelling.

**Chimeric:** Hmm, good point Visual, though I would think philosophy helps us be better people and hence....

**Shingles:** That mischievous categorical Imp, Wichard

**Visual:** I have not noticed any particular moral quality about my philosophical friends but whether philosophers are more morally praiseworthy as a group than say biologists or non-academics is an empirical matter

**Chimeric:** Well, I'm going to officially end the discussion here, and thank you all for a brilliant chat. A big thanks to Marya for getting the stage ready and to Eolas I think for making our pill-seats. As usual, discussion continues on Facebook group discussion board. See you there and here again next Sunday. Thanks all. Let's continue chatting though....

**Wichard:** too bad we can't do a symposium with wine in SL.

**Shingles:** what is the necessity for morality? If you don't mind me asking, Vajra?

**Tor:** There was some research on moral decisions made by indigenous people all over the world. They all tended to make the same choices though they were culturally independent and had no philosophical training. Sounds like morality is hard wired.

**Visual:** I like the sound of that Tor - makes a lot of sense to me

**Renald:** Well, gosh, Tor... what's all the fuss about then? :-)

**Vajra:** You mean why be moral, Shingles? I guess I think because it makes you happy.

**Shingles:** or that it's culture-generated, Tor

**Wichard:** I'm not sure about the hard-wired idea.

**Shingles:** I mean why do we need the idea of Morality, Vajra?

**Vajra:** interesting Tor

**Wichard:** But we do seem to need social supporter for most of our actions.

**Simulat:** I think a lot of morality is hard wired to Tor - but in the way that language is - there is a lot of flexibility within a range

**Vajra:** Maybe we don't Shingles, if that is something contrasted with happiness or well functioning. What do you think?

**Shingles:** I think the idea contrasts with well-functioning, certainly, but that is a point that receives little sympathy, Vajra

**Renald:** Wait, Shingles... did you just mean that morality CONTRASTS with well-function?

Marya: I wonder if we could say that morality is a by product of a social animal

**Shingles:** yes, Ill give you chocolate if you can give me a counter-point I've not heard before, Renald

**Renald** stick out his tongue at Shingles

**Renald:** You're so oppositive!

**Renald:** I just wanted to make sure I followed what you were saying. "Morality" is a pretty empty box, for me, I don't know what to make of it.

**Wichard:** I think the box for morality has the cultural "do goods" in it.

**Vajra:** A Kantian based morality might be contrasted and opposed to the idea of happiness and well functioning

**Shingles:** not morality itself, but the concept of morality seems to cause more problems than it solves, without a Higher Law, morality becomes lost. Yes there will still be social codes of conduct, but there exists no necessity to call these social codes a morality, Renald

# Second Philosophy

---

**Vajra:** Though that might be a superficial understanding of Kant that I expressed

**Wichard:** Does Kant want a universal unconditional moral code that's immutable over all time?

**Renald:** Again, Shing, you seem to be assigning to me a position I'm not even familiar with, let alone espouse. But I don't mind :-)

**Shingles:** I think that's the meaning of 'categorical', so yes, I think Kant does, Wichard

**Wichard:** So I'm against such a structure and probably put local cultural mores in the box of morality and little else.

**Shingles:** it's something I'm particularly preoccupied with, so it's not you, it's me, Renald

**Vajra:** It's an interesting question Shingles....

**Visual:** Are all moral codes "categorical" in the sense that they are contrasted with "hypothetical" imperatives. If so there can be a sense in which the trait of morality exhibits categoricalness even if there are not universal moral codes. (Although I suspect whether or not there are universal moral codes will depend on how we describe them)

**Wichard:** I've started Kant several times, but never got far.

**Shingles:** yes, a particularly alien prospect, that morality cannot exist, I think it unsettles people to consider the prospect of it, which unfortunately sometimes leads them to cloudy thinking, Vajra

**Wichard:** Visual, I think that Hume has a more empirical, naturalistic view of morals as social and self approval.

**Renald:** Shing, it's the apparent cloudiness of the concept that's kept me from making much use of it, myself.

**Shingles:** that is surely a perspectivist account, Visual

**Wichard:** He doesn't require religion for morality, but, if I remember, he puts morals more in sentiment than cognition.

**Renald:** hmm

**Shingles:** then I move for the abandonment of the term 'morality' and substituting it with 'honouring', Renald

**Renald:** Oh, I LIKE honour, Shing

**Wichard:** Hume also is one of the philosophers who questions the existence of free will, somewhere

**Shingles:** it's similar to treating a person as an end, but it's not, I think, Ren

**Visual:** If Hume's view is more empirical I would like to know what studies he has on whether people conceive of morality as a system of categorical imperatives or not. :). I think there is a lot of support from child development that supports Kant personally

**Wichard:** Shingles, "abandonment of the term 'morality' and substituting it with 'honouring'" spins interesting. I'll think about that a while.

