

疫苗接種倫理學中的 後果與美德

Consequences and Virtues in the Ethics of Vaccination

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摘要

凱瑟琳·麥凱在她的文章中強調公共健康倫理學在更廣義的生物倫理學領域中的獨特性，並探討了公共健康倫理學的各種議題。她主張以德性倫理學作為公共健康倫理學的基本道德理論框架，並以此回應各種公共健康的道德困境，例如新冠疫情期間各種對疫苗接種的挑戰。本文雖然承認美德在公共健康倫理學中的重要性，但同時指出「強調美德」與發展整全的「德性倫理學」有著微妙的區別。本文亦建議借助後果評估和能力進路來補充麥

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凱的理論。透過借鑒阿瑪蒂亞·森和瑪莎·努斯鮑姆的思想，本文論證這些方法能擴展對疫苗接種的倫理後果的理解，並與美德的重要性相契合。最終，本文回應強調專注於美德的價值，並納入多元的倫理框架，以有效應對疫苗接種的挑戰，同時邀請大家未來進一步探索這些概念和議題。

In her insightful and informative essay, Dr. Kathryn MacKay presents a survey-style article that explores various moral aspects of public health ethics. From explaining the theoretical underpinnings to practical applications of public health ethics, she adeptly guides us through understanding this complex field. Dr. MacKay begins by highlighting that while public health ethics falls under the umbrella of bioethics, it boasts unique elements that position it as a distinct interdisciplinary domain (14-19).¹ Towards the conclusion of her article, she advocates for virtue ethics as the moral theory and foundation of public health ethics (34-37). She believes that virtue ethics offers an inspiring framework for addressing and resolving numerous ethical dilemmas within the realm of public health, although she acknowledges that further development of this approach is necessary. For practical applications, she surveys several issues, such as those pertaining to the ethics of vaccination, including debates on coercive vaccination (37) and equitable distribution of vaccine resources during the COVID-19 pandemic (20-21). Overall, her work provides a valuable exploration of key issues in public health ethics, offering readers a comprehensive overview of the field.

While her article is inspiring, I believe there are areas that require further clarification and development. Due to the length limit of this essay, I will address two specific aspects only. The first aspect I would like to discuss is the distinction between emphasizing virtue versus emphasizing virtues ethics. MacKay rightly emphasizes the significance of virtues in public health ethics, offering two key suggestions. The first involves cultivating virtuous characteristics in public health professionals, focusing on virtues like responsibility, compassion, and humanity. She stresses the importance of educating these professionals to work from a virtuous perspective (35-36). The second suggestion involves highlighting virtues at the institutional level through a collective virtue ethics approach, exploring how public health shapes societal conditions for virtue and advocating for institutional virtues to enhance moral excellence in public health

(1) As this is a responsive article, all cited page numbers without full references pertain to MacKay's original work.

practices and policies. This shift towards institutional virtue ethics entails evaluating whether institutional actors are promoting moral excellence through their behaviors and policies, aiming to foster a just society by nurturing virtues at a collective level (35-37).

I agree with her emphasis on the significance of virtues in public health ethics, particularly noting the potential for public health ethicists to integrate Western virtues with non-Western philosophical traditions (30, 32-33, 37). This aspect resonates with my discussion on Confucianism and public health ethics in another context (Chan 2020). However, a crucial distinction arises between valuing virtues and developing a comprehensive theory of virtue ethics. Virtues and virtue ethics are intertwined yet distinct in moral philosophy. Virtues refer to qualities or characteristics that embody moral excellence and guide individual behavior, but virtue ethics is a broader ethical framework focusing on cultivating virtues. Nevertheless, virtue ethics is not the only approach to emphasizing virtues. For example, in defending utilitarianism, JS Mill also highlights the importances of virtues, but he argues that virtues are a part of our happiness, and the basic moral principle is still the maximization of overall happiness.

In addition, it is valid for MacKay to assert that virtues can exist outside of Western traditions. For example, in East Asia, Confucianism promotes virtues such as benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), and wisdom (*zhi* 智). Confucianism emphasizes the cultivation of these virtues through self-improvement and social harmony, guiding individuals towards becoming exemplary moral agents within their communities. However, the question of whether Confucianism aligns with virtue ethics remains debatable; although similarities exist with Aristotelian virtue ethics, directly categorizing Confucianism as such is contentious. Moreover, it may not be necessary to immerse ourselves in such a normative ethics debate if our goal is simply to discuss the importance of virtues in public health ethics. MacKay's arguments primarily center around the importance of virtues. Therefore, rather than expanding the discourse to encompass virtue ethics, focusing solely on virtues would suffice.

Whether focusing on virtues or virtue ethics, let's transition to the second aspect I would like to address. I propose that for those seeking to advance a virtue-based approach to public health ethics, it would be beneficial to incorporate consequential evaluation and even the capability approach into the framework. This aligns with my previous arguments in this journal (Chan 2020, 2022; Chan and Cheung 2021), even though I was not advocating for a virtue-based approach to public health ethics in those articles. As certain details have been covered in prior works, readers interested in those specific contents and detailed

references can refer to those publications. Instead of reiterating every point and citation made previously, I will concentrate on providing relevant information that I believe will be beneficial for the ongoing discussion.

In the defense of consequential evaluation, I draw heavily from Amartya Sen's framework, which centers on practical reasoning that assesses responsible choices based on their consequences. This approach opposes making judgments independent of outcomes and dismisses the idea of no trade-offs in every scenario. In essence, consequences play a pivotal role in moral considerations. It is essential to acknowledge the distinction between Sen's consequential evaluation and utilitarianism. While utilitarianism shares similarities with consequential evaluation, they are not interchangeable. Utilitarianism encompasses various elements, such as the emphasis on happiness and aggregative moral calculations, which are not inherent to consequential practical reasoning. Therefore, as a form of practical reasoning, consequential evaluation has a broader scope (though more ambiguous) compared to utilitarianism, characterized as a comprehensive moral theory. This flexibility suggests that consequential evaluation can be compatible with a wide array of moral theories, even if those theories differ significantly or are mutually exclusive to each other.

The determination of what can be deemed as positive consequences poses a significant issue, one that pertains more to the moral contents rather than to the reasoning. Sen proposes embracing plural consequences, setting his stance apart from monist ideologies like utilitarianism, which solely prioritize happiness as the ultimate positive outcome. Embracing plural consequences leads to the capability approach, in which Sen is one of the most prominent founders. Capability, in essence, relates to the freedom to achieve human functioning. Also, an important reminder is that capability is not the only positive consequence but one among many. While Sen is a key figure in developing this concept, the capability approach has expanded beyond his initial ideas. Another influential figure in this approach is Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum's approach originates from Aristotle's philosophy and later emphasizes Rawls' political justice. Drawing from different sources than Sen, Nussbaum presents ten central capabilities. In contrast, Sen refrains from establishing a fixed list, leading to Nussbaum's capabilities being commonly referred to in the plural form, while Sen's remains singular. Although Nussbaum questions Sen's optimistic view on consequentialism, she does not completely reject consequential evaluation as a practical reasoning tool.

Both Sen's consequential evaluation and the capability approach from Sen and Nussbaum offer valuable frameworks for discussing public health ethics at both theoretical and practical levels. These

frameworks have been the focus of my previous works (Chan 2020, 2022; Chan and Cheung 2021). I revisit them here because I believe they can contribute to the development of MacKay's virtue-based approach to public health ethics. At the theoretical level, Sen's consequential evaluation, which emphasizes plural consequences rather than solely focusing on happiness as utilitarianism does, can help steer public health ethics by expanding considerations beyond singular outcomes. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the diverse impacts of health policies on individuals and communities. Additionally, the capability approach offers a framework focusing on individuals' freedoms and opportunities to achieve well-being, aligning well with public health ethics. Nussbaum's capabilities approach, with its emphasis on ten central capabilities such as life, bodily health, and practical reason, aligns closely with Aristotelian virtue ethics. By integrating these capabilities into public health ethics, parallels can be drawn between Nussbaum's approach and Aristotelian virtues, emphasizing the importance of human flourishing and well-being.

Both consequential evaluation and the capability approach, while not collectively forming a comprehensive moral theory, can be valuable in conjunction with other moral theories, particularly in applied ethics fields like public health ethics. Two possibilities exist for connecting them with MacKay's approach. First, if MacKay merely emphasizes the importances of virtues without aligning with a specific version of virtue ethics, the frameworks of consequential evaluation and the capability approach can complement her stance in various ways. For instance, MacKay's suggestion that virtues contribute to positive outcomes in public health ethics, including collective virtues at the institutional level (36-37). This can be further developed by using consequential evaluation to compare the various positive outcomes of these virtues, or treating the virtues themselves as positive outcomes, and incorporating relevant capabilities into this framework. Second, if MacKay prefers to use virtue ethics to discuss public health ethics, even within this framework, consequential evaluation and the capability approach can enhance the development of such a comprehensive moral theory. For example, Nussbaum's capabilities, rooted in Aristotelian philosophy as mentioned earlier, may support some ideas in MacKay's virtue ethics. However, MacKay may need to articulate why her specific version of virtue ethics is superior to other moral theories or even non-Western traditions akin to virtue ethics, such as Confucianism. Whether focusing on virtues in general or a specific version of virtue ethics, she can draw upon the frameworks of consequential evaluation and the capability approach. For example, MacKay's suggestion to carefully weigh the benefits and costs of

proposals for optimal societal outcomes while ensuring noble means are employed resonates with the principles of consequential evaluation and the capability approach (35-36). This theoretical framework offers a guideline for examining practical issues in public health ethics.

I have previously addressed practical issues in public health ethics using consequential evaluation and the capability approach. These discussions covered topics such as human rights to health and rights against torture (Chan 2019), AI Robots in healthcare (Chan 2024), and privacy concerns alongside vaccine hesitancy during the Covid-19 pandemic (Chan 2022; Chan and Cheung 2021). MacKay has also explored moral controversies surrounding vaccinations during the pandemic, including global vaccine allocation, questioning whether governments should prioritize securing vaccines for their populations over sharing resources internationally (21), and the challenges of implementing coercive vaccination policies (37). MacKay's exploration lacks precision on how virtues or virtue ethics contribute to these vaccination debates. This gap can be filled by incorporating consequential evaluation and the capability approach. For instance, in Chan and Cheung (2021), we argue that applying practical reasoning from consequential evaluation to the Covid-19 vaccination discourse in Hong Kong could morally justify implementing compulsory vaccination (removing privileges from vaccine refusers) over mandatory vaccination (imposing civil or criminal penalties). In addition, offering financial incentives for vaccination emerges as a more favourable strategy than both mandatory and compulsory vaccination approaches. The discovery through consequential evaluation aligns well with the assertion that a society comprising more virtuous individuals is inclined to attain improved vaccination outcomes. While the detailed arguments supporting the integration of virtues and consequential evaluation to bolster vaccination efforts will be reserved for future discourse, my intention here is to emphasize the potential advantages of employing consequential evaluation (alongside the capability approach) in addressing this practical public health ethics issue. These elements could potentially enrich MacKay's virtue-based approach.

Due to space constraints, many details have been omitted, with the expectation that future discussions will further explore these issues. However, this concise article aims to respond to MacKay's virtue-based public health ethics by proposing two key aspects. First, in public health ethics, highlighting virtues themselves, rather than virtue ethics as a whole, can be valuable. Second, consequential evaluation and the capability approach offer valuable practical reasoning and positive outcomes that can complement the significance of virtues, regardless of Western or non-Western perspectives.

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