

Chapter Two

Approaches to Ethics

Ethicists often disagree about the nature of moral standards and desirable qualities and follow different path in establishing standards and discovering which qualities are desirable. However, their heroically views about ethics can be discussed, for the sake of convenience by categorizing into two broad fields of ethics. These are:

1. Normative theory of Ethics (Evaluative Ethics)
2. Non- normative theory of Ethics (Descriptive Ethics)

2.1. Normative Ethics

Normative Ethics involves an attempt to determine precisely what moral standards to follow so that our actions may be morally right or good. There are two areas of normative ethics: applied and general.

2.2.1. Applied normative ethics is the attempt to explain and justify positions on specific moral problems, such as sex outside marriage, capital punishment, euthanasia, and reverse discrimination. This area of normative ethics is termed applied because the ethicist applies or uses general ethical principles in an attempt to resolve specific moral problems.

2.2.2. General normative ethics is the reasoned search for principles of human conduct, including a critical study of the major theories about which things are good, which acts are right, and which acts are blameworthy. It attempts to determine precisely what moral standards to follow so that our actions may be morally right or good. For most of us, ethical actions spring from some standard: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. “Act in such a way that you bring about greatest good for the greater number”, “Always act in your own best interest.” Which principle should we adopt? General normative ethics, in part tries to answer this question by attempting to formulate and defend a system of basic ethical principles, which presumably is valid for everyone.

Two broad categories of general normative theories can be distinguished: teleological and deontological. Teleological theories maintain that the morality of an action depends on the non-moral consequences that the action brings about.

For simplicity, we shall refer to teleological theories as Consequentialist. Two important Consequentialist theories that we will consider are egoism and utilitarianism. Egoism is concerned with the best consequences for self, utilitarianism with the best consequences for everyone.

2.2.2.1. Teleological (Consequentialist) Theory of Ethics

It is referred as “the end justifies the means”. It believes in purpose, ends or goals of an action, it stress that the consequences of an action determines the morality or immorality of a given action. Which means an action is judged as right or wrong, moral or immoral depending on what happens because of it. One may have the best intention or follow the highest moral principles but if the result, moral act is harmful, or bad it must be judged as morally or ethically wrong act.

2.2.2.1.1. Ethical Egoism

We usually assume that moral behavior, or being ethical, has to do with not being overly concerned with oneself. In other words, selfishness is assumed to be unacceptable attitude. Even among scholars, there is disagreement about what constitutes ethical behavior. Since very early in western intellectual history, the view point that *humans are not built to look out for other people's interests* has surfaced regularly. Some scholars even hold that proper moral conduct consist of “*looking out for number one*,” period. These view points are known as psychological egoism and ethical egoism respectively. Are all theories that focus on the consequences of actions are ethical egoism? Discuss?

The answer for the above question is no, the consequences we look for may be happy consequences for others and in that case we show ourselves to be

utilitarian. We may focus on the consequences of our actions because we believe that those consequences justify our actions (in other words, that the end justify the means), but this does not necessarily imply that the consequences we hope for are good in the egoist sense that may maximize happiness for one self. We might, for instance, not agree with the Italian statesman Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) that if the end is to maintain political power for one self, one's king or one's political party, then this will justify any means that one might use for that purpose, such as force, surveillance, or even deceit. Although this famous theory is indeed Consequentialist, it does not qualify as utilitarian, because it doesn't have the common good as its ultimate end.

Some years ago, a Good Samaritan stopped to help a man whose car had broken down on the freeway. The man shot and killed the Samaritan, stole his car, and proceeded to lead the police, on a high-speed chase. Eventually he ran out of gas and began a shoot-out with the police, who subsequently killed him. This, of course, didn't bring the Samaritan back to life.

Although most people would admire the Good Samaritan for what he did and although we may deplore the fact that few people now would be inclined to follow his example, the ethical egoist would say that, the Samaritan did the wrong thing. For ethical egoism there is only one rule: "*Look after yourself*", you have no business stopping for anybody on the freeway; indeed, the ethical egoist would say, if you do stop you are throwing your life away.

This theory is called ethical egoism simply because it is an ethical theory, a normative theory about "*how we ought to behave*". The theory implies that we ought to be selfish. Or, to put it more gently, we ought to be self-interested. Calling the theory "ethical" does not suggest that there might be a decent way to be selfish; it just means that ethical egoism is a theory that advocates egoism as a moral rule.

You should look after yourself

Ethical egoist insisted that if you don't take advantage of a situation, you are foolish. The claim that it makes good sense to look after yourself, and morality is a result of that self-interest. If I mistreat others, they mistreat me, so I resolve to behave myself. This is a rather twisted version of the Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you). It is twisted because it is peculiarly slanted toward our own self-interests. The reason we should treat others the way we would like to be treated is that it gives us a good chance of receiving just such treatment; we do it for ourselves, not for others. So, do unto others so that you will be done unto in a similar way.

So the ethical egoist might certainly decide to stop for a stranded motorist on the freeway, not for the sake of the motorist but to ensure that "what goes around, comes around." The Golden Rule usually emphasizes others, but for the ethical egoist it emphasizes the self. Any theory that looks solely to consequences of actions is known as a Consequentialist theory.

The consequences that ethical egoism stipulates are good consequences for the person taking the action. Saying that people ought to look after themselves need not, of course, mean that one should annoy others whenever possible, step on their toes, or deliberately neglect their interests. It simply suggests that one should do what will be of long term benefit to one self, such as exercising, eating healthy food, avoiding repetitive argumentative situations, abstaining from over eating, and so forth. In conjunction, it suggests that other people's interests are of no importance. If you might advance your own interests by helping others, then by all means help others but only if you are the main beneficiary. It is fine to help your children get a head in school, because you love them and this love is a rationale for you.

But there is no reason to lend a hand to your neighbor's children, unless you like them or you achieve gratification through your action.

This interpretation which tells us to do whatever will benefit ourselves, results in a rewriting of the Golden Rule, because, obviously, it is not always the case that you will get the same treatment from others that you give to them. Occasionally you might get away with not treating others decently because they may never know that you are the source of the bad treatment they are receiving. Ethical egoism tells you that it is perfectly all right to treat others in a way that is to your advantage and not to theirs as long as you can be certain that you will get away with it.

The following are some methods to apply the principle of ethical egoism to a particular situation.

- List the possible acts
- For each act, see how much net good it would do for you.
- Identify the act that does the most net good for you

Some important things to notice about ethical egoism:

- It does not just say that, from the moral point of view, one's own welfare counts as well as that of others. Rather, it says that, from the moral point of view, only one's own welfare counts, and others' does not, when one is making a moral decision about how to act.
- Ethical egoism does not forbid one to help others, or require one to harm others. It just says that whatever moral reason you have to help others, or not harm them, must ultimately stem from the way in which helping them or not harming them helps you.
- Ethical egoism does not say that one ought always to do what is most pleasurable, or enjoyable. It acknowledges that one's own self-interest may occasionally require pain or sacrifice.

2.2.2.1.2 Hedonism: The Pleasure, Happiness or Satisfaction Principle

Hedonism is a general ethical theory which views pleasure as the good. According to the hedonistic pleasure principle, pleasure is thus the criterion or

standard or “pay off” of right action. That is, an action is to be valued or not in light of the amount or kind of pleasure that results from it.

Egoistic hedonism: If a person accepts the claim of ethical egoism (I-ism, makes the self the central concern for the beginning and end of all considerations) and is a hedonist, the result is egoistic hedonism, the doctrine that each individual should pursue primarily his or her own pleasure:

Hedonism: the ethical doctrine that pleasure is the highest good, and the production of pleasure is the criterion of right action.

Egoistic hedonism is very old and the most widely practiced moral philosophy. The two best example of Greek Philosophy in this regard are cyrenacism and Epicureanism.

Cyrenacism was founded by Aristppus (about 400 B.C). According to him, our subjective sensations are the basis of our conduct: we should act in such a way as to maximize our own pleasurable sensations.

Cyrenacism was most interested in the lower pleasures. The point is to enjoy as much *bodily* pleasure as possible, and as *immediately* as possible: Double your pleasure, double your fun, and eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.

Egoistic Hedonism: The doctrine that the pursuit and production of one’s own pleasure is good and is the criterion of right action.

Another more important form of egoistic hedonism is Epicureanism, named after its founder, Epicurus (300 B.C).

The pleasant life for the Epicureans meant something quite different from what it meant for the Cyrenacism As far as pleasure is concerned, they advocate the absence of pain especially mental pain in the form of anguish and fear; not the pleasures of the body but the pleasure of mind. And not the accumulation of

immediate pleasures so much as a life time of pleasures. Health of body and peace of mind.

Freedom from bodily and mental pain and an attention to the elevated and refined pleasures, especially those of the mind. It is not a drunken orgy but a Bach cantata that, in the long run, contribute most to the pleasant life.

- Both are hedonistic, both are egoistic and both believe in the “calculation” of pleasures and pains.
- The cyrenaics emphasized positive pleasures, bodily pleasures, and immediate pleasures while the Epicureans emphasized negative pleasures (or absence of pain), mental pleasures, and sustained pleasures over a long period of time.

2.2.2.1.3 Utilitarian Ethics/Utilitarianism/Social Hedonism

Utilitarianism (social hedonism) is a hard universalism in the sense that he or she believes that there is one universal moral code, which is the only one possible, and every one ought to realize it. It is the principle of utility, or the greatest happiness principle; when choosing a course of action, always choose the action that will maximize happiness and minimize unhappiness for the greatest number of people. Whatever action conforms to this rule will be defined as a morally right action, and whatever action does not conform to this principle will be called a morally wrong action. In this way utilitarianism proposes a clear and simple moral criterion: pleasure is good and pain is bad; therefore, what ever cause happiness and/or decrease pain is morally right, and what ever causes pain or unhappiness is morally wrong. In other words, utilitarianism is interested in the consequences of our actions. If they are good the action is right; if bad the action is wrong. This focus on consequences makes utilitarianism a Consequentialist, one that strives to provide the best possible consequences for as many people as possible. This principle, utilitarianism, will provide answers to all real life dilemmas.

We can get at the real nature of the heart of utilitarianism lies the *Principle of utility*. The word “utility” simply means “usefulness,” but the Utilitarians employ it to mean that which promotes the greatest balance of good over evil. Thus utilitarian is:

1. The doctrine that we ought to act so as to promote the greatest balance of good over evil.

But there must be more, for we have not yet been told what the good is. In fact, second, utilitarianism has always gone hand in hand with hedonism, which, as we have seen, certainly does specify the nature of the good, it is pleasure. Thus utilitarianism is:

2. The doctrine that we ought to act so as to promote the greatest balance of pleasure over pain.

But there is more, for we have yet been told whose pleasure is to be maximized. In fact, third, utilitarianism has always gone hand in hand specifically with social hedonism, and indeed may be regarded as identical with social hedonism.

But here we must slow down a bit.

As we pass from egoistic hedonism in the last section to social hedonism or utilitarianism in this section, it is important to note right away what they have in common and where they differ.

Like egoistic hedonism, social hedonism or utilitarianism holds to a *teleological* conception right action: It Judges the rightness of an action by its *consequences*. And, like egoistic hedonism, social hedonism or utilitarianism is, of course, hedonistic in its conception of right action. It judges the rightness of an action by its production of *pleasurable* consequences. But the two views differ at a critical point.

While the egoistic hedonist is motivated out of *self-interest* and aims at *self-satisfaction*, the social hedonist or utilitarian is motivated out of an interest for the greatest possible number of persons and the greatest possible number of persons and aims at *their* satisfaction. In place of the egoism of egoistic

hedonism, social hedonism or utilitarianism substitutes the *Benevolence* principle.

Happiness is to be distributed as widely and as equally as possible among all people. Thus, utilitarianism is, finally.

3. The doctrine that we ought to act so as to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Utilitarianism (Social Hedonism): The ethical doctrine that an action is right if, and only if, it promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

Bentham's Version: Quantity over Quality

Historically, social hedonism or social utilitarianism is identified with the English philosophers Jermy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. These two thinkers, however, represent two different forms of utilitarianism, though the difference reduces more to a matter of emphasis; in the one case an emphasis on *quantity* of happiness, and in the other an emphasis on *quality* of happiness.

For Bentham, the process of making moral decisions is really quite simple. All you do is this. First, consider the various courses of action open to you; then, taking into account all the persons affected, and counting yourself as only one of them, calculate the pleasures and pains involved; then, choose that course of action which will result in the greatest balance of pleasure over pain.

As already indicated, when Bentham presses for the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, his idea of pleasure is a purely *quantitative* one. The greater pleasure for the greater number means for Bentham the *most* pleasure. Bentham said that what is good is what is pleasurable, and what is bad is what is painful. In other words, hedonism (pleasure seeking) is the basis for his moral theory, and this theory is often called hedonistic utilitarianism. The ultimate value is happiness or pleasure, these things are *intrinsically valuable*.

Anything that helps us achieve happiness or avoid pain is of *instrumental value*, and because we may do something pleasurable in order to achieve another pleasure, pleasure can have both intrinsic and instrumental value.

John Stuart Mill: Quality over Quantity

It was to meet these sorts of objections and save utilitarianism from the charge of being a pig philosophy that Bentham's successor, John Stuart Mill, sought to distinguish happiness from mere sensual pleasure. His version of the theory is often called eudaimonistic utilitarianism (from the Greek eudaimonia, meaning —happiness). He defines happiness in terms of certain types of higher- order pleasures or satisfactions such as intellectual, aesthetic, and social enjoyments, as well as in terms of minimal suffering. That is, there are two types of pleasures. The lower, or elementary, include eating, drinking, sexuality, resting, and sensuous titillation. The higher include high culture, scientific knowledge, intellectuality, and creativity. Although the lower pleasures are more intensely gratifying, they also lead to pain when overindulged in. The higher pleasures tend to be more long term, continuous, and gradual.

Mill argued that the higher, or more refined, pleasures are superior to the lower ones: It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. Humans are the kind of creatures who require more to be truly happy. They want the lower pleasures, but they also want deep friendship, intellectual ability, and culture, the ability to create and appreciate art, knowledge, and wisdom.

The point is not merely that humans wouldn't be satisfied with what satisfies a pig but that somehow the quality of the higher pleasures is better. But what does it mean to speak of better pleasure? The formula he comes up with is this: Happiness ... [is] not a life of rapture; but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various

pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing.

Mill is clearly pushing the boundaries of the concept of pleasure by emphasizing higher qualities such as knowledge, intelligence, freedom, friendship, love, and health. In fact, one might even say that his litmus test for happiness really has little to do with actual pleasure and more to do with a non-hedonic cultivated state of mind.

Act- And Rule-Utilitarianism

There are two classical types of utilitarianism: act- and rule-utilitarianism. In applying the principle of utility, act-utilitarians, such as Bentham, say that ideally we ought to apply the principle to all of the alternatives open to us at any given moment. We may define act-utilitarianism in this way:

Act-utilitarianism argues that an act is right if and only if it results in as much good as any available alternative. One practical problem with act-utilitarianism is that we cannot do the necessary calculations to determine which act is the correct one in each case, for often we must act spontaneously and quickly. So rules of thumb are of practical importance for example, –In general, don't lie, and generally, keep your promises. However, the right act is still that alternative that results in the most utility. A second problem with act-utilitarianism is that it seems to fly in the face of fundamental intuitions about minimally correct behavior. The alternative to act-utilitarianism is a view called rule-utilitarianism elements of which we find in Mill's theory. Most generally, the position is this:

Rule-utilitarianism: An act is right, if and only if it is required by a rule that is itself a member of a set of rules whose acceptance would lead to greater utility for society than any available alternative. Human beings are

rule-following creatures. We learn by adhering to the rules of a given subject, whether it is speaking a language, driving a car, dancing, writing an essay, rock climbing, or cooking. We want to have a set of action guiding rules by which to live. The act-utilitarian rule, to do the act that maximizes utility, is too general for most purposes. Often, we don't have time to decide whether lying will produce more utility than truth telling, so we need a more specific rule prescribing truthfulness that passes the test of rational scrutiny.

2.2.2.1.4 Ethical Altruism

According to this view an action is morally right if the consequence of the action is more favorable than unfavorable to the society except the doer of the action. Here moral actions are motivated by sympathy and compassion to others especially the disadvantaged section of society. This is an important virtue of good citizenship. A civic -minded person show readiness and commitment towards promoting the collective interest than individual interest. Why do you think is the reason why citizens/ soldiers/ die for their own country?

2.2.2.1.5 Psychological Egoism

The descriptive egoist's theory is called "psychological egoism". Psychological egoism describes human nature as being wholly self-centered and self-motivated. Psychological egoism *is a theory about the nature of human motives*. It suggests that all behaviors are motivated by self-interest. In other words, it suggests that every action or behavior or decision of every person is motivated by self interest. Psychological egoism is a thesis about motivation, usually with a focus on the motivation of human (intentional) action. It is exemplified in the kinds of descriptions we sometimes give of people's actions in terms of hidden, ulterior motives. Psychological egoism is a universal claim: it is a claim about all human actions; the idea is that something in the nature of human beings,

or in the nature of intentional action, implies that genuine altruistic action -- action done for the sake of others rather than oneself -- is impossible for human beings. So it is important to distinguish psychological egoism from the following two claims:

1. The view that human beings sometimes, or quite often, act out of their own self-interest. These claims are so obviously correct as to be hardly worth discussing. The psychological egoist doesn't just claim that some actions are done for self-interested reasons, but that all are.

Some hold we are all automatically selfish. So, just as it is a constitutive part of us that we have certain physical organs and functions – a heart, brain, liver, blood circulation, and motor behavior – so it is that we *will* act to advance our own well-being, that we will attempt to benefit ourselves at all times. We are supposed to be instinctively moved to act selfishly. Here is one way of giving expression to what seems to be the gist of this idea: “Every individual serves his own private interest The great Saints of history have served their ‘private interest’ just as the most money grubbing miser has served his interest. The *private interest* is whatever it is that drives an individual”. In economics, however, “selfish” or “self-interested” can mean “stemming from one’s own choices” or “for reasons of one’s own.”

2.3 Deontological (Non-Consequentialist) Theory of Ethics

It is referred as “the means justifies the end”. It is coined as “**deontics**”. This is a theory that the rightness or wrongness of moral action is determined, at least partly with reference to formal rules of conduct rather than consequences or result of an action.

It is an emphasis on the intentions, motives, moral principles or performance of duty rather than results, as the sign of right action/morality and immorality. It is a duty based and according to this theory, the consequences or results of our action have nothing to do with their rightness or wrongness. The common forms of theory, which advocate the deontological ethical position, are:

- A. Immanuel Kant (categorical Imperative)
- B. Divine command theory
- C. Intuitionism

2.3.1 Immanuel Kant (Categorical Imperative): Categorical imperative requires that we should respect for the humanity and dignity of all person and that, we treat each other in accordance we think should be universally practiced. “Act as if the maxim you choose to follow always become a universal law of nature”, “Always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other never simply as a means, but always also as an end”

- ☆ **Only Good will is good without qualification-** it refers that “nothing in the world is good, without qualification except a good will”. Will is part of person that reasons about and decides what he will do. When persons will is morally good, it is good under all conditions, which means its goodness does not depend upon anything outside of itself. For instance, intellectual talents, such as intelligence, cleverness and good judgment and character traits such as courage, determination and perseverance have value to the extent that they aid us in doing what is right but they become evil when they are used for evil ends.
- ☆ **Good will and external action-** we do not say a person has a good will merely because the person performs certain external action. A person can have a good will and may try to do what is right, but may be prevented from doing it by physical circumstances such as paralysis. Instead, we determine whether a person has a good will by looking only at the persons “willing” which means by looking at the reason on which the person bases his decisions concerning what he will do.
- ☆ **Good will and the three types of motivation-** A person may do his duty “**out of self interest**”, by “**direct inclination**”, which means by the immediate satisfaction or pleasure it gives him/her. Doing something simply because he believes it is the morally correct thing to

do, or **acting from duty**. It is doing something absolutely, directly and objectively.

2.3.2 Divine Command Theory

The *Divine Command Theory* is a single rule non-Consequentialist normative theory that says we should always do the will of God. In other words, whatever the situation, if we do what God wills, then we do the right thing; if we do not do what God wills, then no matter what the consequences, we do wrong.

Notice that this theory does not state that we should obey God's law because we will therefore promote our own or the general good or be faithful to some virtuous principles. Perhaps we will accomplish these ends, but the sole justification for obeying God's law is that God wills it. The theory also does not defend the morality of an action by promising some supernatural reward to the faithful. True, perhaps the faithful will be rewarded, and perhaps behaving righteously is in their best long-term interests, but divine command theorist wouldn't justify moral actions on such egoistic grounds.

Understandably, divine command theorists would see no intrinsic worth or value in such things as pleasure, power or knowledge; instead, they would propose something like a union with God as taking the form of heavenly salvation. The great Christian theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas, writing in one of his most important ethical works, *Summa contra Gentiles*, refers to the human's ultimate happiness as being the contemplation of God.

He arrives at this conclusion after arguing that human happiness does not consist in wealth, worldly power, or sensual pleasures.

This state of eternal bliss is the ultimate goal of all human endeavors; it is the only thing of intrinsic value. What is valuable is independent of what any individual thinks or likes and what any society happens to sanction. Moral

laws are established by God; they are universally binding for all people and are eternally true, regardless of whether they are universally obeyed. Such God-established laws are generally interpreted in a religious tradition. The Ten Commandments are a good example. These laws, claim their adherents, apply to everybody everywhere and their value does not depend on what produces human satisfaction, either individually or collectively.

The justification of such moral laws is usually divine authority and its supposed expression through humans and their institutions. Thus the Bible or the Koran/Quran may be appealed to as an authority as may a religious institution or leader.

A cursory look at the divine command theory reveals a couple of weaknesses

First, we don't know what God has commanded. True, divine commanded theorists frequently point to sacred books or scriptures as guidelines yet, how do we know that these writings represent the inspired word of God? Some would assert that the scriptures say so. But such circular reasoning will not do. After all, how do we know that there is a God at all? And if there is, can we be sure that He or She expressed Himself or Herself in one source and not in another? In addition, the divine command theory can't satisfactorily explain why God commands something.

In other words, does God command something because it is right, or is something right because God command it?

2.3.3. Moral Intuitionism

Moral intuitionists (also known as "moral non-naturalists") think that observation is insufficient to explain all of our moral knowledge and at least some of our moral knowledge is based on intuition or contemplation that enables us to know self-evident facts. Once we fully understand a moral

statement that can be enough to know if it's true. For example, it might be self-evident that all pain is intrinsically bad to anyone who fully understands what “pain” and “intrinsically bad” refer to. This is much like our knowledge of mathematics and logic. We can know that “ $2+2=4$ ” just by understanding what the statement is saying. Moral intuitionists don't necessarily think moral facts are natural because they don't think we can know all moral facts through observation of the natural world. They tend to disagree that moral facts are identical to natural facts.

We must decide what is right or wrong in each situation by consulting our conscience or our intuitions. Now let's consider the moral theory of William David Ross (1877-1971) who is one of the proponents of act-intuitionism. “Ross suggests ‘*prima facie* duty’ or ‘conditional duty’ as a brief way of referring to the characteristic (quite distinct from that of being a duty proper) which an act has, in virtue of being of a certain kind (e.g. the keeping of a promise), of being an act which would be a duty proper if it were not at the same time of another kind which is morally significant. Whether an act is a duty proper or actual duty depends on all the morally significant kinds it is an instance of.” An act is a ***prima facie* duty** when there is a moral reason in favor of doing the act, but one that can be outweighed by other moral reasons. An act is a ***prima facie* duty** when it has at least one right-making feature. An act is a ***prima facie* wrong** when there is a moral reason against doing the act, but one that can be outweighed by other moral reasons. An act is a ***prima facie* wrong** when it has at least one wrong-making feature.

For example “if I have promised to meet a friend at a particular time for some trivial purpose, I should certainly think myself justified in breaking my engagement if by doing so I could prevent a serious accident or bring relief to the victims of one.” Let's make this more explicit. I promise to meet a friend for lunch. On the way there, I witness an accident. If I keep my promise to meet my friend, someone will die. If I break my promise, I can help at the accident and save a life. I thus have a *prima facie* duty to meet my friend (since I

promised that I would meet him, and that I promised to do something is a reason in favor of doing it). But I also have a *prima facie* duty to help at the accident (since this would prevent serious harm to someone, and that an act would prevent serious harm is a reason in favor of doing it). I thus have a conflict of *prima facie* duties. Ross makes a distinction between “*Prima facie* duties” and “*all things considered* duties”. According to Ross *prima facie* duties are duties we seem to have “at first blush” and obligate us to act certain ways, *assuming everything else is equal*, can be overridden by other considerations. *All things considered* duties: are those duties what we must do after balancing all the conflicting *prima facie* duties we may have.

Ross lists seven sources of *prima facie* duties these are:

1. **Duties of fidelity:** first there are duties stemming from our explicit and implicit promises. ***The cases of the two moving friends.*** If I’ve promised one friend I’d help him move, I should help him, and not another friend, even if the other friend has more stuff. Implicit promises have many sources. Consider e.g. ***the case of the dining friends.*** Kim and Shelley eat together in their dorm every day. Kim has come to expect this. On one busy day, however, a “cute boy” comes and wants to sit next to Shelley. Should Shelley let him sit there?
2. **Duties of reparation:** these are duties stemming from our past wrongdoings towards others. ***The brothers and the bike:*** Sam gets mad at Gus for no reason and breaks his bike. It would seem that at least until Gus ought get a new bike, Sam to loan his bike to Gus.
3. **Duties of gratitude:** these are duties to repay or redo favors or simply thank others for their kindness towards us. ***Frasier and Daphne:*** Frasier offers to pay for Daphne’s wedding. Daphne is obligated to invite Frasier to the wedding and give him a thank you card.
4. **Duties of justice and fairness:** these are duties involving distributing goods and services in a fair and equal manner whenever possible. ***The tax break:*** Due to a good year financially, the government can give many taxpayers a

partial tax rebate. It would be morally wrong simply to give these rebates to some people and not others.

5. **Duties of beneficence:** these are duties to try to bring about the happiness of other people if possible. **The new car:** I am trying to decide between buying a red or blue car. My wife strongly prefers red. If I don't care between them, I ought to get the red car.

6. **Duties of self-improvement:** these are duties involving making the best ourselves and making our lives the best they could be. **The video game question:** Roger wants to play his new video game but needs to study for his ethics exam the next day. What should he do?

7. **Duties of non-maleficence:** these are duties not to hurt, harm or sadden other people. **Grandma Edna:** Grandma Edna sure is taking her time getting across a crosswalk. No one is around. Late for work, Francine could just run her down and continue on her way.

According to Ross when deciding what to do, we need to consider all the *prima facie* duties that are relevant. These duties often conflict; need to be weighed and balanced. How are we supposed to *know* which duties apply in which cases, and which are stronger? Ross responds: we can know what duties we have simply by "intuition".

2.3.4 Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is a type of ethical theory in which the notion of *virtue or good character* plays a central role. The proponents of virtue ethics emphasize neither consequences nor rules *but rather moral virtues or moral characters*, which are typically thought of as behavioral dispositions; *an action is morally right insofar as it is a product of such virtues*.

According to virtue theory, we ought to possess certain character traits such as courage, generosity, compassion, etc. – and these ought to be manifest in our actions. We therefore ought to act in ways that exhibit the virtues. Virtue ethicists tell us that it is the agent's character traits and motives (i.e., whether

the virtuous person would do act) that makes the action morally permissible or not.

Virtue is the *habit of doing what is right*. It is a ‘good habit’. It is a habit or disposition that tends to produce good consequences. A life where virtues become ingrained is a *virtuous life*. By contrast, *vices* are ‘bad habits’. A life where vices become ingrained is a vicious life. Virtues and vices are character traits. Generally, the major ethical question in virtue ethics is NOT what should I do? BUT *what kind of person should I be?* In other word, virtue ethics focuses on criteria of character development & acquisition of good character traits from habit.

According to virtue Ethicists, an action is right if it is what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances. A *virtuous agent* is one who acts virtuously, that is, one who has and exercises the virtues. Virtue ethics emphasizes *right being over right action*.

According to virtue ethicists, *our character- or the sort of person we are – is more important than the rules or principles we follow*.

Historically, virtue theory is one of the oldest normative traditions in Western philosophy, having its roots in ancient Greek civilization. Socrates, Plato & Aristotle are the proponents of virtue ethics.

Socrates’ Understanding of Virtue

Socrates (469–399 BC) was one of the first Greek philosophers to encourage both scholars and the common citizen to turn their attention from the outside world to the condition of humankind abide by the doctrine of “*know thyself*”. Socrates presents himself as a gift to the city from the gods and a gadfly *whose role is to awaken a big sleepy horse*.

In this view, *knowledge having a bearing on human life was placed highest*, all other knowledge being secondary. *Self-knowledge was considered necessary for success and inherently an essential good*.

He posited that *people will naturally do what is good, if they know what is right*. *Evil or bad actions are the result of ignorance*. If a criminal were truly aware of

the mental and spiritual consequences of his actions, he would neither commit nor even consider committing those actions. Any person who knows what is truly right will automatically do it, according to Socrates. While he *correlated knowledge with virtue*, he similarly equated *virtue with happiness*. The *truly wise man will know what is right, do what is good, and therefore be happy*.

Plato's Understanding of Virtue

In the Protagoras Plato, through Socrates, argues that *virtue is knowledge*. The argument begins with the premise that *everyone wants what he or she believes to be good*. From this it follows that when a person does something wrong or bad it cannot be because they want to do it, knowing it is bad, it must be that they want to do it, believing it to be good. Plato says *the soul will always choose to do good, if it recognizes what is good*. What separates the virtuous person from the un-virtuous is not a desire for what is good, everyone desires what they think to be good, but rather *the knowledge of what the good really is*.

Plato begins with an argument concerning the postulating the *Tripartite theory of the soul*. Like a just state, *a just soul has three elements: Reason, will to power (spirit) and appetites*. Appetite is the part of the soul that is animal like, lusting for bodily pleasure and itches, reason that which is concerned with calculation and rational thought, and spirit the part associated with emotions. *Each element of the Soul has its own corresponding virtue*: The virtue of rational part of the soul is *Wisdom*; *Courage* is the virtue of the spirited part of the soul and *temperance* is the virtue of the appetitive part of the soul. Temperance is *the harmony of the relation* when the spirited element and the desires are ruled or are in control of reason. This implies that *justice is the harmonious relationship between the parts of the soul*. *Injustice is disagreement among the parts of the soul* where irrational desire and emotional parts of the soul dominate reason.

Thus, *the just man is a person whose knowledge, emotion and desire work in perfect harmony*, no part of the soul tyrannizing over the rest, each part exercising its due activity. *The just person is the virtuous person*.

Aristotle's Virtue Theory: The Niccomachean Ethics

Aristotle tells us that *happiness must be explained in terms of reason, man's distinctive function or activity*. Just as the acorn actualizes its unique *potentiality* by becoming an Oak, so man actualizes his distinctive or defining *potentiality by living the life of reason*. To Aristotle, this means that *happiness depends upon the actualization- the full realization - of man's rationality*.

For him, as for other Greek philosophers, “*virtue refers to the excellence of a thing, i.e., the disposition to perform effectively its proper function*. For example, a virtuous knife cuts well and a virtuous physician successfully restores his patients to health. By the same token, Aristotle argues, a *virtuous man lives according to reason, thus realizing his distinctive potentiality*.

Virtuous people, who live a life of harmony, are the only type capable of reaching their goal as humans: happiness. *The good life avoids the extremes of both excessive repression and excessive indulgence. Virtue strikes the mean: Virtue is golden mean between two extremes*: For instance, excessive indulgence is as much a vice as the excessive repression of desires. *Self-control*, therefore, is a virtue. Likewise, courage is the mean between rashness and cowardice.

2.4 Non- Normative Theory of Ethics

Is either a factual investigation of moral behaviors or analysis of the meaning of terms used in moral discourse and an examination of the moral reasoning by which moral beliefs can be shown to be true or false.

Non- normative ethics has two aspects (fields). These are:

1. Scientific/Descriptive study
2. Meta-ethics study

1. Scientific/ Descriptive study: this study of morality involves factual investigation of moral behavior. It is concerned with how people do in fact behave, that means how people actually behave/acting something. A

descriptive one describes actual human conduct. Again scientific or descriptive study can be subdivided into two doctrines. These are:

1. Ethical Absolutism
2. Ethical Relativism

1. Ethical Absolutism: is the doctrine that states there is one and only one moral code. Absolutists maintain that this code applies to everyone, at all times and everywhere. They advocates, what is a moral duty for me must also be a duty for you. For example, if euthanasia is wrong, it is wrong for everyone, at all times and everywhere.

They do not necessarily claim that their interpretation of the absolute standard is true and valid one but they do insist that there is a true moral code and that this code is the same for all people in all ages.

i. Objectivism (Ethical objectivism) the view that moral principles have objective validity whether or not people recognize them as such; that is, moral rightness or wrongness does not depend on social approval, but on such independent considerations as whether the act or principle promotes human flourishing or ameliorates human suffering. Objectivism differs from **absolutism** in allowing that all or many of our principles are overridable in given situations.

2. Ethical Relativism: is a doctrine that denies there is a single moral standard that is universally applicable to all people, at all times. They insist that there are many moral codes, which take root in diverse social, soil and environment. Which means morality is relative to time, place and circumstances in which it occurs.

They do not merely saying that what is thought right in one part of the world is frequently thought wrong in another. Rather, they assert that precisely the same action that is right in one society at one time can be wrong in another.

For example, putting to death 80 years old can be right in the jungles of New Guinea and wrong in US.

i. Conventionalism (conventional ethical relativism) the view that there are no objective moral principles but that all valid moral principles are justified (or are made true) by virtue of their cultural acceptance, recognizes the social nature of morality.

ii. Subjectivism (Subjective ethical relativism) is the type of ethical relativism stating that it is the individual who determine valid moral principles.

B. Meta Ethics

The second field of non-normative ethics is called Meta-ethics. Meta ethics is the highly technical discipline investigating the meaning of ethical terms, including a critical study of how ethical statements can be verified. Meta Ethics is concerned with the meanings of such ethical terms as *right*, *wrong*, *obligation* and *responsibility*.

Accordingly, Meta ethicists would be more concerned with the meanings of such words as *good* or *bad* than with what we think is good or bad. If you maintained, for instance, that an act of euthanasia was right, the Meta ethicist might ask; just what do you mean by right? Meta ethical positions often are classified as representative of Naturalism, Non-naturalism and Emotivism.

Naturalism maintains that ethical statements can be translated into non ethical statements. One naturalistic position, autobiographical naturalism, contends that an ethical statement simply expresses the approval or disapproval of the speaker. For example, when you say, "That act of euthanasia was right." You mean "I approve of that act of euthanasia." Another naturalistic position, sociological naturalism, holds that an ethical statement simply expresses the approval or disapproval of the majority. Thus, "That act of euthanasia was right" means "the majority approves of that act of euthanasia." Still another naturalistic position, theological naturalism claims that an ethical statement expresses divine approval or disapproval. Accordingly, "That act of

euthanasia was right,” in effect, means” God (or some equivalent reference) approves of that act of euthanasia.”

Non-naturalism, in contrast to naturalism, is the position that holds that an ethical statement defines translation into a non ethical form. Non-naturalists insist that at least some ethical words can be defined only in terms of other ethical words.

Thus Non naturalism might argue that the statement “that act of euthanasia was right” can only be translated into other ethical statements, such as “That act of euthanasia was proper” or “That act of euthanasia should have been performed,” or “That act of euthanasia was good.” In other words, words like *good, right, and should* are so basic in ethics that there are not other words by means of which to define them.

Given their position, non-naturalists clearly come close to asserting that ethical statements cannot be verified, that they cannot be determined true or false. How then does the Non-naturalism handle ethical statements? More advises that we reflect on them and determine as well as we can, whether we believe the statements are true. There are no empirical observations, no mathematical or logical calculations, which would enable us to discover the truth of ethical statements.

Emotivism (or non-cognitivism) can be broadly defined as a meta-ethics position which claims that ethical statements are used to evoke a predetermined response or to encourage a predetermined behavior. According to emotivists, ethical statements can be used, indeed are used, to make someone feel or behave in a certain way. For example, if a teacher says to a student, “cheating is wrong,’ the teacher may not be expressing a moral position on cheating but rather trying to still in the student a certain attitude

toward cheating. Ethical statements, therefore, among the commands such as “Don’t cheat” or “Don’t lie” or “Don’t break promises.” The essential difference between autobiographical naturalism and emotivism is that the former holds that ethical statements are subjective and verifiable, while the latter believes that they are subjective but not verifiable.

2.5.3 Civic Virtues

Civic virtue is morality or a standard of righteous behavior in relationship to a citizen’s involvement in society. The Greek word for virtue is *arête*, which means excellence. Civic virtue helps people understand their ties of the community and their responsibility with in it. Civic virtue is the moral understanding of how a citizen relates to society. Without an understanding of civic virtue, citizens are less likely to look beyond their own families, friends, and economic interests. They are less likely to help others in the community, to volunteer their time, to give money to nonprofit organizations, or to participate in a group that benefits society.

It is viewed that the citizen committed to civic virtue as one who watches both sets of values-those of the public good and those of freedom, diversity, and individual rights and who acts on the basis of the best informed judgment that profoundly study and active participation can be provided. It is believed that civic virtue embraces rational thinking and acting in such a way that individual rights are viewed in light of the public good and that the public good includes the protection of individual rights. Whether one prefers to stress balance, equilibrium, or tension between these traditions, or views them as a blend, mixture, or tapestry it is believed that the effort to identify and understand their ingredients is the first major step toward the practice of civic virtue. Civic virtue is described in terms of civic dispositions and civic commitments.

- 🕒 Civic Virtue
- 🕒 Civic Disposition
- 🕒 Civic Commitment

A. Civic Dispositions refers to those attitudes and ingrained habits of mind that are conducive to behavior that leads to the healthy functioning and common good of the democratic system. These dispositions also enhance the individual's ability to participate competently and responsibly in the political system.

Dispositions of the citizen conducive to the healthy functioning of a constitutional democracy include the following:

1. *Civility*: - is a polite way of acting or behaving towards others. It is the need to respect others. This includes the respect and politeness we show to those with whom even we may disagree. In this case, thus, we are expected to respect the rights of those who are in dispute with us. It is an element of civilized behavior. Moreover it is a way of peaceful living and co-existence with others.

In its civic context, civility has the following characteristics:

A. *Respect*. Civility includes treating others with respect and as individuals inherently worthy of regard whether or not one agrees with their positions.

B. *Civil discourse*. Civility includes a disposition to take part in public debate and in doing so to adhere to commonly accepted standards of discourse such as:

- a. Addressing the issue. Debate should be based on the substance of opponents' argument or positions on the issue and not on personal attacks on their character.
- b. Respecting the right of others to be heard. Disruptive tactics that undermine debate in a public forum should be avoided. However, when people are unjustly denied their right to express their views, disruptive tactics such as civil disobedience and similar non – violent activities can be justified.

2. *Individual responsibility*: - refers to the moral and legal obligation of citizens, and hence citizens should be disposed to care for and take responsibility for themselves and their actions and activities.

3. *Self – discipline*: - Virtuous citizens freely adhere to the fundamental rules required for the maintenance of a system of constitutional government without requiring the imposition of external authority. In all situations, there are some rules and regulations to be observed. These rules and regulations help to guide our actions. Thus, we should be able to respect these rules and standards in our day-to-day activities. When we do this freely and from our own initiative, our actions can be referred as self-disciplined. Thus self-discipline comes from inside of us without being forced or controlled by outside expectations or impositions.

4. *Civic – mindedness*: - this refers to citizen's readiness and desire to give concern to the public. Thoughtful citizens recognize that there is often a tension between private interest and the common good. Citizens should understand that there are times when they should place the common good above their personal interests. Civic-mindedness is unselfish behavior that enables us to do good and make sacrifice ourselves to the society and to our nation.

5. *Open-mindedness*: - This is the disposition to be receptive to different ideas and arguments. This includes the following attributes:

- A. Openness: - citizens should be open to considering opposing positions and changing or modifying their own positions. Openness to opposing positions and arguments, however, does not mean that all views are of equal value or validity.
- B. A healthy skepticism: - A healthy skepticism is an appropriate response of the citizen to unsupported generalizations and dogmatism.
- C. Recognition of ambiguity: - citizens should recognize that actions and situations are sometimes capable of more than one interpretation and that the character of political and social reality is therefore sometimes ambiguous. It may therefore be difficult to achieve full understanding or certainty.

6. *Compromise (Negotiation/bargaining)*: - is one form of behavior that should be observed in settling conflicts peacefully. It involves the readiness and willingness to spare something on both sides of the conflict in favor of the peaceful resolution of the problem and its outcome. That means, whenever we are in conflict with others on a certain issue, there is a need to give up some of our positions or interests. However compromise never allows abandoning basic principles and interests.

Therefore, compromise is based on the principle of give and take spirit and hence involves concession and counter concession by each party or individual person engaged in conflict.

7. *Toleration of diversity*: The disposition to tolerate, appreciate, and support diversity includes respect for the right of others to differ in ideas, ways of life, customs, and beliefs etc. Support for diversity in everyday life should be based upon an understanding of benefits of having people of diverse beliefs and ethnic and racial backgrounds as a part of the community.

8. *Patience and persistence*: - Citizens should understand that forming or changing public policy usually requires a great deal of time and persistent effort. They should not be dissuaded from this fact or by the inevitable delays and failures that result when trying to exert influence on governmental decision-making.

9. *Compassion*: - Compassion is the disposition to empathize with others and show concern for their welfare, and hence, it is an essential attribute of citizens in a society devoted to the common good.

10. *Generosity*: - Generosity means the disposition to expend time, effort, and resources in a civic context for the benefit of others. The virtuous citizen shows generosity to others and to the community at large.

B. Civic Commitment and Internalization

Civic commitments are reasoned devotion or commitment expected to be discharged or fulfilled by all citizens of a given state. Civic commitment is profoundly applied or practiced if and only if citizens and students conspicuously and persistently internalized the aforementioned and other civic virtues, and thereby, making them part and parcel of their behavior conduct. It is only if civic commitment is essentially practiced by each and every citizen that our social system and solidarity get effective, and hence not fragile.