Chapter Two: Approaches to Ethics.

1.1. Normative Ethics

We may now begin our review of problems and views in the area of normative ethics, starting with the theory of obligation and then going on to the theory of moral value and, finally, to the theory of non moral value. The ultimate concern of the normative theory of obligation is to guide us in the making of decisions and judgments about actions in particular situations.

Normative ethics;

- Offers theories or accounts of the best way to live. These theories evaluate actions in a systematic way, i.e., they may focus on outcomes or duties or motivation as a means of justifying human conduct.
- Includes ethical theories or approaches such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, principlism, narrative ethics and feminist ethics.

Normative ethics poses questions of the following kind:

- ✓ Are there general principles or rules that we could follow which distinguish between right and wrong? Or:
- ✓ Are there virtues and/or relationships that we can nurture, in order to behave well?

1.1.1. Teleological Ethics (Consequentiality)

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.

In general their views have been of two sorts:

(1) Deontological theories and

(2) Teleological ones. A teleological theory says that the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory, etc., is the non-moral value that is brought into being. The final appeal, directly or indirectly, must be to the comparative amount of good produced, or rather to the comparative balance of good over evil produced. Thus, an act is right if and only if it or the rule under which it falls produces, will probably produce, or is intended to produce at least as great a balance of good over evil as any available alternative; an act is wrong if and only if it does not do so.

It is important to notice here that, for a teleologist, the moral quality or value of actions, persons, or traits of character, is dependent on the comparative nonmoral value of what they bring about or try to bring about.

For the moral quality or value of something to depend on the moral value of whatever it promotes would be circular. Teleological theories, then, make the right, the obligatory, and the morally good dependent on the nonmorally good. Accordingly, they also make the theory of moral obligation and moral value dependent, in a sense, on the theory of nonmoral value.

It should also be noticed, however, that teleologists may hold various views about what is good in the nonmoral sense. Teleologists have often been hedonists, identifying the good with pleasure and evil with pain, and concluding that the right course or rule of action is that which produces at least as great a balance of pleasure over pain as any alternative would. But they may be and have sometimes been non-hedonists, identifying the good with power, knowledge, self-realization, perfection etc. This fact must not be forgotten when we are evaluating the teleological theory of obligation..

Teleologists differ on the question of whose good it is that one ought to try to promote.

Ethical egoism holds that one is always to do what will promote his own greatest good -- that an act or rule of action is right if and only if it promotes at least as great a balance of good over evil for him in the long run as any alternative would, and wrong if it does not. This view was held by Epicurus, Hobbes, and Nietzsche, among others.

Ethical universalism, or what is usually called utilitarianism, takes the position that the ultimate end is the greatest general good -- that an act or rule of action is right if and only if it is, or probably is, conducive to at least as great a balance of good over evil in the universe as a whole as any alternative would be, wrong if it is not, and obligatory if it is or probably is conducive to the greatest possible balance of good over evil in the universe.

1.1.2. Egoism: Ethical and psychological Egoism

1.1.2.1. 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.

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 goism as a moral rule.

One argument for ethical egoism follows immediately from the theory of psychological egoism, which we examined in the previous section. If I am psychologically programmed to act only in my own best interest, then I can

never be obligated to perform altruistic (that is, selfless) acts toward others. More formally the argument is this:

(1) We all always seek to maximize our own self-interest (definition of psychological egoism).

(2) If one cannot do an act, one has no obligation to do that act (ought to implies can).

(3) Altruistic acts involve putting other people's interests ahead of our own (definition of altruism).

(4) But, altruism contradicts psychological egoism and so is impossible (by premises 1 and 3).

(5) Therefore, altruistic acts are never morally obligatory (by premises 2 and 4).

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 for 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.

1.1.2.2. Psychological Egoism

The main argument that has been used as a basis for ethical egoism is a psychological one, an argument from human nature.

- ❖ We are all so constituted, it is said, that one always seeks one's own advantage or welfare, or always does what he thinks will give him the greatest balance of good over evil.

- Self-love is the only basic "principle" in human nature; in one set of contemporary terms, it means that "ego-satisfaction" is the final aim of all activity.

- The pleasure principle" is the basic "drive" in every individual.

- Ethical egoism has generally presupposed what is called *psychological egoism* -- that each of us is always seeking his own greatest good, whether this is conceived of as pleasure, happiness, knowledge, power, self-realization.

- The question is not whether egoism is strong in human nature but whether we ever have any concern or desire for the welfare of others except as a means to our own, any concern for or interest in their welfare for its own sake, which is not derived from our concern for our own welfare. In dealing with this ethical theory;

(1) That the desire for one's own good presupposes or builds upon the existence of more basic desires for food, fame, sex, etc. If we did not have any of these "primary appetites," we would not have any good to be concerned about; our welfare consists of the satisfaction of such desires.

(2) It follows, that the object of these basic desires is not one's own welfare; it is food, fame, sex, etc., as the case may be. One's own good is not the object of all of one's desires but only of one of them, self- love.

(3) That in some cases the object of a basic desire is something for oneself, for example, food or the eating of food. But there is no necessity about this; the object may be something for someone else, for example, enjoying the sight of the ocean. In other words, there may be altruistic impulses. There may also be a desire to do the right as such. Whether there are such desires or not is a question of empirical fact.

(4) As a matter of fact, there are such altruistic interests in the welfare of others (sheer malevolence, if it exists, is a desire that another experience pain for its own sake), as well as a desire to do the right as such.

1.1.3. Utilitarianism: Producing the best consequences

That action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers. Consider some traditional moral principles and see if they help us come to a decision. One principle often given to guide action is “Let your conscience be your guide.” Suppose your conscience tells you to give the money to the Ethiopian Coffee Club and my conscience tells me to give the money to the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS). How can we even discuss the matter? If conscience is the end of it, we’re left mute.

Another principle urged on us is “Do whatever is most loving”; Love is surely a wonderful value. It is a more wholesome attitude than hate, and we should overcome feelings of hate if only for our own psychological health. But is love enough to guide our actions when there is a conflict of interest? “Love is blind,” it has been said, “but reason, like marriage, is an eye-opener.” Whom should I love in the case of the disbursement of the millionaire’s money—the millionaire or the starving people? It’s not clear how love alone will settle anything. In fact, it is not obvious that we must always do what is most loving. Should we always treat our enemies in loving ways? Or is it morally permissible to feel hate for those who have purposely and unjustly harmed us, our loved ones, or other innocent people? Should the survivors of Auschwitz love Adolph Hitler? Love alone does not solve difficult moral issues.

A third principle often given to guide our moral actions is the Golden Rule: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” This, too, is a noble rule of thumb, one that works in simple, commonsense situations. But it has problems. First, it cannot be taken literally. Thus, the rule must be modified: “Do to others as you would have them do to you if you were in

their shoes.” However, this still has problems. Likewise, the Golden Rule doesn’t tell me to whom to give the millionaire’s money.

Conscience, love, and the Golden Rule are all worthy rules of thumb to help us through life. They work for most of us, most of the time, in ordinary moral situations. But, in more complicated cases, especially when there are legitimate conflicts of interests, they are limited.

A more promising strategy for solving dilemmas is that of following definite moral rules. Suppose you decided to give the millionaire’s money to the Ethiopian Coffee Club to keep your promise or because to do otherwise would be stealing. The principle you followed would be “Always keep your promise.” Principles are important in life. If you decided to act on the principle of keeping promises, then you adhered to a type of moral theory called deontology. As you will see so far that deontological systems maintain that the center of value is the act or kind of act; certain features in the act itself have intrinsic value. For example, a deontologist would see something intrinsically wrong in the very act of lying. If, on the other hand, you decided to give the money to the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) to save an enormous number of lives and restore economic solvency to the society, you sided with a type of theory called teleological ethics. Sometimes, it is referred to as consequentiality ethics. The center of value here is the outcome or consequences of the act. For example, a teleology’s would judge whether lying was morally right or wrong by the consequences it produced..

1.1.3.1. Classic Utilitarianism

In our normal lives we use utilitarian reasoning all the time. As a formal ethical theory, the seeds of utilitarianism were sewn by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (342–270 BCE), who stated that “

Pleasure is the goal that nature has ordained for us; it is also the standard by which we judge everything good." According to this view, rightness and wrongness are determined by pleasure or pain that something produces.

Epicurus's theory focused largely on the individual's personal experience of pleasure and pain, and to that extent he advocated a version of ethical egoism.

The classical expressions of utilitarianism, though, appear in the writings of two English philosophers and social reformers Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). They were the nonreligious ancestors of the twentieth-century secular humanists, optimistic about human nature and our ability to solve our problems without recourse to God. Engaged in a struggle for legal as well as moral reform, they were impatient with the rule-bound character of law and morality in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Great Britain and tried to make the law serve human needs and interests.

1.1.3.2. Jeremy Bentham: Quantity over Quality

There are two main features of utilitarianism, both of which Bentham articulated:

- ***The consequentialist principle (or its teleological aspect):*** states that the rightness or wrongness of an act is determined by the goodness or badness of the results that flow from it. It is the end, not the means that counts; the end justifies the means. and
- ***The utility principle (or its hedonic aspect):*** states that the only thing that is good in itself is some specific type of state (for example, pleasure, happiness, welfare).

1.1.3.3. 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, culture, the ability to create and appreciate art, knowledge, and wisdom..

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.

1.1.3.4. Act- And Rule-Utilitarianism

There are two classical types of utilitarianism: act- and rule-utilitarianism.

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.

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 Strengths of Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism has **three** very positive features.

The **first** attraction or strength is that it is a single principle, an absolute system with a potential answer for every situation: Do what will promote the most utility! It's good to have a simple, action-guiding principle that is applicable to every occasion—even if it may be difficult to apply (life's not simple).

The second virtue appeals to our sense that morality is made for people and that morality is not so much about rules as about helping people and alleviating the suffering in the world. As such, utilitarianism seems commonsensical.

A third strength of utilitarianism is that it is particularly well suited to address the problem of posterity—namely, why we should preserve scarce natural resources for the betterment of future generations of humans that

do not yet exist. Expressed rhetorically, the question is “Why should I care about posterity; what has posterity ever done for me

Criticism of Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism has been around for several centuries, but so too have been its critics, and we need to address a series of standard objections to utilitarianism before we can give it a “philosophically clean bill of health.”

Problems with Formulating Utilitarianism

The first set of problems occurs in the very formulation of utilitarianism: “The greatest happiness for the greatest number.” Notice that we have two “greatest” things in this formula: “happiness” and “number.” Whenever we have two variables, we invite problems of determining which of the variables to rank first when they seem to conflict.

The Comparative Consequences Objection

Another crucial problem with utilitarianism is that it seems to require a superhuman ability to look into the future and survey a mind-boggling array of consequences of actions. Of course, we normally do not know the long-term consequences of our actions because life is too complex and the consequences go on into the indefinite future.

The Consistency Objection to Rule-Utilitarianism

An often-debated question about rule-utilitarianism is whether, when pushed to its logical limits, it must either become a deontological system or transform itself into act-utilitarianism. As such, it is an inconsistent theory that offers no truly independent standard for making moral judgments. Briefly, the argument goes like this: Imagine that following the set of general rules of a rule-utilitarian system yields 100 hedons (positive utility units). We could always find a case where breaking the general rule would

result in additional hedons without decreasing the sum of the whole. So, for example, we could imagine a situation in which breaking the general rule "Never lie" to spare someone's feelings would create more utility (for example, 102 hedons) than keeping the rule would. It would seem that we could always improve on any version of rule-utilitarianism by breaking the set of rules whenever we judge that by doing so we could produce even more utility than by following the set.

The No-Rest Objection

According to utilitarianism, one should always do that act that promises to promote the most utility. But there is usually an infinite set of possible acts to choose from, and even if I can be excused from considering all of them, I can be fairly sure that there is often a preferable act that I could be doing. For example, when I am about to go to the cinema with a friend, I should ask myself if helping the homeless in my community wouldn't promote more utility. When I am about to go to sleep, I should ask myself whether I could at that moment be doing something to help save the ozone layer. And, why not simply give all my assets (beyond what is absolutely necessary to keep me alive) to the poor to promote utility? Following utilitarianism, I should get little or no rest, and, certainly, I have no right to enjoy life when by sacrificing I can make others happier. Peter

The Publicity Objection

It is usually thought that moral principles must be known to all so that all may freely obey the principles. But utilitarians usually hesitate to recommend that everyone act as a utilitarian, especially an act-utilitarian, because it takes a great deal of deliberation to work out the likely consequences of alternative courses of action. It would be better if most

people acted simply as deontologists. Thus, utilitarianism seems to contradict our requirement of publicity.

The Relativism Objection

Sometimes people accuse rule-utilitarianism of being relativistic because it seems to endorse different rules in different societies. In one society, it may uphold polygamy, whereas in our society it defends monogamy. In a desert society, it upholds a rule "Don't waste water," whereas in a community where water is plentiful no such rule exists. But this is not really conventional relativism because the rule is not made valid by the community's choosing it but by the actual situation.

Criticism of the Ends Justifying Immoral Means

Chief among the criticisms of utilitarianism is that utilitarian ends might justify immoral means. There are many dastardly things that we can do in the name of maximizing general happiness: deceit, torture, slavery, even killing off ethnic minorities. As long as the larger populace benefits, these actions might be justified. The general problem can be laid out in this argument:

(1) If a moral theory justifies actions that we universally deem impermissible, then that moral theory must be rejected.
(2) Utilitarianism justifies actions that we universally deem impermissible.
(3) Therefore, utilitarianism must be rejected.

The Lying Objection

William D. Ross has argued that utilitarianism is to be rejected because it leads to the counterintuitive endorsement of lying when it serves the greater good. Consider two acts, A and B, that will both result in 100 hedons (units of pleasure of utility). The only difference is that A involves

telling a lie and B involves telling the truth. The utilitarian must maintain that the two acts are of equal value. But this seems implausible; truth seems to be an intrinsically good thing.

What is so important about truth telling or so bad about lying? If it turned out that lying really promoted human welfare, we'd have to accept it. But that's not likely. Our happiness is tied up with a need for reliable information (that is, truth) on how to achieve our ends, so truthfulness will be a member of the rule-utility's set. But where lying will clearly promote utility without undermining the general adherence to the rule, we simply ought to lie. Don't we already accept lying to a gangster or telling white lies to spare people's feelings?

The Justice Objection

The utilitarian response was that we should reconsider whether truth telling and personal integrity are values that should never be compromised. The situation is intensified, though, when we consider standards of justice that most of us think should never be dispensed with. Let's look at two examples, each of which highlights a different aspect of justice.

First, imagine that a rape and murder is committed in a racially volatile community. As the sheriff of the town, you have spent a lifetime working for racial harmony. Now, just when your goal is being realized, this incident occurs. The crime is thought to be racially motivated, and a riot is about to break out that will very likely result in the death of several people and create long-lasting racial antagonism.

As a second illustration, imagine that you are a utilitarian physician who has five patients under your care. One needs a heart transplant, one need two lungs, one needs a liver, and the last two each need a kidney. Now into your office comes a healthy bachelor needing an immunization. You judge that he would make a perfect sacrifice for your five patients. Through a utility-

calculus, you determine that, without a doubt, you could do the most good by injecting the healthy man with a fatal drug and then using his organs to save your five other patients.

These careless views of justice offend us. The very fact that utilitarians even consider such actions—that they would misuse the legal system or the medical system to carry out their schemes—seems frightening.

Three-Step Action Formula:

Utilitarianism might be construed as offering a three-step action formula for action:

1. On the basis of what I know, I must project the consequences of each alternative option open to me (e.g., taking different kinds of actions or taking no action).
2. Calculate how much happiness, or balance of happiness over unhappiness, is likely to be produced by anticipated consequences of each action or none.
3. Select that action which, on balance, will produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people affected

Generally, utilitarianism is a moral theory which takes into account how the consequences of an act will affect all the parties involved. Moral rightness depends on the consequences for all affected people or sentient beings. The fundamental principle of utilitarianism is the principle of utility:

The principle of utility

- ✓ The morally right action is the one that produces the best overall consequences with regard to the utility or welfare of all the affected parties.
- ✓ Jeremy Bentham's slogan: The right act or policy is the one that causes 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' – that is,

maximize the total utility or welfare of the majority of all the affected parties.

1.1.3.5. Altruism

In altruism an action is right if the consequences of that action are favorable to all except the actor. Butler argued that we have an inherent psychological capacity to show benevolence to others. This view is called **psychological altruism** and maintains that at least some of our actions are motivated by instinctive benevolence.

Psychological altruism holds that all human action is necessarily other centered and other motivated. A parallel analysis of psychological altruism results in opposing conclusions to psychological egoism, and again arguably the theory is just as closed as psychological egoism

Deontological Ethics (Non- Consequentiality)

Deontology: What duty asks of us?

What makes a 'right' act right? The utilitarian or consequentialist answer to this question is that it is the good outcome of an act which makes it right. Moral rightness or wrongness is calculated by determining the extent to which the action promotes values such as pleasure, well-being, happiness, etc. To this extent, the end justifies the means. In many respects, deontological moral theory is diametrically the opposite of utilitarianism.

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.

Performance of One's own Duty

The 17th century German philosopher Samuel Pufendorf, who classified dozens of duties under three headings: duties to God, duties to oneself and duties to others!

Concerning our duties towards God, he argued that there are two kinds: (1) a theoretical duty to know the existence and nature of God, and (2) a practical duty to both inwardly and outwardly worship God.

Concerning our duties towards oneself; these are also of two sorts: (1) duties of the soul, which involve developing one's skills and talents, and (2) duties of the body, which involve not harming our bodies, as we might through gluttony or drunkenness, and not killing oneself.

Concerning our duties towards others; Pufendorf divides these between absolute duties, which are universally binding on people, and conditional duties, which are the result of contracts between people.

Absolute duties are of three sorts: (1) avoid wronging others; (2) treat people as equals, and (3) promote the good of others.

Conditional duties involve various types of agreements, the principal one of which is the duty is to keep one's promises.

1.1.3.6. The Divine Command Theory

According to one view, called the divine command theory (DCT), ethical principles are simply the commands of God. They derive their validity from God's commanding them, and they mean "commanded by God." Without God, there would be no universally valid morality. We can analyze the DCT into three separate theses:

1. Morality (that is, rightness and wrongness) originates with God.

2. Moral rightness simply means “willed by God,” and moral wrongness means “being against the will of God.”
3. Because morality essentially is based on divine will, not on independently existing reasons for action, no further reasons for action are necessary.

There are modified versions of the DCT that drop or qualify one or more of these three theses, but the strongest form includes all three assertions. We can characterize that position thusly: Necessarily, for any person S and for all acts A, if A is forbidden (required) of S, then God commands that not-A (A) for S. Likewise, if A is permitted for S, then God has commanded neither A nor not-A for S. Bringing out the implications of this, we may list four propositions:

1. Act A is wrong if and only if it is contrary to the command of God.
2. Act A is right (required) if and only if it is commanded by God.
3. Act A is morally permissible if and only if it is permitted by the command of God.
4. If there is no God, then nothing is ethically wrong, required, or permitted.

We can summarize the DCT this way: Morality not only originates with God, but moral rightness simply means “willed by God” and moral wrongness means “being against the will of God”. That is, an act is right in virtue of being permitted by the will of God, and an act is wrong in virtue of being against the will of God. Because morality essentially is based on divine will, not on independently existing reasons for action, no further reasons for action are necessary. So we may ask, “If God doesn’t exist, everything is permissible?” If so, nothing is forbidden or required. Without God, we have moral nihilism. If there is no God, then nothing is ethically wrong, required, or permitted.

Problems with the Divine Command Theory

There are two problems with the DCT that need to be faced by those who hold it.

1. DCT would seem to make the attribution of “goodness” to God redundant. When we say “God is good,” we think we are ascribing a property to God; but if good simply means “what God commands or wills,” then we are not attributing any property to God. Our statement “God is good” merely means “God does whatever he wills to do” or “God practices what he preaches,” and the statement “God commands us to do what is good” merely is the logically empty statement “God commands us to do what God commands us to do.”
2. DCT is that it seems to make morality into some-thing arbitrary. If God’s decree is the sole arbiter of right and wrong, it would seem to be logically possible for such heinous acts as rape, killing of the innocent for the fun of it, and gratuitous cruelty to become morally good actions—if God suddenly decided to command us to do these things

1.1.3.7. Rights Theory

A second duty-based approach to ethics is ***rights theory***. Most generally, a "right" is a justified claim against another person's behavior - such as my right to not be harmed by you. Rights and duties are related in such a way that the rights of one person imply the duties of another person.. This is called the correlativity of rights and duties.

The most influential early account of rights theory is that of 17th century British philosopher John Locke, who argued that the laws of nature mandate that we should not harm anyone's life, health, liberty or possessions**.** For Locke, these are our natural rights, given to us by God. There are four features traditionally associated with moral rights.

- ✓ First, rights are *natural* insofar as they are not invented or created by governments.

- ✓ Second, they are *universal* insofar as they do not change from country to country.
- ✓ Third, they are *equal* in the sense that rights are the same for all people, irrespective of gender, race, or handicap.
- ✓ Fourth, they are *inalienable* which means that I cannot hand over my rights to another person, such as by selling myself into slavery.

1.1.3.8. Kant's Categorical Imperative

The name of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is identified with the moral theory known as deontology. Kant was adamantly opposed to the idea that the outcome of an action could determine its moral worth. For deontologists, it is not consequences which determine the rightness or wrongness of an act, but, rather, the intention of the person who carries out the act. The emphasis is on the correctness of the action, regardless of the possible benefits or harm it might produce. Deontologists maintain that there are some moral obligations which are absolutely binding, no matter what consequences are produced.

The Categorical Imperative

A Kant's duty-based theory is emphasizes a single principle of duty. Kant agreed that we have moral duties to oneself and others, such as developing one's talents, and keeping our promises to others. However, Kant argued that there is a more foundational principle of duty that encompasses our particular duties. It is a single, self-evident principle of reason that he calls the "categorical imperative."

- A ***categorical imperative,*** he argued, is fundamentally different from *hypothetical imperatives* that hinge on some personal desire that we have. For example, "If you want to get a good job, then you ought to go to college." By contrast, a categorical imperative simply mandates an

action, irrespective of one's personal desires, such as "You ought to do X."

To understand Kant's thought, note the emphasis he places on the idea of ***good intension***. Kant believed that *nothing was good in itself except a* "***good will***." Intelligence, judgment and all other facets of the human personality are perhaps good and desirable, but only if the will that makes use of them is good. By will, Kant means *the uniquely human capacity to act according to the concepts behind laws*, that is, principles presumably operating in nature. A good will, therefore, acts in accordance with nature's laws. For Kant a will could be good without qualification only if it always had in view one principle: *whether the maxim of its action could become a universal law*.

This standard is such a crucial part of Kant's theory of ethics. Kant believed, then, that there was just one command or imperative that was categorical, that is, one that presented an action as necessary of itself, without regard to any other end. He believed that from this one categorical imperative, this universal command, all commands of duty could be derived. Kant's categorical imperative states that *we should act in such a way that the maxim or general rule governing our action could be a universal law.*

Consider his example of making a promise that you are willing to break if it suits your purposes. Your maxim can be expressed thus: this maxim could not be universally acted up on, because it involves a contradiction of wills. On the same hand, you are willing to make promises and honor them; on the other hand, you are willing to beak those promises. Notice that Kant is not a utilitarian: he is not arguing that the consequences of a universal law condoning promise breaking would be bad and the rule is bad. Instead he is claiming that ***the rule is self-contradictory***; the institution of promise making would dissolve if such a maxim were universalized. His appeal is to ***logical consistency***, not to consequences.

Kant gives at least ***three versions or formulations*** of the categorical imperative. His categorical imperative is a deontological ethical theory, which means ***it is based on the idea that there are certain objective ethical rules in the world.*** Kant's version is possibly the most well-known, and relies heavily on his idea that ***all people are fundamentally capable of reasoning in the same manner and on the same level.*** Kantianism focuses more on intent and action in itself, as opposed to the consequentialist focus of utilitarianism.

- **Hypothetical imperatives** tell us which *means* best achieve our ends. They do not, however, tell us which ends we should choose. The typical dichotomy in choosing ends is between ends that are "right" (e.g., helping someone) and those that are "good" (e.g., enriching oneself). Kant considered the "right" superior to the "good"; to him, the "good" was morally irrelevant. In Kant's view, a person cannot decide whether conduct is "right," or moral, through empirical means. Such judgments must be reached *a priori*, using pure practical reason.

Reason, separate from all empirical experience, can determine the principle according to which all ends can be determined as moral. It is this fundamental principle of moral reason that is known as the categorical imperative. ***Pure practical reason*** in the process of determining it dictates what ought to be done without reference to empirical contingent factors. Moral questions are determined independent of reference to the particular subject posing them. It is because morality is determined by pure practical reason rather than particular empirical or sensuous factors that morality is universally valid. This ***moral universalism*** has come to be seen as the distinctive aspect of Kant's moral philosophy and has had wide social impact in the legal and political concepts of *human rights* and *equality*.

Kant's theory is hinged by his beliefs on ***autonomy*** *and his formulation of categorical imperatives.* He believed that, unless a person freely and

willingly makes a choice, their action has no meaning (and certainly no moral value). ***Autonomy*** allows us to be self-creating when it comes to our values and morality. Autonomy is one's own beliefs, independence, and government: acting without regard for anyone else. Conversely, ***heteronomy*** is acting under the influence of someone else and allows for an individual to consistently place blame outside of self.

Kant believed that each individual is rational and capable of making free choices; thereby relies on autonomous thinking. Kant thought that every man, if using reason when looking at moral dilemmas, would agree with what he called the Categorical Imperative (the CI). So, while the law is objective, Kant thought that all people could come to understand and agree with it after autonomous reflection. So how, exactly, does the CI tell us how to act? How does it work? The decision-making procedure of the theory is actually quite straight forward, and one that many people should be able to grasp intuitively (which is exactly what Kant wanted to achieve).

Kant thought that when a moral action is being considered, one should ask the following questions; what would happen if everyone in the world did this, all the time? And would that be the kind of world I'd like to live in? We can look at the text-book example to illustrate this; murder. So we want to know whether murder is an ethically justifiable action. Well, what would happen if everyone in the entire world started killing people? Absolute chaos would ensue. It's not the sort of world many people would like to live in. Therefore, according to the categorical imperative, murder is wrong. A core aspect of this theory is the concept of ***intent***. To Kant, it was the intent that mattered to him.

Let's look at an example. Imagine you're a murderer walking down the street, and you see a defenseless young man in front of you. It's dark, and there's no one else around. You have a knife in your pocket. It would be easy for you to kill him. So, you consider. Maybe, in the end, you choose to

let the man live –not because you were worried about acting immorally, but because you didn’t want to take the risk of him screaming and drawing the attention of the police (or something to that effect). In the end, you *do not kill.*

According to Kant, you haven’t acted ethically. Your action does not make you a better person. This is because when you acted (or, rather, chose not to act), you weren’t considering the action in terms of its morality. You didn’t make a *moral choice – you merely acted out of self-preservation*. However, if you were to choose not to kill the man because you suddenly realized that it was wrong to kill and didn’t want to act unethically, then you would have acted morally, and would be a better person for it.

Kant concludes that a moral proposition that is true must be one that is not tied to any particular conditions, including the identity of the person making the moral deliberation. A moral maxim must imply *absolute necessity*, which is to say that it must be disconnected from the particular physical details surrounding the proposition, and could be applied to any rational being. This leads to the first formulation of the categorical imperative:

A. The Principle of Universality

The **first maxim** states that we should choose our 'codes of conduct' only if they serve perfect / imperfect duty and are good for all. "*Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction.*" Kant divides the duties imposed by this formulation into two subsets: perfect and imperfect duty. ***Perfect duties*** are blameworthy if not met and are the basic requirements for a human being. According to his reasoning, we first have a ***perfect duty*** not to act by maxims that result in logical contradictions when we attempt to universalize them.

The moral proposition *A*: "It is permissible to steal" would result in a contradiction upon universalisation. The notion of stealing presupposes the existence of property, but were *A* universalized, then there could be no property, and so the proposition has logically negated itself. An example of perfect duty is the avoidance of suicide. Suicide is the end of life and Kant believed that "self-love impels the improvement of life;" if a person commits suicide, improvement of life ceases.

Imperfect duties are those that do not achieve blame, rather they receive praise if completed; they are circumstantial duties such as cultivating talent. They are still based on pure reason, but which allow for desires in how they are carried out in practice. Because these depend somewhat on the subjective preferences of humankind, this duty is not as strong as a perfect duty, but it is still morally binding. As such, unlike perfect duties, you do not attract blame should you not complete an imperfect duty but you shall receive praise for it should you complete it, as you have gone beyond the basic duties and taken duty upon yourself. Imperfect duties are circumstantial, meaning simply that you could not reasonably exist in a constant state of performing that duty. This is what truly differentiates between perfect and imperfect duties, because imperfect duties are those duties that are never truly completed. Examples of imperfect duties are perfecting the ability to write and produce works.

B. The Principle of Humanity as an End, Never as Merely a Means

The **second maxim** states that we should not use humanity of ourselves or others as a means to an end. **“**Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.” Every rational action must set before itself not only a principle, but also an end. Most ends are of a subjective kind, because they need only be pursued if they are in line with some particular hypothetical imperative that a person may choose

to adopt. For an end to be objective, it would be necessary that we categorically pursue it. This principle has received more widespread approval than any other part of Kant’s moral philosophy. People, as rational beings, are ends in themselves and should never be used merely as means to other ends. We may use physical things as means, but when we use people simply as means, as in slavery, prostitution, or commercial exploitation, we degrade them and violate their innermost beings as people.

The categorical imperative also regulates the morality of actions that affect us individually. For example, **Suicide** would be wrong since I would be treating my life as a means to the alleviation of my misery. The free will is the source of all rational action. But to treat it as a subjective end is to deny the possibility of freedom in general. Because the autonomous will is the one and only source of moral action, it would contradict the first formulation to claim that a person is merely a means to some other end, rather than always an end in themselves. On this basis, Kant derives second formulation of the categorical imperative from the first. By combining this formulation with the first, we learn that a person has ***perfect duty*** not to use the humanity of themselves or others merely as a means to some other end. An example of the second maxim would be that of slavery. Although it can be realized that a slave owner has the right to own property, they do not have the right to own a person. The right to not own a person stems from the ideals of autonomy and free will. A person who is owned does not have free will and therefore is not autonomous and cannot be held to duty; the concept of slavery contradicts the first maxim and *Kant's theory does not allow for contradictions of the maxims.*

We should always treat people with dignity, and never use them as mere instruments. For Kant, we treat people as an end whenever our actions toward someone reflect the inherent value of that person. Donating to charity, for example, is morally correct since this acknowledges the inherent value of the recipient. By contrast, we treat someone as a means to

an end whenever we treat that person as a tool to achieve something else. It is wrong, for example, to steal my neighbor's car since I would be treating her as a means to my own happiness.

C. The Principle of Autonomy

The ***third maxim*** states that we should consider ourselves to be members in the universal realm of ends. Therefore, ***every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends***.

Because a truly autonomous will would not be subjugated to any interest, it would only be subject to those laws it makes for itself - but it must also regard those laws as if they would be bound to others, or they would not be universalizable, and hence they would not be laws of conduct at all. Thus Kant presents the notion of the hypothetical *Kingdom of Ends* of which he suggests all people should consider themselves both means and ends. We should consider our actions to be of consequence to everyone else in that our actions affect not only ourselves but that of others. Everything we do should not only be of benefit to ourselves, but benefit each other universally.

"Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means." We ought to act only by maxims that would harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends. We have perfect duty not to act by maxims that create incoherent or impossible states of natural affairs when we attempt to universalize them, and we have imperfect duty not to act by maxims that lead to unstable or greatly undesirable states of affairs.

The main problem with the categorical imperative is its rigidity. The famous example that illustrates this is that of a crazed axe-murderer coming to your front door and asking you where your children are. You could lie – many

would say you should lie – but imagine if everyone in the entire world lied all the time. That would not be a nice place to live in, so the categorical imperative says you can't lie. You have to tell the axe-murderer the truth, so he can go and kill your children. Kant was asked about this personally, and he said that this was indeed the case. It would be immoral to lie to the man. He did, however, say that you could also choose to lock your door and call the police. Here's another example – you're in a room with a man who's holding a gun to your mother's head. You know he'll shoot her any second. Right next to you, there's a button. If you press the button, the man will fall through a trap door and land in a spike pit, dying instantly. Your mother will be saved.

According to the categorical imperative, this would be the wrong thing to do. You can't press the button. But if you don't, your mother will die. It's in situations like this that strict ethical systems with specific decision procedures tend to fall apart. Morality is simply too complex, too full of exceptions for these theories to ever fully work.

1.1.3.9. Ross's Prima Facie Duties or Moral Guidelines

A ***fourth*** and more recent duty-based theory is that by British philosopher W.D. Ross, which emphasizes *prima facie* duties. Sir William David Ross (15 April 1877 – 5 May 1971), usually cited as W. D. Ross, was a Scottish philosopher, known for work in ethics. The term *prima facie* means "at a first sight" or "on the surface." By prima facie duties, Ross means duties that dictate what we should do when other moral factors are not considered. Stated another way, prima facie duties are duties that generally obligate us; that is, they ordinarily impose a moral obligation but may not in a particular case because of circumstances. An **actual duty** is the action that one ought to perform after considering and weighing all the prima facie duties involved.

According to W. D. Ross (1877-1971), there are several *prima facie duties* that we can use to determine ***what, concretely, we ought to do***. A prima facie duty is a duty that is binding (obligatory) other things equal, that is, unless it is overridden or trumped by another duty or duties. Another way of putting it is that where there is a prima facie duty to do something, there is at least a fairly strong presumption in favor of doing it. An example of a prima facie duty is the duty to keep promises. ***Unless stronger moral considerations override, one ought to keep a promise made***. By contrast with prima facie duties, our ***actual or concrete duty*** is the duty we should perform in the particular situation of choice. Whatever one's actual duty is, one is morally bound to perform it. Prima facie duties relate to actual duties as reasons do to conclusions of reasoning.

The term "duty" in "prima facie duty" is slightly misleading. The prima facie duties are understood as ***guidelines***, not rules without exception. If an action does not correspond to a specific guideline, one is not necessarily violating a rule that one ought to follow. However, not following the rule one ought to follow in a particular case is failing to do one's (actual) duty. In such cases it makes sense to talk about violating a rule. The rule might be the same in words as a prima facie duty (minus the phrase "unless other moral considerations override"), but it would no longer be merely a guideline because it describes what one concretely should do.

Like his 17th and 18th century counterparts, Ross argues that our duties are “part of the fundamental nature of the universe.” However, Ross’s list the following categories of prima facie duties is much shorter, which he believes reflects our actual moral convictions:

- ***Duties of Fidelity***: the duty to keep promises and the obligation not to lie. Duties of fidelity are duties to keep one’s promises and contracts and not to engage in deception.

- ***Duties of Reparation*:** This is a duty to make up for the injuries one has done to others. Ross describes this duty as "resting on a previous wrongful act". It is the duty to compensate others when we harm them. If, for example, I damage something that belongs to someone else, I have an obligation to make restitution.
- ***Duties of Gratitude*:** the duty to thank those who help us. Suppose, for example, an especially good friend is suddenly in need of assistance, I am duty bound to do all I can help this individual, who in the past had acted so selflessly toward me.
- ***Duties of Justice***: The duty of justice requires that one act in such a way that one distributes benefits and burdens fairly. Ross himself emphasizes the negative aspect of this duty: he says that this type of duty "rests on the fact or possibility of a distribution of pleasure or happiness (or the means thereto) that is not in accord with the merit of the persons concerned; in such cases there arises a duty to upset or prevent such a distribution". Thus the duty of justice includes the duty, insofar as possible, to prevent an unjust distribution of benefits or burdens.
- ***Duties of Beneficence***: the duty to improve the conditions of others. The duty to do good to others: to foster their health, security, wisdom, moral goodness, or happiness. This duty, says Ross, "rests upon the fact that there are other beings in the world whose condition we can make better in respect of virtue, or of intelligence, or of pleasure."
- ***Duties of Self-improvement***: The duty of self-improvement is to act so as to promote one's own good, i.e., one's own health, security, wisdom, moral goodness, virtue, intelligence and happiness.
- ***Duties of Non-maleficence*:** The duty of non-injury (also known as non-maleficence) is the duty not to harm others physically or psychologically: to avoid harming their health, security, intelligence, character, or happiness. We are obliged to avoid hurting others physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Jacques Thiroux (2001) claims that Ross' duty of non-injury includes a duty to prevent injury to others. This seems to be wrong regarding Ross, but it might be reasonable to add such a prima facie duty to the list. Non-injury in Ross' strict sense is distinct from the prevention of harm to others. Non-injury instructs us generally to avoid intentionally, negligently, or ignorantly (when ignorance is avoidable) harming others. Harm-prevention instructs us generally to make a real effort to prevent harm to others from causes other than ourselves.

In summary, Ross presents seven categories of prima facie duties, although there may be more categories. However, he does insist that we acknowledge and willingly accept the seven categories without argument. His appeal for their acceptance does not rely primarily on reason and argument but on *intuition*. When faced with a situation that presents conflicting prima facie duties, Ross tells us, the more obligatory, our actual duty. The actual duty has the greatest amount of prima facie rightness over wrongness.

1.1.4. Virtue Ethics

Virtue Ethics: Challenging the adequacy of rule-based theories

“Virtue ethics” is a technical term in contemporary Western analytical moral philosophy, used to distinguish a normative ethical theory focused on the virtues, or moral character, from others such as deontology (or contractarianism) and consequentialism. Imagine a case in which it is agreed by every sort of theorist that I should, say, help someone in need. A deontologist will emphasize the fact that in offering help, I will be acting in accordance with a moral rule or principle such as “Do unto others as you would be done by”; a consequentialist will point out that the consequences of helping will maximize well-being; and a virtue ethicist will emphasize the fact that providing help would be charitable or benevolent – charity and benevolence being virtues.

1.1.4.1. Aristotle's Ethics

The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, (384-322 B.C.) first wrote a detailed discussion of virtue morality in the Nichomachean Ethics. 'Virtus' he understood as strength. Correspondingly, specific virtues are seen as strengths of character. But, many years after Aristotle's death, virtue theory came to be over-shadowed by the development of utilitarianism and deontology.

In the past fifty years, however, virtue theory has resurfaced as a major moral theory. But why is that so? Virtue ethics has been restated and reinvigorated in the years since 1958 by philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre and Elizabeth Anscombe. They and many others became disillusioned with the promises of mainstream theories. They argue that how we ought to live could be much more adequately answered by a virtue-based theory than in terms of calculating consequences or obeying rules.

With respect to the good, right, happiness, the good is not a disposition. The good involves a teleological system that involves actions.

A. Good is that which all things aim. Something is good if it performs its proper function. *E.g.*, a good coffee cup or a good red oak.
    - A right action is that which is conducive to the good, and different goods correspond to the differing sciences and arts.
    - "The god" or best good is that which is desired for its own sake and for the sake which we desire all other ends or goods. For human beings, ***eudaemonia*** is activity of the soul in accordance with *arete* (excellence, virtue, or what it's good for). *Eudaemonia* is living well and doing well in the affairs of the world.

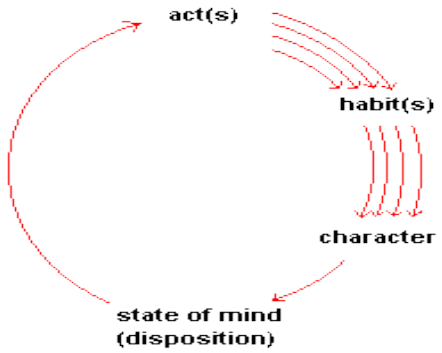
B. The good of human beings cannot be answered with the exactitude of a mathematical problem since mathematics starts with general principles and argues to conclusions.
        - Ethics starts with actual moral judgments before the formulation of general principles.

- Aristotle presupposes natural tendencies in people.

C. Aristotle distinguishes between happiness (*eudaemonia*) and moral virtue:
   - Moral virtue is not the end of life for it can go with inactivity, misery, and unhappiness
   - Happiness, the end of life, that to which all aims, is activity in accordance with reason (reason is the *arete* or peculiar excellence of persons).
     a. Happiness is an activity involving both moral and intellectual *arete*.
     b. Some external goods are necessary in order to exercise that activity.

The Good Character

A. People have a natural capacity for good character, and it is developed through practice. The capacity does not come first--it's developed



through practice.
   - The sequence of human behavior raises the question of which is preeminent--acts or dispositions. Their interaction is broken by Aristotle's distinction between acts which create good dispositions and acts which flow from the good disposition once it has been created.
   - *Arete* is a disposition developed out of a capacity by the proper exercise of that capacity.

- Habits are developed through acting; a person's character is the structure of habits and is formed by what we do.

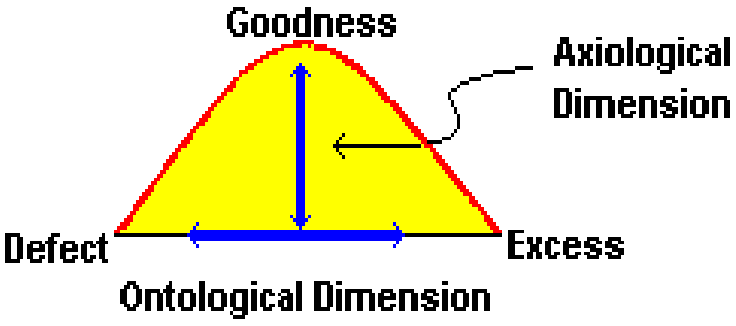
B. Virtue, *arete*, or excellence is defined as a mean between two extremes of excess and defect in regard to a feeling or action as the practically wise person would determine it. The mean cannot be calculated *a priori*.
   - The mean is relative to the individual and circumstances. For example, consider the following traits:

Aristotelian Virtues And Vices Sphere Of Action	**Vice Of Deficiency**	**Mean Or Virtue**	**Vice Of Excess**
Fear	Cowardice	courage	foolhardiness
Pleasure and Pain	insensibility	temperance	self-indulgence
Acquisition (minor)	tight wad	liberality	spendthrift or prodigality
Acquisition (major)	undue humility	pride or proper ambition	undue vanity
Anger	unirascibility	patience or good temper	hotheadedness
Self-Expression	Self-deprecating	truthfulness	boastfulness
Conversation	boorishness	wittiness	buffoonery
Social Conduct	cantankerous	friendliness	obsequiousness
Exhibition	shamelessness	modesty	shyness
Indignation	spitefulness	righteous	envy

		indignation	

- The level of courage necessary is different for a philosophy teacher, a commando, and a systems programmer.

- ***Phronesis*** or practical wisdom is the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances. Notice, especially, Aristotle's theory does not imply ethical relativism because there are appropriate standards.
- In the ontological dimension, virtue is a mean; in the axiological dimension, it is an extreme or excellence. Martin Luther King, Jr. relates his struggle to understand this difference in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" when he wrote, "You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme... But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love...? Was not Amos an extremist for justice...? Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel...? Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.''
- Some presumptively virtuous behaviors can be an extreme as when, for example, the medieval philosopher Peter Abélard explains, No long time thereafter I was smitten with a grievous illness, brought upon me by my immoderate zeal for study. (Peter Abélard, *Historia Calamitatum* trans. Ralph Adams Cram (St. Paul, MN: Thomas A. Boyd, 1922), 4.)
- In the ontological dimension, virtue is a mean; in the axiological dimension, it is an extreme or excellence. *E.g.*, Hartmann's Diagram:



- Pleasure and pain are powerful determinants of our actions.

III. **Pleasure** is the natural accompaniment of unimpeded activity. Pleasure, as such, is neither good nor bad.

A. Even so, pleasure is something positive and its effect is to perfect the exercise of activity. Everything from playing chess to making love is improved with skill.

B. Pleasure cannot be directly sought--it is the side-product of activity. It is only an element of happiness.

C. The good person, the one who has attained *eudaemonia*, is the standard as to what is truly pleasant or unpleasant.

IV. **Friendship**: a person's relationship to a friend is the same as the relation to oneself. The friend can be thought of as a second self.

A. In friendship a person loves himself (egoism) not as one seeks money for himself, but as he gives his money away to receive honor.

B. The kinds of friendship:

- Utility
- Pleasure
- The Good--endures as long as both retain their character.

V. **The Contemplative Faculty**--the exercise of perfect happiness in intellectual or philosophic activity.

A. Reason is the highest faculty of human beings. We can engage in it longer than other activities.

B. Philosophy is loved as an end-in-itself, and so *eudaemonia* implies leisure and self-sufficiency as an environment for contemplation.

Aristotle on Pleasure

A summary of Aristotle's ethics clarifies several important distinction between happiness and pleasure.

I. *Eudaimonia*: the state of personal wellbeing, having self-worth; exhibiting a zest for life; radiating energy; achieving happiness, "good spirit," or self-presence.

II. Hence, happiness is activity of the soul in accordance with *areté* (excellence or virtue).
   A. *I.e.* Living well and doing well in the affairs of the world.
   B. Picture yourself at your best. Compare Maslow's self-actualizing person or Jung's individuation of a person with Aristotle's description of *eudaimonia.*

III. Good is that to which all thing aim; *i.e.*, the good is that which performs its proper function.
   A. What constitutes a good wrench or a good coffee cup? The peculiar *areté* of excellence is established by its purpose. The peculiar excellence is teleological.
   B. What constitutes a good person?"
   1) Activity of the soul in accordance with reason (that capacity which is unique to us as persons).
   2) This activity is both **moral** (doing the right thing at the right time) and **intellectual** *areté* (practical wisdom or *phronesis*).
   3) Aristotle notes that some external goods are necessary for the exercise of that activity.

IV. *Moral Virtue* is not the end of life, for it can go with inactivity, misery, and unhappiness.

V. What is good for a person cannot be answered with the exactitude of mathematics.

A. Ethics attempts to formulate general principles whose application is dependent upon the circumstances at hand (*i.e.,* initial conditions). (Note that Aristotle's theory does not imply ethical relativism)

B. The doctrine of the mean is not a doctrine of relativism but doctrine applied to specific circumstances. *E.g.,* what and how much one eats differs for a weight-lifter and a ballerina--even so, proper diet has guidelines and standards which apply differently according to different initial conditions.

VI. Pleasure, itself, is a side-product of activity; pleasure results from activity without hindrance.

1) As Aristotle expresses it, pleasure is the natural accompaniment of unimpeded activity.
2) Pleasure, as such, is neither good nor bad, but is something positive because the effect of pleasure perfects the exercise of that activity.
3) Even so, Aristotle emphasizes that pleasure is not to be sought for its own sake. (*Cf.*, the hedonistic paradox.)

1.2. Non-Normative Ethics/Meta-ethics

1.2.1. What is Meta-ethics?

Suppose I am debating with a friend the question whether or not we ought to give to famine relief, whether or not we are morally obliged to give to famine relief. The sorts of questions philosophers raise about this kind of debate fall roughly into two groups. First, there are *first order* questions about which party in the debate, if any, is right, and why. Then, there are *second order* questions about what the parties in the debate are doing when they engage in it. Roughly, the first order questions are the province of *normative ethics,* and the second order questions are the province of *metaethics.* As one recent writer puts it:

In metaethics, we are concerned not with questions which are the province of normative ethics like 'Should I give to famine relief?' or 'Should I return the wallet I found in the street?' but with questions about questions like these.

It is important to be clear that in normative ethics we do not just look for an answer to the question 'Should we give to famine relief?' we also look for some insight into *why* the right answer is right. It is in their answers to this latter sort of 'why?' question that the classic theories in normative ethics disagree. Examples of such theories include:

- ***act-utilitarianism*** (one ought to give to famine relief because that particular action, of those possible, contributes most to the greater happiness of the greatest number); rule-utilitarianism (one ought to give to famine relief because giving to famine relief is prescribed by a rule the general observance of which contributes most to the greater happiness of the greatest number); and
- **Kantianism** (one ought to give to famine relief because universal refusal to give to famine relief would generate some kind of inconsistency).

Normative ethics thus seeks to discover the general principles underlying moral practice, and in this way potentially impacts upon practical moral problems: different general principles may yield different verdicts in particular cases. Meta-ethics, rather, concerned with questions about the following:

(a) ***Meaning:*** what is the *semantic function* of moral discourse? Is the function of moral discourse to state *facts,* or does it have some other non-fact-stating role?

(b) ***Metaphysics****:* do moral facts (or properties) exist? If so, what are they like? Are they identical or reducible to some other type of fact (or property) or are they irreducible and *sui generis?*

(c) ***Epistemology* and *justification****:* is there such a thing as moral knowledge? How can we know whether our moral judgements are true or false? How can we ever justify our claims to moral knowledge?

(d) ***Phenomenology****:* how are moral qualities represented in the experience of an agent making a moral judgement? Do they appear to be 'out there' in the world?

(e) ***Moral psychology****:* what can we say about the motivational state of someone making a moral judgement? What sort of connection is there between making a moral judgement and being motivated to act as that judgement prescribes?

(f) ***Objectivity****:* can moral judgements really be correct or incorrect? Can we work towards finding out the moral truth?

Obviously, this list is not intended to be exhaustive, and the various questions are not all independent (for example, a positive answer to (f) looks, on the face of it, to presuppose that the function of moral discourse is to state facts). But it is worth noting that the list is much wider than many philosophers forty or fifty years ago would have thought. For example, one such philosopher writes:

[Metaethics] is not about what people ought to do. It is about what they are doing when they talk about what they ought to do.

The idea that metaethics is exclusively about language was no doubt due to the more general idea that philosophy as a whole has no function other than the study of ordinary language and that 'philosophical problems' only arise from the application of words out of the contexts in which they are ordinarily used. Fortunately, this 'ordinary language' conception of

philosophy has long since ceased to hold sway, and the list of metaethical concerns – in metaphysics, epistemology, phenomenology and moral psychology, as well as in semantics and the theory of meaning – bears this out. Positions in metaethics can be defined in terms of the answers they give to these sorts of question. Some examples of metaethical theories are moral realism, non-cognitivism, error-theory and moral anti-realism.

1.2.2. Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism

Consider a particular moral judgement, such as the judgement that murder is wrong. What sort of psychological state does this express? Some philosophers, called cognitivists, think that a moral judgement such as this expresses a belief. Beliefs can be true or false: they are truth-apt, or apt to be assessed in terms of truth and falsity. So cognitivists think that moral judgements are capable of being true or false. On the other hand, non-cognitivists think that moral judgements express non-cognitive states such as emotions or desires. Desires and emotions are not truth-apt. So moral judgements are not capable of being true or false. (Note that, although it may be true that I have a desire for a pint of beer and false that I have a desire to see Ethiopia win the World Cup, this does not imply that desires themselves can be true or false.)

1.2.2.1. Strong Cognitivism: Naturalism

A *strong cognitivist* theory is one which holds that moral judgements (a) are apt for evaluation in terms of truth and falsity, and (b) can be the upshot of cognitively accessing the facts which render them true. Strong cognitivist theories can be either *naturalist* or *non-naturalist.* According to a naturalist, a moral judgement is rendered true or false by a natural state of affairs, and it is this natural state of affairs to which a true moral judgement affords us access. But what is a natural state of affairs? G. E. Moore's characterization: *“By 'nature', then, I do mean and have meant that which is the subject matter of the natural sciences and also of psychology.”*

A natural property is a property which figures in one of the natural sciences or in psychology: examples might include the property of being conducive to the greatest happiness of the greatest number and the property of being conducive to the preservation of the human species. A natural state of affairs is simply a state of affairs that consists in the instantiation of a natural property.

Naturalist cognitivists hold that moral properties are identical to (or reducible to) natural properties. The Cornell realists (e.g. Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Boyd, and David Brink) think that moral properties are irreducible natural properties in their own right. Naturalist reductionists (e.g. Richard that moral properties are reducible to the other natural properties that are the subject matter of the natural sciences and psychology. Both the Cornell realists and the naturalist reductionists are moral realists: they think that there really are moral facts and moral properties, and that the existence of these moral facts and instantiation of these moral properties is constitutively independent of human opinion.

1.2.2.1.1. Strong Cognitivism: Non-Naturalism

Non-naturalists think that moral properties are not identical to or reducible to natural properties. They are irreducible and *sui generis.* We will look at two types of strong cognitivist non-naturalism: Moore's ethical non-naturalism, as developed in his *Principia Ethica* (first published in 1903), according to which the property of moral goodness is non-natural, simple, and unanalysable; and the contemporary version of non-naturalism that has been developed by John McDowell and David Wiggins (roughly from the 1970s to the present day). Again, both types of non-naturalist are moral realists: they think that there really are moral facts and moral properties, and that the existence of these moral facts and instantiation of these moral properties is constitutively independent of human opinion.

1.2.2.1.2. Strong Cognitivism without Moral Realism: Mackie's 'Error-Theory'

John Mackie has argued that although moral judgements are apt to be true or false, and that moral judgements, if true, would afford us cognitive access to moral facts, moral judgements are in fact always *false*. This is because there simply are no moral facts or properties in the world of the sort required to render our moral judgements true: we have no plausible epistemological account of how we could access such facts and properties, and, moreover, such properties and facts would be *metaphysically queer,* unlike anything else in the universe as we know it. A moral property would have to be such that the mere apprehension of it by a moral agent would be sufficient to motivate that agent to act. Mackie finds this idea utterly problematic. He concludes that there are no moral properties or moral facts, so that (positive, atomic) moral judgements are uniformly false: our moral thinking involves us in a radical *error.* Because Mackie denies that there are moral facts or properties, he is not a moral realist, but a *moral antirealist.*

1.2.2.1.3. Weak Cognitivism about Morals without Moral Realism: 'Best Opinion' Theories

A *weak cognitivist* theory is one which holds that moral judgements

(a) are apt for evaluation in terms of truth and falsity, but
(b) cannot be the upshot of cognitive access to moral properties and states of affairs.

Weak cognitivism thus agrees with strong cognitivism on (a), but disagrees on (b). An example of a weak cognitivist theory would be one which held that our best judgements about morals *determine* the extensions of moral predicates, rather than being based upon some faculty which *tracks, detects* or *cognitively accesses* facts about the instantiation of moral properties.

(The extension of a predicate is the class of things, events or objects to which that predicate may correctly be applied.)

Moral judgements are thus capable of being true or false, even though they are not based on a faculty with a tracking, accessing or detecting role - in other words, even though true moral judgements are not the upshot of cognitive access to moral states of affairs. This view thus rejects moral realism, not by denying the existence of moral facts (like the error-theory), but by denying that those facts are constitutively independent of human opinion.

1.2.3. Non-Cognitivism

Non-cognitivists deny that moral judgements are even apt to be true or false. Non-cognitivists thus disagree with both weak and strong cognitivism. We shall look at a number of arguments which the non-cognitivist uses against cognitivism. An example of such an argument is the *argument from moral psychology.*

Suppose that moral judgements can express beliefs, as the cognitivist claims. Being motivated to do something or to pursue a course of action is always a matter of having a belief and a desire. For example, I am motivated to reach for the fridge because I believe that it contains water and I have a desire for water. But it is an internal and necessary fact about an agent that, if she sincerely judges that X is good, she is motivated to pursue the course of action X. So if a moral judgement expressed a belief, it would have to be a belief which sustained an internal and necessary connection to a desire: it would have to be a necessary truth that an agent who possessed the belief would *inter alia* possess the desire. But no belief is necessarily connected to a desire because, as Hume claimed, 'beliefs and desires are distinct existences', and it is impossible to have a necessary connection between distinct existences. So it cannot be the case that moral

judgements express beliefs. So moral judgements are not truth-apt. If moral judgements cannot express beliefs, ***what do they express?***

We shall look at three versions of non-cognitivism which give different answers to this question:

- ✓ J. Ayer's ***emotivism*** (1936), according to which moral judgements express emotions, or sentiments of approval or disapproval;
- ✓ Simon Blackburn's ***quasi-realism*** (1984), according to which moral judgements express our dispositions to form sentiments of approval or disapproval; and
- ✓ Allan Gibbard's ***norm-expressivism*** (1990), according to which our moral judgements express our acceptance of norms.

Perhaps the main challenge to non-cognitivism is what is called the *Frege - Geach* problem. According to emotivism, for example, judging that murder is wrong is really just like shouting 'Boo for murder!' (when I shout 'Boo!' I am evincing my disapproval; I am not attempting to *describe* something). But what about 'If murder is wrong, then it is wrong to murder your mother-in-law'? This makes sense. But on the emotivist interpretation it doesn't (what would it sound like on an emotivist interpretation?).

1.2.3.1. Internalism and Externalism, Humeanism and Anti-Humeanism

One of the premises in the argument from moral psychology above is the claim that there is an internal and necessary connection between sincerely making a moral judgement and being motivated to act in the manner prescribed by that judgement. This claim is known as ***internalism****,* because it says that there is an *i**nternal*** or ***conceptual*** connection between moral judgement and motivation.

Some cognitivist philosophers respond to the argument from moral psychology by denying internalism. They claim that the connection between

judgement and motivation is only external and contingent. Such philosophers are known as ***externalists.*** Other cognitivist philosophers respond to the argument from moral psychology by denying another premise of the argument, the claim that motivation always involves the presence of *both* beliefs and desires (this premise is known as the ***Humean theory of motivation****,* since it received a classic exposition by Hume). McDowell and Wiggins advance an ***anti-Humean theory of motivation****,* according to which beliefs themselves can be intrinsically motivating.

Deontological theories deny what teleological theories affirm. They deny that the right, the obligatory, and the morally good are wholly, whether directly or indirectly, a function of what is non morally good or of what promotes the greatest balance of good over evil for self, one's society, or the world as a whole. They assert that there are other considerations that may make an action or rule right or obligatory besides the goodness or badness of its consequences -- certain features of the act itself other than the *value* it brings into existence, for example, the fact that it keeps a promise, is just, or is commanded by God or by the state. Teleologists believe that there is one and only one basic or ultimate right-making characteristic, namely, the comparative value (nonmoral) of what is, probably will be, or is intended to be brought into being. Deontologists either deny that this characteristic is right-making at all or they insist that there are other basic or ultimate right-making characteristics as well. For them the principle of maximizing the balance of good over evil, no matter for whom, is either not a moral criterion or standard at all, or, at least, it is not the only basic or ultimate one.

To put the matter in yet another way: a deontologist contends that it is possible for an action or rule of action to be the morally right or obligatory one even if it does not promote the greatest possible balance of good over evil for self, society, or universe. It may be right or obligatory simply because of some other fact about it or because of its own nature. It follows

that a deontologist may also adopt any kind of a view about what is good or bad in the nonmoral sense.

Teleologists differ on the question of whose good it is that one ought to try to promote. *Ethical egoism* holds that one is always to do what will promote his own greatest good -- that an act or rule of action is right if and only if it promotes at least as great a balance of good over evil for him in the long run as any alternative would, and wrong if it does not. This view was held by Epicurus, Hobbes, and Nietzsche, among others. *Ethical universalism*, or what is usually called *utilitarianism*, takes the position that the ultimate end is the greatest general good -- that an act or rule of action is right if and only if it is, or probably is, conducive to at least as great a balance of good over evil in the universe as a whole as any alternative would be, wrong if it is not, and obligatory if it is or probably is conducive to the greatest possible balance of good over evil in the universe. The so-called utilitarians, for example, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, have usually been hedonists in their view about what is good, asserting that the moral end is the greatest balance of pleasure over pain. But some utilitarians are not hedonists, for example, G. E. Moore and Hastings Rashdall, and so have been called "Ideal" utilitarians. That is, utilitarianism is a certain kind of teleological theory of obligation and does not entail any particular theory of value, although a utilitarian must accept some particular theory of value.

It would also be possible, of course, to adopt teleological theories intermediate between ethical egoism and utilitarianism, for example, theories that say the right act or rule is one conducive to the greatest balance of good over evil for a certain group -- one's nation, class, family, or race. A pure *ethical altruist* might even contend that the right act or rule is the one that most promotes the good of *other* people. We shall, however, limit our coming discussion to egoism and universalism.

1.2.4. Egoism: Ethical and psychological Egoism

1.2.4.1. 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 viewpoints are known as psychological egoism and ethical egoism respectively.

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 states man Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) that if the end is to maintain political power for one self, ones king or ones political party, then this will justify any means that one might use for that propose, 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.

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 un to 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.

One argument for ethical egoism follows immediately from the theory of psychological egoism, which we examined in the previous section. If I am psychologically programmed to act only in my own best interest, then I can never be obligated to perform altruistic (that is, selfless) acts toward others. More formally the argument is this:

(6) We all always seek to maximize our own self-interest (definition of psychological egoism).

(7) If one cannot do an act, one has no obligation to do that act (ought to implies can).

(8) Altruistic acts involve putting other people's interests ahead of our own (definition of altruism).

(9) But, altruism contradicts psychological egoism and so is impossible (by premises 1 and 3).

(10) Therefore, altruistic acts are never morally obligatory (by premises 2 and 4).

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 benefits 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 other 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 method 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 for 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.

1.2.4.2. Psychological Egoism

The main argument that has been used as a basis for ethical egoism is a psychological one, an argument from human nature. We are all so constituted, it is said, that one always seeks one's own advantage or welfare, or always does what he thinks will give him the greatest balance of good over evil. In Butler's terms, this means that "self-love" is the only basic "principle" in human nature; in one set of contemporary terms, it means that "ego-satisfaction" is the final aim of all activity or that "the pleasure principle" is the basic "drive" in every individual. If this is so, the argument continues, we must recognize this fact in our moral theory and infer that our basic ethical principle must be that of self-love, albeit cool self-love. To hold anything else is to fly in the face of the facts.

It is usual here to object that one cannot logically infer an ethical conclusion from a psychological premise in this way. This objection has some force, as we shall see in Chapter 6. But the egoist may not be doing this. He may only be contending that, if human nature is as he describes it, it is simply unrealistic and even unreasonable to propose that we ought basically to do anything but what is for our own greatest good. For, in a sense, we cannot

do anything but this, except by mistake, and, as a famous dictum has it. “Ought” implies “can”. Thus understood, the psychological argument for ethical egoism is at least reasonable, even if it is not logically compelling.

Thus, ethical egoism has generally presupposed what is called *psychological egoism* -- that each of us is always seeking his own greatest good, whether this is conceived of as pleasure, happiness, knowledge, power, self-realization, or a mixed life. The question is not whether egoism is strong in human nature but whether we ever have any concern or desire for the welfare of others except as a means to our own, any concern for or interest in their welfare for its own sake, which is not derived from our concern for our own welfare. In dealing with this ethical theory;

(1) That the desire for one's own good presupposes or builds upon the existence of more basic desires for food, fame, sex, etc. If we did not have any of these "primary appetites," we would not have any good to be concerned about; our welfare consists of the satisfaction of such desires.

(2) It follows, that the object of these basic desires is not one's own welfare; it is food, fame, sex, etc., as the case may be. One's own good is not the object of all of one's desires but only of one of them, self- love.

(3) That in some cases the object of a basic desire is something for oneself, for example, food or the eating of food. But there is no necessity about this; the object may be something for someone else, for example, enjoying the sight of the ocean. In other words, there may be altruistic impulses. There may also be a desire to do the right as such. Whether there are such desires or not is a question of empirical fact.

(4) As a matter of fact, there are such altruistic interests in the welfare of others (sheer malevolence, if it exists, is a desire that another experience pain for its own sake), as well as a desire to do the right as such.

At this point it is usual for the psychological egoist to say, "Yes, we do things for others, but we get satisfaction out of doing them, and this satisfaction is our end in doing them. Doing them is only a means to this satisfaction. Hence, even in doing 'altruistic' things for others, like taking them to see the ocean, we are seeking our own good."

To this criticism, some argued that, of course, we get satisfaction out of doing such things, but we do not want to do them because of the satisfaction we expect to get out of them, we get satisfaction out of doing them because we wanted to do them. The psychological egoist is putting the cart before the horse. They confuses the *object* of B's desire (A's enjoying the ocean) with the *satisfaction* that results for B when this object is attained. Suppose B fails to get A to the ocean or that A does not enjoy seeing it. Then B will experience frustration, but it will not follow that this frustration is his goal; he experiences frustration because his goal is to have A enjoy himself.

Generally, Egoistic and particularistic consequentialism only takes into consideration how the consequences of an act will affect oneself or a given group – e.g. one's family, fellow citizens/compatriots, class or race. Moral rightness depends on the consequences for an individual agent or a limited group.

1.2.5. Utilitarianism: Producing the best consequences

That action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers.

Consider some traditional moral principles and see if they help us come to a decision. One principle often given to guide action is "Let your conscience be your guide." Suppose your conscience tells you to give the money to the Ethiopian Coffee Club and my conscience tells me to give the money to the

Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS). How can we even discuss the matter? If conscience is the end of it, we're left mute.

Another principle urged on us is "Do whatever is most loving"; Love is surely a wonderful value. It is a more wholesome attitude than hate, and we should overcome feelings of hate if only for our own psychological health. But is love enough to guide our actions when there is a conflict of interest? "Love is blind," it has been said, "but reason, like marriage, is an eye-opener." Whom should I love in the case of the disbursement of the millionaire's money—the millionaire or the starving people? It's not clear how love alone will settle anything. In fact, it is not obvious that we must always do what is most loving. Should we always treat our enemies in loving ways? Or is it morally permissible to feel hate for those who have purposely and unjustly harmed us, our loved ones, or other innocent people? Should the survivors of Auschwitz love Adolph Hitler? Love alone does not solve difficult moral issues.

A third principle often given to guide our moral actions is the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." This, too, is a noble rule of thumb, one that works in simple, commonsense situations. But it has problems. First, it cannot be taken literally. Thus, the rule must be modified: "Do to others as you would have them do to you if you were in their shoes." However, this still has problems. Likewise, the Golden Rule doesn't tell me to whom to give the millionaire's money.

Conscience, love, and the Golden Rule are all worthy rules of thumb to help us through life. They work for most of us, most of the time, in ordinary moral situations. But, in more complicated cases, especially when there are legitimate conflicts of interests, they are limited.

A more promising strategy for solving dilemmas is that of following definite moral rules. Suppose you decided to give the millionaire's money to the

Ethiopian Coffee Club to keep your promise or because to do otherwise would be stealing. The principle you followed would be “Always keep your promise.” Principles are important in life. If you decided to act on the principle of keeping promises, then you adhered to a type of moral theory called deontology. As you will see so far that deontological systems maintain that the center of value is the act or kind of act; certain features in the act itself have intrinsic value. For example, a deontologist would see something intrinsically wrong in the very act of lying. If, on the other hand, you decided to give the money to the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) to save an enormous number of lives and restore economic solvency to the society, you sided with a type of theory called teleological ethics. Sometimes, it is referred to as consequentialist ethics. The center of value here is the outcome or consequences of the act. For example, a teleologist would judge whether lying was morally right or wrong by the consequences it produced.

We have already examined one type of teleological ethics: ethical egoism, the view that the act that produces the most amount of good for the agent is the right act. Egoism is teleological ethics narrowed to the agent himself or herself. Unlike ethical egoism, utilitarianism is a universal teleological system. It calls for the maximization of goodness in society—that is, the greatest goodness for the greatest number—and not merely the good of the agent.

1.2.5.1. Classic Utilitarianism

In our normal lives we use utilitarian reasoning all the time. As a formal ethical theory, the seeds of utilitarianism were sewn by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (342–270 BCE), who stated that “pleasure is the goal that nature has ordained for us; it is also the standard by which we judge everything good.” According to this view, rightness and wrongness are determined by pleasure or pain that something produces. Epicurus’s theory focused largely on the individual’s personal experience of pleasure and

pain, and to that extent he advocated a version of ethical egoism. Nevertheless, Epicurus inspired a series of eighteenth-century philosophers who emphasized the notion of general happiness—that is, the pleasing consequences of actions that impact others and not just the individual.

The classical expressions of utilitarianism, though, appear in the writings of two English philosophers and social reformers Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). They were the nonreligious ancestors of the twentieth-century secular humanists, optimistic about human nature and our ability to solve our problems without recourse to God. Engaged in a struggle for legal as well as moral reform, they were impatient with the rule-bound character of law and morality in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Great Britain and tried to make the law serve human needs and interests.

1.2.5.2. Jeremy Bentham: Quantity over Quality

There are two main features of utilitarianism, both of which Bentham articulated:

- ***The consequentialist principle (or its teleological aspect):*** states that the rightness or wrongness of an act is determined by the goodness or badness of the results that flow from it. It is the end, not the means that counts; the end justifies the means. and
- ***The utility principle (or its hedonic aspect):*** states that the only thing that is good in itself is some specific type of state (for example, pleasure, happiness, welfare).

Hedonistic utilitarianism views pleasure as the sole good and pain as the only evil. An act is right if it either brings about more pleasure than pain or prevents pain, and an act is wrong if it either brings about more pain than pleasure or prevents pleasure from occurring. Bentham invented a scheme for measuring pleasure and pain that he called the hedonic calculus: The

quantitative score for any pleasure or pain experience is obtained by summing the seven aspects of a pleasurable or painful experience: its intensity, duration, certainty, nearness, fruitfulness, purity, and extent.

Adding up the amounts of pleasure and pain for each possible act and then comparing the scores would enable us to decide which act to perform. With regard to our example of deciding between giving the dying man's money to the Ethiopian Coffee Club or to the famine victims, we would add up the likely pleasures to all involved, for all seven qualities. If we found that giving the money to the famine victims would cause at least 3 million hedons (units of happiness) but that giving the money to the Ethiopian Coffee Club would cause less than 1,000 hedons, we would have an obligation to give the money to the famine victims.

There is something appealing about Bentham's utilitarianism. It is simple in that there is only one principle to apply: Maximize pleasure and minimize suffering. It is commonsensical in that we think that morality really is about reducing suffering and promoting benevolence. It is scientific: Simply make quantitative measurements and apply the principle impartially, giving no special treatment to ourselves or to anyone else because of race, gender, personal relationship, or religion.

1.2.5.3. 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, 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.

1.2.5.4. 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-utlitarianism 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 actionguiding 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.

The Strengths of Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism has three very positive features. The first attraction or strength is that it is a single principle, an absolute system with a potential answer for every situation: Do what will promote the most utility! It’s good to have a simple, action-guiding principle that is applicable to every occasion—even if it may be difficult to apply (life’s not simple).

Its second strength is that utilitarianism seems to get to the substance of morality. It is not merely a formal system that simply sets forth broad guidelines for choosing principles but offers no principles—such as the guideline "Do whatever you can universalize." Rather it has a material core: We should promote human (and possibly animal) flourishing and reduce suffering. The first virtue gives us a clear decision procedure in arriving at our answer about what to do.

The second virtue appeals to our sense that morality is made for people and that morality is not so much about rules as about helping people and alleviating the suffering in the world. As such, utilitarianism seems commonsensical. For instance, it gives us clear and reasonable guidance in dealing with the Kitty Genovese case: We should call the police or do what is necessary to help her, as long as helping her does not create more disutility than leaving her alone. And, in the case of deciding what to do with the dead millionaire's $2 million, something in us says that it is absurd to keep a promise to a dead person when it means allowing hundreds of thousands of famine victims to die. Far more good can be accomplished by helping the needy than by giving the money to the Yankees!

A third strength of utilitarianism is that it is particularly well suited to address the problem of posterity—namely, why we should preserve scarce natural resources for the betterment of future generations of humans that do not yet exist. Expressed rhetorically, the question is "Why should I care about posterity; what has posterity ever done for me?" In Chapter 6, we saw that the theory of ethical egoism failed to give us an adequate answer to this problem. That is, the egoist gains nothing by preserving natural resources for future generations that do not yet exist and thus can give no benefit to the egoist. However, utilitarians have one overriding duty: to maximize general happiness. As long as the quality of life of future people promises to be positive, we have an obligation to continue human existence,

to produce human beings, and to take whatever actions are necessary to ensure that their quality of life is not only positive but high.

What are our obligations to future people? If utilitarians are correct, we have an obligation to leave posterity to as good a world as we can. This would mean radically simplifying our lifestyles so that we use no more resources than are necessary, keeping as much top soil intact as possible, protecting endangered species, reducing our carbon dioxide emissions, preserving the wilderness, and minimizing our overall deleterious impact on the environment in general while using technology wisely.

Criticism of Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism has been around for several centuries, but so too have been its critics, and we need to address a series of standard objections to utilitarianism before we can give it a "philosophically clean bill of health."

Problems with Formulating Utilitarianism

The first set of problems occurs in the very formulation of utilitarianism: "The greatest happiness for the greatest number." Notice that we have two "greatest" things in this formula: "happiness" and "number." Whenever we have two variables, we invite problems of determining which of the variables to rank first when they seem to conflict. To see this point, consider the following example:

This is precisely the problem with utilitarianism. On the one hand, we might concern ourselves with spreading happiness around so that the greatest number obtain it (in which case, we should get busy and procreate a larger population). On the other hand, we might be concerned that the greatest possible amount of happiness obtains in society (in which case, we might be tempted to allow some people to become far happier than others, as long as

their increase offsets the losers' diminished happiness). So should we worry more about total happiness or about highest average?

The Comparative Consequences Objection

Another crucial problem with utilitarianism is that it seems to require a superhuman ability to look into the future and survey a mind-boggling array of consequences of actions. Of course, we normally do not know the long-term consequences of our actions because life is too complex and the consequences go on into the indefinite future.

The Consistency Objection to Rule-Utilitarianism

An often-debated question about rule-utilitarianism is whether, when pushed to its logical limits, it must either become a deontological system or transform itself into act-utilitarianism. As such, it is an inconsistent theory that offers no truly independent standard for making moral judgments. Briefly, the argument goes like this: Imagine that following the set of general rules of a rule-utilitarian system yields 100 hedons (positive utility units). We could always find a case where breaking the general rule would result in additional hedons without decreasing the sum of the whole. So, for example, we could imagine a situation in which breaking the general rule "Never lie" to spare someone's feelings would create more utility (for example, 102 hedons) than keeping the rule would. It would seem that we could always improve on any version of rule-utilitarianism by breaking the set of rules whenever we judge that by doing so we could produce even more utility than by following the set.

The No-Rest Objection

According to utilitarianism, one should always do that act that promises to promote the most utility. But there is usually an infinite set of possible acts to choose from, and even if I can be excused from considering all of them, I

can be fairly sure that there is often a preferable act that I could be doing. For example, when I am about to go to the cinema with a friend, I should ask myself if helping the homeless in my community wouldn't promote more utility. When I am about to go to sleep, I should ask myself whether I could at that moment be doing something to help save the ozone layer. And, why not simply give all my assets (beyond what is absolutely necessary to keep me alive) to the poor to promote utility? Following utilitarianism, I should get little or no rest, and, certainly, I have no right to enjoy life when by sacrificing I can make others happier. Peter

The Publicity Objection

It is usually thought that moral principles must be known to all so that all may freely obey the principles. But utilitarians usually hesitate to recommend that everyone act as a utilitarian, especially an act-utilitarian, because it takes a great deal of deliberation to work out the likely consequences of alternative courses of action. It would be better if most people acted simply as deontologists. Thus, utilitarianism seems to contradict our requirement of publicity.

The Relativism Objection

Sometimes people accuse rule-utilitarianism of being relativistic because it seems to endorse different rules in different societies. In one society, it may uphold polygamy, whereas in our society it defends monogamy. In a desert society, it upholds a rule "Don't waste water," whereas in a community where water is plentiful no such rule exists. But this is not really conventional relativism because the rule is not made valid by the community's choosing it but by the actual situation.

Criticism of the Ends Justifying Immoral Means

Chief among the criticisms of utilitarianism is that utilitarian ends might justify immoral means. There are many dastardly things that we can do in the name of maximizing general happiness: deceit, torture, slavery, even killing off ethnic minorities. As long as the larger populace benefits, these actions might be justified. The general problem can be laid out in this argument:

(4) If a moral theory justifies actions that we universally deem impermissible, then that moral theory must be rejected.
(5) Utilitarianism justifies actions that we universally deem impermissible.
(6) Therefore, utilitarianism must be rejected.

The Lying Objection

William D. Ross has argued that utilitarianism is to be rejected because it leads to the counterintuitive endorsement of lying when it serves the greater good. Consider two acts, A and B, that will both result in 100 hedons (units of pleasure of utility). The only difference is that A involves telling a lie and B involves telling the truth. The utilitarian must maintain that the two acts are of equal value. But this seems implausible; truth seems to be an intrinsically good thing.

What is so important about truth telling or so bad about lying? If it turned out that lying really promoted human welfare, we'd have to accept it. But that's not likely. Our happiness is tied up with a need for reliable information (that is, truth) on how to achieve our ends, so truthfulness will be a member of the rule-utility's set. But where lying will clearly promote utility without undermining the general adherence to the rule, we simply ought to lie. Don't we already accept lying to a gangster or telling white lies to spare people's feelings?

The Justice Objection

The utilitarian response was that we should reconsider whether truth telling and personal integrity are values that should never be compromised. The situation is intensified, though, when we consider standards of justice that most of us think should never be dispensed with. Let's look at two examples, each of which highlights a different aspect of justice.

First, imagine that a rape and murder is committed in a racially volatile community. As the sheriff of the town, you have spent a lifetime working for racial harmony. Now, just when your goal is being realized, this incident occurs. The crime is thought to be racially motivated, and a riot is about to break out that will very likely result in the death of several people and create long-lasting racial antagonism. You see that you could frame a tramp for the crime so that a trial will find him guilty and he will be executed. There is every reason to believe that a speedy trial and execution will head off the riot and save community harmony. Only you (and the real criminal, who will keep quiet about it) will know that an innocent man has been tried and executed. What is the morally right thing to do? The utilitarian seems committed to framing the tramp, but many would find this appalling.

As a second illustration, imagine that you are a utilitarian physician who has five patients under your care. One needs a heart transplant, one needs two lungs, one needs a liver, and the last two each need a kidney. Now into your office comes a healthy bachelor needing an immunization. You judge that he would make a perfect sacrifice for your five patients. Through a utility-calculus, you determine that, without a doubt, you could do the most good by injecting the healthy man with a fatal drug and then using his organs to save your five other patients.

These careless views of justice offend us. The very fact that utilitarians even consider such actions—that they would misuse the legal system or the medical system to carry out their schemes—seems frightening.

However, the utilitarian cannot exclude the possibility of sacrificing innocent people for the greater good of humanity. Wouldn't we all agree that it would be right to sacrifice one innocent person to prevent an enormous evil? Suppose, for example, a maniac is about to set off a nuclear bomb that will destroy New York City. He is scheduled to detonate the bomb in one hour. His psychiatrist knows the lunatic well and assures us that there is one way to stop him—torture his 10-year-old daughter and televise it. Suppose for the sake of the argument that there is no way to simulate the torture. Would you not consider torturing the child in this situation? As the rule-utilitarian would see it, we have two moral rules that are in conflict: the rule to prevent widespread harm and the rule against torture. To resolve this conflict, the rule-utilitarian might appeal to this second level conflict-resolving rule: We may sacrifice an innocent person to prevent a significantly greater social harm. Or, if no conflict-resolving rule is available, the rule-utilitarian can appeal to this third-level remainder rule: When no other rule applies, simply do what your best judgment deems to be the act that will maximize utility. Using this remainder rule, the rule-utilitarian could justify torturing the girl.

Thus, in such cases, it might be right to sacrifice one innocent person to save a city or prevent some wide-scale disaster. In these cases, the rule-utilitarian's approach to justice is in fact the same as the above approach to lying and compromising one's integrity: Justice is just one more lower-order principle within utilitarianism. The problem, clearly, is determining which kinds of wide-scale disasters warrant sacrificing innocent lives. This question invariably comes up in wartime: In every bombing raid, especially in the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the noncombatant–combatant distinction is overridden. Innocent civilian lives are sacrificed with the prospect of ending the war. We seem to be making this judgment call in our decision to drive automobiles and trucks even though we are fairly certain the practice will result in the death of

thousands of innocent people each year. Judgment calls like these highlight utilitarianism's difficulty in handling issues of justice

Three-Step Action Formula:

Utilitarianism might be construed as offering a three-step action formula for action:

4. On the basis of what I know, I must project the consequences of each alternative option open to me (e.g., taking different kinds of actions or taking no action).
5. Calculate how much happiness, or balance of happiness over unhappiness, is likely to be produced by anticipated consequences of each action or none.
6. Select that action which, on balance, will produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people affected

Generally, utilitarianism is a moral theory which takes into account how the consequences of an act will affect all the parties involved. Moral rightness depends on the consequences for all affected people or sentient beings. The fundamental principle of utilitarianism is the principle of utility:

The principle of utility

- ✓ The morally right action is the one that produces the best overall consequences with regard to the utility or welfare of all the affected parties.
- ✓ Jeremy Bentham's slogan: The right act or policy is the one that causes 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' – that is, maximize the total utility or welfare of the majority of all the affected parties.

1.2.5.5. Altruism

In altruism an action is right if the consequences of that action are favorable to all except the actor. Butler argued that we have an inherent

psychological capacity to show benevolence to others. This view is called *psychological altruism* and maintains that at least some of our actions are motivated by instinctive benevolence.

Psychological altruism holds that all human action is necessarily other centered and other motivated. A parallel analysis of psychological altruism results in opposing conclusions to psychological egoism, and again arguably the theory is just as closed as psychological egoism. If both theories can be validly maintained, it follows that the soundness of either or both must be questioned. Suppose, for example, that Degu, who is not good at swimming, saves a child from drawing in Lake Tana. What ultimately motivated him to do this? It would be odd to suggest that it's ultimately his own benefit that Degu is seeking. After all, he is risking his own life in the process.

Altruists are people who act so as to increase other people's pleasure. They will act for the sake of someone else even if it decreases their own pleasure and causes themselves pain.

We can differentiate egoistic and altruistic desires in the following way: One's desire is *egoistic* if (and only if) it concerns (what one perceives to be) the benefit of oneself and not anyone else. In the contrary, one's desire is *altruistic* if (and only if) it concerns (what one perceives to be) the benefit of at least someone other than oneself. Altruists reject the theory of psychological egoism and argue instead that humans are instinctively benevolent. And instinctive benevolence, they argue, is the feature of our human nature which is the basis of our altruistic moral obligations

1.2.6. Deontological Ethics (Non- Consequentiality)

Deontology: What duty asks of us?

What makes a 'right' act right? The utilitarian or consequentialist answer to this question is that it is the good outcome of an act which makes it right. Moral rightness or wrongness is calculated by determining the extent to

which the action promotes values such as pleasure, well-being, happiness, etc. To this extent, the end justifies the means. In many respects, deontological moral theory is diametrically the opposite of utilitarianism.

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.

Performance of One’s own Duty

The 17th century German philosopher Samuel Pufendorf, who classified dozens of duties under three headings: duties to God, duties to oneself and duties to others!

Concerning our duties towards God, he argued that there are two kinds: (1) a theoretical duty to know the existence and nature of God, and (2) a practical duty to both inwardly and outwardly worship God.
Concerning our duties towards oneself; these are also of two sorts: (1) duties of the soul, which involve developing one's skills and talents, and (2) duties of the body, which involve not harming our bodies, as we might through gluttony or drunkenness, and not killing oneself.
Concerning our duties towards others; Pufendorf divides these between absolute duties, which are universally binding on people, and conditional duties, which are the result of contracts between people.
Absolute duties are of three sorts: (1) avoid wronging others; (2) treat people as equals, and (3) promote the good of others.

Conditional duties involve various types of agreements, the principal one of which is the duty is to keep one's promises.

1.2.6.1. The Divine Command Theory

According to one view, called the divine command theory (DCT), ethical principles are simply the commands of God. They derive their validity from God's commanding them, and they mean "commanded by God." Without God, there would be no universally valid morality. We can analyze the DCT into three separate theses:

4. Morality (that is, rightness and wrongness) originates with God.
5. Moral rightness simply means "willed by God," and moral wrongness means "being against the will of God."
6. Because morality essentially is based on divine will, not on independently existing reasons for action, no further reasons for action are necessary.

There are modified versions of the DCT that drop or qualify one or more of these three theses, but the strongest form includes all three assertions. We can characterize that position thusly: Necessarily, for any person S and for all acts A, if A is forbidden (required) of S, then God commands that not-A (A) for S. Likewise, if A is permitted for S, then God has commanded neither A nor not-A for S. Bringing out the implications of this, we may list four propositions:

1. Act A is wrong if and only if it is contrary to the command of God.
2. Act A is right (required) if and only if it is commanded by God.
3. Act A is morally permissible if and only if it is permitted by the command of God.
4. If there is no God, then nothing is ethically wrong, required, or permitted.

We can summarize the DCT this way: Morality not only originates with God, but moral rightness simply means "willed by God" and moral wrongness

means “being against the will of God”. That is, an act is right in virtue of being permitted by the will of God, and an act is wrong in virtue of being against the will of God. Because morality essentially is based on divine will, not on independently existing reasons for action, no further reasons for action are necessary. So we may ask, “If God doesn’t exist, everything is permissible?” If so, nothing is forbidden or required. Without God, we have moral nihilism. If there is no God, then nothing is ethically wrong, required, or permitted.

Problems with the Divine Command Theory

There are two problems with the DCT that need to be faced by those who hold it.

3. DCT would seem to make the attribution of “goodness” to God redundant. When we say “God is good,” we think we are ascribing a property to God; but if good simply means “what God commands or wills,” then we are not attributing any property to God. Our statement “God is good” merely means “God does whatever he wills to do” or “God practices what he preaches,” and the statement “God commands us to do what is good” merely is the logically empty statement “God commands us to do what God commands us to do.”
4. DCT is that it seems to make morality into some-thing arbitrary. If God’s decree is the sole arbiter of right and wrong, it would seem to be logically possible for such heinous acts as rape, killing of the innocent for the fun of it, and gratuitous cruelty to become morally good actions—if God suddenly decided to command us to do these things

1.2.6.2. Rights Theory

A second duty-based approach to ethics is ***rights theory***. Most generally, a "right" is a justified claim against another person's behavior - such as my right to not be harmed by you. Rights and duties are related in such a way

that the rights of one person imply the duties of another person. For example, if I have a right to payment of $10 by Smith, then Smith has a duty to pay me $10. This is called the correlativity of rights and duties. The most influential early account of rights theory is that of 17th century British philosopher John Locke, who argued that the laws of nature mandate that we should not harm anyone's life, health, liberty or possessions**.** For Locke, these are our natural rights, given to us by God. Following Locke, the United States Declaration of Independence authored by Thomas Jefferson recognizes three foundational rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Jefferson and others rights theorists maintained that we deduce other more specific rights from these, including the rights of property, movement, speech, and religious expression.

There are four features traditionally associated with moral rights.

- ✓ First, rights are *natural* insofar as they are not invented or created by governments.
- ✓ Second, they are *universal* insofar as they do not change from country to country.
- ✓ Third, they are *equal* in the sense that rights are the same for all people, irrespective of gender, race, or handicap.
- ✓ Fourth, they are *inalienable* which means that I cannot hand over my rights to another person, such as by selling myself into slavery.

1.2.6.3. Kant’s Categorical Imperative

The name of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is identified with the moral theory known as deontology. Kant was adamantly opposed to the idea that the outcome of an action could determine its moral worth. For deontologists, it is not consequences which determine the rightness or wrongness of an act, but, rather, the intention of the person who carries out the act. The emphasis is on the correctness of the action, regardless of the possible benefits or harm it might produce. Deontologists

maintain that there are some moral obligations which are absolutely binding, no matter what consequences are produced.

The Categorical Imperative

A Kant's duty-based theory is emphasizes a single principle of duty. Kant agreed that we have moral duties to oneself and others, such as developing one's talents, and keeping our promises to others. However, Kant argued that there is a more foundational principle of duty that encompasses our particular duties. It is a single, self-evident principle of reason that he calls the "categorical imperative."

- A ***categorical imperative,*** he argued, is fundamentally different from *hypothetical imperatives* that hinge on some personal desire that we have. For example, "If you want to get a good job, then you ought to go to college." By contrast, a categorical imperative simply mandates an action, irrespective of one's personal desires, such as "You ought to do X."

To understand Kant's thought, note the emphasis he places on the idea of ***good intension***. Kant believed that *nothing was good in itself except a* "***good will***." Intelligence, judgment and all other facets of the human personality are perhaps good and desirable, but only if the will that makes use of them is good. By will, Kant means *the uniquely human capacity to act according to the concepts behind laws*, that is, principles presumably operating in nature. A good will, therefore, acts in accordance with nature's laws. For Kant a will could be good without qualification only if it always had in view one principle: *whether the maxim of its action could become a universal law*.

This standard is such a crucial part of Kant's theory of ethics. Kant believed, then, that there was just one command or imperative that was categorical, that is, one that presented an action as necessary of itself, without regard to

any other end. He believed that from this one categorical imperative, this universal command, all commands of duty could be derived. Kant's categorical imperative states that *we should act in such a way that the maxim or general rule governing our action could be a universal law.*

Consider his example of making a promise that you are willing to break if it suits your purposes. Your maxim can be expressed thus: this maxim could not be universally acted up on, because it involves a contradiction of wills. On the same hand, you are willing to make promises and honor them; on the other hand, you are willing to beak those promises. Notice that Kant is not a utilitarian: he is not arguing that the consequences of a universal law condoning promise breaking would be bad and the rule is bad. Instead he is claiming that ***the rule is self-contradictory***; the institution of promise making would dissolve if such a maxim were universalized. His appeal is to ***logical consistency***, not to consequences.

Kant gives at least ***three versions or formulations*** of the categorical imperative. His categorical imperative is a deontological ethical theory, which means ***it is based on the idea that there are certain objective ethical rules in the world.*** Kant's version is possibly the most well-known, and relies heavily on his idea that ***all people are fundamentally capable of reasoning in the same manner and on the same level.*** Kantianism focuses more on intent and action in itself, as opposed to the consequentialist focus of utilitarianism.

- **Hypothetical imperatives** tell us which *means* best achieve our ends. They do not, however, tell us which ends we should choose. The typical dichotomy in choosing ends is between ends that are "right" (e.g., helping someone) and those that are "good" (e.g., enriching oneself). Kant considered the "right" superior to the "good"; to him, the "good" was morally irrelevant. In Kant's view, a person cannot decide whether

conduct is "right," or moral, through empirical means. Such judgments must be reached *a priori*, using pure practical reason.

Reason, separate from all empirical experience, can determine the principle according to which all ends can be determined as moral. It is this fundamental principle of moral reason that is known as the categorical imperative. ***Pure practical reason*** in the process of determining it dictates what ought to be done without reference to empirical contingent factors. Moral questions are determined independent of reference to the particular subject posing them. It is because morality is determined by pure practical reason rather than particular empirical or sensuous factors that morality is universally valid. This ***moral universalism*** has come to be seen as the distinctive aspect of Kant's moral philosophy and has had wide social impact in the legal and political concepts of *human rights* and *equality*.

Kant's theory is hinged by his beliefs on ***autonomy*** *and his formulation of categorical imperatives.* He believed that, unless a person freely and willingly makes a choice, their action has no meaning (and certainly no moral value). ***Autonomy*** allows us to be self-creating when it comes to our values and morality. Autonomy is one's own beliefs, independence, and government: acting without regard for anyone else. Conversely, ***heteronomy*** is acting under the influence of someone else and allows for an individual to consistently place blame outside of self.

Kant believed that each individual is rational and capable of making free choices; thereby relies on autonomous thinking. Kant thought that every man, if using reason when looking at moral dilemmas, would agree with what he called the Categorical Imperative (the CI). So, while the law is objective, Kant thought that all people could come to understand and agree with it after autonomous reflection. So how, exactly, does the CI tell us how to act? How does it work? The decision-making procedure of the theory is

actually quite straight forward, and one that many people should be able to grasp intuitively (which is exactly what Kant wanted to achieve).

Kant thought that when a moral action is being considered, one should ask the following questions; what would happen if everyone in the world did this, all the time? And would that be the kind of world I'd like to live in? We can look at the text-book example to illustrate this; murder. So we want to know whether murder is an ethically justifiable action. Well, what would happen if everyone in the entire world started killing people? Absolute chaos would ensue. It's not the sort of world many people would like to live in. Therefore, according to the categorical imperative, murder is wrong. A core aspect of this theory is the concept of ***intent***. To Kant, it was the intent that mattered to him.

Let's look at an example. Imagine you're a murderer walking down the street, and you see a defenseless young man in front of you. It's dark, and there's no one else around. You have a knife in your pocket. It would be easy for you to kill him. So, you consider. Maybe, in the end, you choose to let the man live –not because you were worried about acting immorally, but because you didn't want to take the risk of him screaming and drawing the attention of the police (or something to that effect). In the end, you *do not kill.*

According to Kant, you haven't acted ethically. Your action does not make you a better person. This is because when you acted (or, rather, chose not to act), you weren't considering the action in terms of its morality. You didn't make a *moral choice – you merely acted out of self-preservation*. However, if you were to choose not to kill the man because you suddenly realized that it was wrong to kill and didn't want to act unethically, then you would have acted morally, and would be a better person for it.

Kant concludes that a moral proposition that is true must be one that is not tied to any particular conditions, including the identity of the person making the moral deliberation. A moral maxim must imply *absolute necessity*, which is to say that it must be disconnected from the particular physical details surrounding the proposition, and could be applied to any rational being. This leads to the first formulation of the categorical imperative:

A. The Principle of Universality

The **first maxim** states that we should choose our 'codes of conduct' only if they serve perfect / imperfect duty and are good for all. "*Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction.*" Kant divides the duties imposed by this formulation into two subsets: perfect and imperfect duty. ***Perfect duties*** are blameworthy if not met and are the basic requirements for a human being. According to his reasoning, we first have a ***perfect duty*** not to act by maxims that result in logical contradictions when we attempt to universalize them.

The moral proposition *A*: "It is permissible to steal" would result in a contradiction upon universalisation. The notion of stealing presupposes the existence of property, but were *A* universalized, then there could be no property, and so the proposition has logically negated itself. An example of perfect duty is the avoidance of suicide. Suicide is the end of life and Kant believed that "self-love impels the improvement of life;" if a person commits suicide, improvement of life ceases.

Imperfect duties are those that do not achieve blame, rather they receive praise if completed; they are circumstantial duties such as cultivating talent. They are still based on pure reason, but which allow for desires in how they are carried out in practice. Because these depend somewhat on the subjective preferences of humankind, this duty is not as strong as a

perfect duty, but it is still morally binding. As such, unlike perfect duties, you do not attract blame should you not complete an imperfect duty but you shall receive praise for it should you complete it, as you have gone beyond the basic duties and taken duty upon yourself. Imperfect duties are circumstantial, meaning simply that you could not reasonably exist in a constant state of performing that duty. This is what truly differentiates between perfect and imperfect duties, because imperfect duties are those duties that are never truly completed. Examples of imperfect duties are perfecting the ability to write and produce works.

B. The Principle of Humanity as an End, Never as Merely a Means

The **second maxim** states that we should not use humanity of ourselves or others as a means to an end. **"**Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end." Every rational action must set before itself not only a principle, but also an end. Most ends are of a subjective kind, because they need only be pursued if they are in line with some particular hypothetical imperative that a person may choose to adopt. For an end to be objective, it would be necessary that we categorically pursue it. This principle has received more widespread approval than any other part of Kant's moral philosophy. People, as rational beings, are ends in themselves and should never be used merely as means to other ends. We may use physical things as means, but when we use people simply as means, as in slavery, prostitution, or commercial exploitation, we degrade them and violate their innermost beings as people.

The categorical imperative also regulates the morality of actions that affect us individually. For example, **Suicide** would be wrong since I would be treating my life as a means to the alleviation of my misery. The free will is the source of all rational action. But to treat it as a subjective end is to deny the possibility of freedom in general. Because the autonomous will is the

one and only source of moral action, it would contradict the first formulation to claim that a person is merely a means to some other end, rather than always an end in themselves. On this basis, Kant derives second formulation of the categorical imperative from the first. By combining this formulation with the first, we learn that a person has ***perfect duty*** not to use the humanity of themselves or others merely as a means to some other end. An example of the second maxim would be that of slavery. Although it can be realized that a slave owner has the right to own property, they do not have the right to own a person. The right to not own a person stems from the ideals of autonomy and free will. A person who is owned does not have free will and therefore is not autonomous and cannot be held to duty; the concept of slavery contradicts the first maxim and *Kant's theory does not allow for contradictions of the maxims.*

We should always treat people with dignity, and never use them as mere instruments. For Kant, we treat people as an end whenever our actions toward someone reflect the inherent value of that person. Donating to charity, for example, is morally correct since this acknowledges the inherent value of the recipient. By contrast, we treat someone as a means to an end whenever we treat that person as a tool to achieve something else. It is wrong, for example, to steal my neighbor’s car since I would be treating her as a means to my own happiness.

C. The Principle of Autonomy

The ***third maxim*** states that we should consider ourselves to be members in the universal realm of ends. Therefore, ***every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends***.

Because a truly autonomous will would not be subjugated to any interest, it would only be subject to those laws it makes for itself - but it must also

regard those laws as if they would be bound to others, or they would not be universalizable, and hence they would not be laws of conduct at all. Thus Kant presents the notion of the hypothetical *Kingdom of Ends* of which he suggests all people should consider themselves both means and ends. We should consider our actions to be of consequence to everyone else in that our actions affect not only ourselves but that of others. Everything we do should not only be of benefit to ourselves, but benefit each other universally.

"Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means." We ought to act only by maxims that would harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends. We have perfect duty not to act by maxims that create incoherent or impossible states of natural affairs when we attempt to universalize them, and we have imperfect duty not to act by maxims that lead to unstable or greatly undesirable states of affairs.

The main problem with the categorical imperative is its rigidity. The famous example that illustrates this is that of a crazed axe-murderer coming to your front door and asking you where your children are. You could lie – many would say you should lie – but imagine if everyone in the entire world lied all the time. That would not be a nice place to live in, so the categorical imperative says you can't lie. You have to tell the axe-murderer the truth, so he can go and kill your children. Kant was asked about this personally, and he said that this was indeed the case. It would be immoral to lie to the man. He did, however, say that you could also choose to lock your door and call the police. Here's another example – you're in a room with a man who's holding a gun to your mother's head. You know he'll shoot her any second. Right next to you, there's a button. If you press the button, the man will fall through a trap door and land in a spike pit, dying instantly. Your mother will be saved.

According to the categorical imperative, this would be the wrong thing to do. You can't press the button. But if you don't, your mother will die. It's in situations like this that strict ethical systems with specific decision procedures tend to fall apart. Morality is simply too complex, too full of exceptions for these theories to ever fully work.

1.2.6.4. Ross's Prima Facie Duties or Moral Guidelines

A ***fourth*** and more recent duty-based theory is that by British philosopher W.D. Ross, which emphasizes *prima facie* duties. Sir William David Ross (15 April 1877 – 5 May 1971), usually cited as W. D. Ross, was a Scottish philosopher, known for work in ethics. The term *prima facie* means "at a first sight" or "on the surface." By prima facie duties, Ross means duties that dictate what we should do when other moral factors are not considered. Stated another way, prima facie duties are duties that generally obligate us; that is, they ordinarily impose a moral obligation but may not in a particular case because of circumstances. An **actual duty** is the action that one ought to perform after considering and weighing all the prima facie duties involved.

According to W. D. Ross (1877-1971), there are several *prima facie duties* that we can use to determine ***what, concretely, we ought to do***. A prima facie duty is a duty that is binding (obligatory) other things equal, that is, unless it is overridden or trumped by another duty or duties. Another way of putting it is that where there is a prima facie duty to do something, there is at least a fairly strong presumption in favor of doing it. An example of a prima facie duty is the duty to keep promises. ***Unless stronger moral considerations override, one ought to keep a promise made***. By contrast with prima facie duties, our ***actual or concrete duty*** is the duty we should perform in the particular situation of choice. Whatever one's

actual duty is, one is morally bound to perform it. Prima facie duties relate to actual duties as reasons do to conclusions of reasoning.

The term "duty" in "prima facie duty" is slightly misleading. The prima facie duties are understood as ***guidelines***, not rules without exception. If an action does not correspond to a specific guideline, one is not necessarily violating a rule that one ought to follow. However, not following the rule one ought to follow in a particular case is failing to do one's (actual) duty. In such cases it makes sense to talk about violating a rule. The rule might be the same in words as a prima facie duty (minus the phrase "unless other moral considerations override"), but it would no longer be merely a guideline because it describes what one concretely should do.

Like his 17th and 18th century counterparts, Ross argues that our duties are “part of the fundamental nature of the universe.” However, Ross’s list the following categories of prima facie duties is much shorter, which he believes reflects our actual moral convictions:

- ***Duties of Fidelity***: the duty to keep promises and the obligation not to lie. Duties of fidelity are duties to keep one’s promises and contracts and not to engage in deception.
- ***Duties of Reparation*****:** This is a duty to make up for the injuries one has done to others. Ross describes this duty as "resting on a previous wrongful act". It is the duty to compensate others when we harm them. If, for example, I damage something that belongs to someone else, I have an obligation to make restitution.
- ***Duties of Gratitude*****:** the duty to thank those who help us. Suppose, for example, an especially good friend is suddenly in need of assistance, I am duty bound to do all I can help this individual, who in the past had acted so selflessly toward me.
- ***Duties of Justice***: The duty of justice requires that one act in such a way that one distributes benefits and burdens fairly. Ross himself

emphasizes the negative aspect of this duty: he says that this type of duty "rests on the fact or possibility of a distribution of pleasure or happiness (or the means thereto) that is not in accord with the merit of the persons concerned; in such cases there arises a duty to upset or prevent such a distribution". Thus the duty of justice includes the duty, insofar as possible, to prevent an unjust distribution of benefits or burdens.

- ***Duties of Beneficence***: the duty to improve the conditions of others. The duty to do good to others: to foster their health, security, wisdom, moral goodness, or happiness. This duty, says Ross, "rests upon the fact that there are other beings in the world whose condition we can make better in respect of virtue, or of intelligence, or of pleasure."
- ***Duties of Self-improvement***: The duty of self-improvement is to act so as to promote one's own good, i.e., one's own health, security, wisdom, moral goodness, virtue, intelligence and happiness.
- ***Duties of Non-maleficence*:** The duty of non-injury (also known as non-maleficence) is the duty not to harm others physically or psychologically: to avoid harming their health, security, intelligence, character, or happiness. We are obliged to avoid hurting others physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Jacques Thiroux (2001) claims that Ross' duty of non-injury includes a duty to prevent injury to others. This seems to be wrong regarding Ross, but it might be reasonable to add such a prima facie duty to the list. Non-injury in Ross' strict sense is distinct from the prevention of harm to others. Non-injury instructs us generally to avoid intentionally, negligently, or ignorantly (when ignorance is avoidable) harming others. Harm-prevention instructs us generally to make a real effort to prevent harm to others from causes other than ourselves.

In summary, Ross presents seven categories of prima facie duties, although there may be more categories. However, he does insist that we

acknowledge and willingly accept the seven categories without argument. His appeal for their acceptance does not rely primarily on reason and argument but on *intuition*. When faced with a situation that presents conflicting prima facie duties, Ross tells us, the more obligatory, our actual duty. The actual duty has the greatest amount of prima facie rightness over wrongness.

1.2.7. Virtue Ethics

Virtue Ethics: Challenging the adequacy of rule-based theories

"Virtue ethics" is a technical term in contemporary Western analytical moral philosophy, used to distinguish a normative ethical theory focused on the virtues, or moral character, from others such as deontology (or contractarianism) and consequentialism. Imagine a case in which it is agreed by every sort of theorist that I should, say, help someone in need. A deontologist will emphasize the fact that in offering help, I will be acting in accordance with a moral rule or principle such as "Do unto others as you would be done by"; a consequentialist will point out that the consequences of helping will maximize well-being; and a virtue ethicist will emphasize the fact that providing help would be charitable or benevolent – charity and benevolence being virtues.

1.2.7.1. Aristotle's Ethics

The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, (384-322 B.C.) first wrote a detailed discussion of virtue morality in the Nichomachean Ethics. 'Virtus' he understood as strength. Correspondingly, specific virtues are seen as strengths of character. But, many years after Aristotle's death, virtue theory came to be over-shadowed by the development of utilitarianism and deontology.

In the past fifty years, however, virtue theory has resurfaced as a major moral theory. But why is that so? Virtue ethics has been restated and

reinvigorated in the years since 1958 by philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre and Elizabeth Anscombe. They and many others became disillusioned with the promises of mainstream theories. They argue that how we ought to live could be much more adequately answered by a virtue-based theory than in terms of calculating consequences or obeying rules.

With respect to the good, right, happiness, the good is not a disposition. The good involves a teleological system that involves actions.

D. Good is that which all things aim. Something is good if it performs its proper function. *E.g.*, a good coffee cup or a good red oak.
    - A right action is that which is conducive to the good, and different goods correspond to the differing sciences and arts.
    - "The god" or best good is that which is desired for its own sake and for the sake which we desire all other ends or goods. For human beings, ***eudaemonia*** is activity of the soul in accordance with *arete* (excellence, virtue, or what it's good for). *Eudaemonia* is living well and doing well in the affairs of the world.

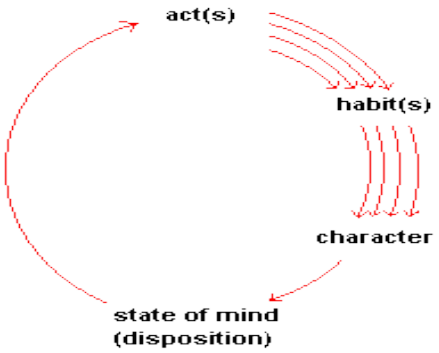
E. The good of human beings cannot be answered with the exactitude of a mathematical problem since mathematics starts with general principles and argues to conclusions.
        - Ethics starts with actual moral judgments before the formulation of general principles.
        - Aristotle presupposes natural tendencies in people.

F. Aristotle distinguishes between happiness (*eudaemonia*) and moral virtue:
    - Moral virtue is not the end of life for it can go with inactivity, misery, and unhappiness
    - Happiness, the end of life, that to which all aims, is activity in accordance with reason (reason is the *arete* or peculiar excellence of persons).

c. Happiness is an activity involving both moral and intellectual *arete*.
d. Some external goods are necessary in order to exercise that activity.

The Good Character

C. People have a natural capacity for good character, and it is developed through practice. The capacity does not come first--it's developed



through practice.

- The sequence of human behavior raises the question of which is preeminent--acts or dispositions. Their interaction is broken by Aristotle's distinction between acts which create good dispositions and acts which flow from the good disposition once it has been created.
- *Arete* is a disposition developed out of a capacity by the proper exercise of that capacity.
- Habits are developed through acting; a person's character is the structure of habits and is formed by what we do.

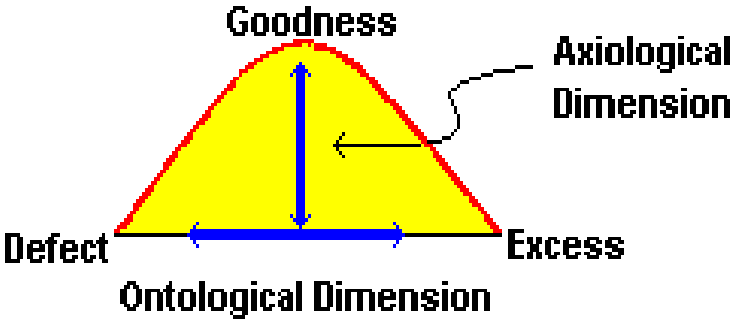
D. Virtue, *arete*, or excellence is defined as a mean between two extremes of excess and defect in regard to a feeling or action as the practically wise person would determine it. The mean cannot be calculated *a priori*.

- The mean is relative to the individual and circumstances. For example, consider the following traits:

Aristotelian Virtues And Vices Sphere Of Action	Vice Of Deficiency	Mean Or Virtue	Vice Of Excess
Fear	cowardice	courage	foolhardiness
Pleasure and Pain	insensibility	temperance	self-indulgence
Acquisition (minor)	tight wad	liberality	spendthrift or prodigality
Acquisition (major)	undue humility	pride or proper ambition	undue vanity
Anger	unirascibility	patience or good temper	hotheadedness
Self-Expression	Self-deprecating	truthfulness	boastfulness
Conversation	boorishness	wittiness	buffoonery
Social Conduct	cantankerous	friendliness	obsequiousness
Exhibition	shamelessness	modesty	shyness
Indignation	spitefulness	righteous indignation	envy

- The level of courage necessary is different for a philosophy teacher, a commando, and a systems programmer.
- ***Phronesis*** or practical wisdom is the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances. Notice, especially, Aristotle's theory does not imply ethical relativism because there are appropriate standards.

- In the ontological dimension, virtue is a mean; in the axiological dimension, it is an extreme or excellence. Martin Luther King, Jr. relates his struggle to understand this difference in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" when he wrote, "You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme… But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love…? Was not Amos an extremist for justice…? Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel…? Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.''
- Some presumptively virtuous behaviors can be an extreme as when, for example, the medieval philosopher Peter Abélard explains, No long time thereafter I was smitten with a grievous illness, brought upon me by my immoderate zeal for study. (Peter Abélard, *Historia Calamitatum* trans. Ralph Adams Cram (St. Paul, MN: Thomas A. Boyd, 1922), 4.)
- In the ontological dimension, virtue is a mean; in the axiological dimension, it is an extreme or excellence. *E.g.*, Hartmann's Diagram:



- Pleasure and pain are powerful determinants of our actions.

III. **Pleasure** is the natural accompaniment of unimpeded activity. Pleasure, as such, is neither good nor bad.

D. Even so, pleasure is something positive and its effect is to perfect the exercise of activity. Everything from playing chess to making love is improved with skill.

E. Pleasure cannot be directly sought--it is the side-product of activity. It is only an element of happiness.

F. The good person, the one who has attained *eudaemonia*, is the standard as to what is truly pleasant or unpleasant.

IV. **Friendship**: a person's relationship to a friend is the same as the relation to oneself. The friend can be thought of as a second self.

C. In friendship a person loves himself (egoism) not as one seeks money for himself, but as he gives his money away to receive honor.

D. The kinds of friendship:

- Utility
- Pleasure
- The Good--endures as long as both retain their character.

V. **The Contemplative Faculty**--the exercise of perfect happiness in intellectual or philosophic activity.

A. Reason is the highest faculty of human beings. We can engage in it longer than other activities.

B. Philosophy is loved as an end-in-itself, and so *eudaemonia* implies leisure and self-sufficiency as an environment for contemplation.

Aristotle on Pleasure

A summary of Aristotle's ethics clarifies several important distinction between happiness and pleasure.

VII. *Eudaimonia*: the state of personal wellbeing, having self-worth; exhibiting a zest for life; radiating energy; achieving happiness, "good spirit," or self-presence.

VIII. Hence, happiness is activity of the soul in accordance with *areté* (excellence or virtue).

A. *I.e.* Living well and doing well in the affairs of the world.

B. Picture yourself at your best. Compare Maslow's self-actualizing person or Jung's individuation of a person with Aristotle's description of *eudaimonia.*

IX. Good is that to which all thing aim; *i.e.*, the good is that which performs its proper function.

A. What constitutes a good wrench or a good coffee cup? The peculiar *areté* of excellence is established by its purpose. The peculiar excellence is teleological.

B. What constitutes a good person?"

1) Activity of the soul in accordance with reason (that capacity which is unique to us as persons).
2) This activity is both **moral** (doing the right thing at the right time) and **intellectual** *areté* (practical wisdom or *phronesis*).
3) Aristotle notes that some external goods are necessary for the exercise of that activity.

X. *Moral Virtue* is not the end of life, for it can go with inactivity, misery, and unhappiness.

XI. What is good for a person cannot be answered with the exactitude of mathematics.

A. Ethics attempts to formulate general principles whose application is dependent upon the circumstances at hand

(*i.e.,* initial conditions). (Note that Aristotle's theory does not imply ethical relativism)

B. The doctrine of the mean is not a doctrine of relativism but doctrine applied to specific circumstances. *E.g.*, what and how much one eats differs for a weight-lifter and a ballerina--even so, proper diet has guidelines and standards which apply differently according to different initial conditions.

XII. Pleasure, itself, is a side-product of activity; pleasure results from activity without hindrance.

4) As Aristotle expresses it, pleasure is the natural accompaniment of unimpeded activity.
5) Pleasure, as such, is neither good nor bad, but is something positive because the effect of pleasure perfects the exercise of that activity.
6) Even so, Aristotle emphasizes that pleasure is not to be sought for its own sake. (*Cf.*, the hedonistic paradox.)

1.3. Non-Normative Ethics/Meta-ethics

1.3.1. What is Meta-ethics?

Suppose I am debating with a friend the question whether or not we ought to give to famine relief, whether or not we are morally obliged to give to famine relief. The sorts of questions philosophers raise about this kind of debate fall roughly into two groups. First, there are *first order* questions about which party in the debate, if any, is right, and why. Then, there are *second order* questions about what the parties in the debate are doing when they engage in it. Roughly, the first order questions are the province of *normative ethics,* and the second order questions are the province of *metaethics.* As one recent writer puts it:

In metaethics, we are concerned not with questions which are the province of normative ethics like 'Should I give to famine relief?' or 'Should I return

the wallet I found in the street?' but with questions about questions like these.

It is important to be clear that in normative ethics we do not just look for an answer to the question 'Should we give to famine relief?' we also look for some insight into *why* the right answer is right. It is in their answers to this latter sort of 'why?' question that the classic theories in normative ethics disagree. Examples of such theories include:

- ***act-utilitarianism*** (one ought to give to famine relief because that particular action, of those possible, contributes most to the greater happiness of the greatest number); rule-utilitarianism (one ought to give to famine relief because giving to famine relief is prescribed by a rule the general observance of which contributes most to the greater happiness of the greatest number); and

- **Kantianism** (one ought to give to famine relief because universal refusal to give to famine relief would generate some kind of inconsistency).

Normative ethics thus seeks to discover the general principles underlying moral practice, and in this way potentially impacts upon practical moral problems: different general principles may yield different verdicts in particular cases. Meta-ethics, rather, concerned with questions about the following:

(g) ***Meaning:*** what is the *semantic function* of moral discourse? Is the function of moral discourse to state *facts,* or does it have some other non-fact-stating role?

(h) ***Metaphysics****:* do moral facts (or properties) exist? If so, what are they like? Are they identical or reducible to some other type of fact (or property) or are they irreducible and *sui generis?*

(i) ***Epistemology* and *justification*:** is there such a thing as moral knowledge? How can we know whether our moral judgements are true or false? How can we ever justify our claims to moral knowledge?

(j) ***Phenomenology*:** how are moral qualities represented in the experience of an agent making a moral judgement? Do they appear to be 'out there' in the world?

(k) ***Moral psychology*:** what can we say about the motivational state of someone making a moral judgement? What sort of connection is there between making a moral judgement and being motivated to act as that judgement prescribes?

(l) ***Objectivity*:** can moral judgements really be correct or incorrect? Can we work towards finding out the moral truth?

Obviously, this list is not intended to be exhaustive, and the various questions are not all independent (for example, a positive answer to (f) looks, on the face of it, to presuppose that the function of moral discourse is to state facts). But it is worth noting that the list is much wider than many philosophers forty or fifty years ago would have thought. For example, one such philosopher writes:

[Metaethics] is not about what people ought to do. It is about what they are doing when they talk about what they ought to do.

The idea that metaethics is exclusively about language was no doubt due to the more general idea that philosophy as a whole has no function other than the study of ordinary language and that 'philosophical problems' only arise from the application of words out of the contexts in which they are ordinarily used. Fortunately, this 'ordinary language' conception of philosophy has long since ceased to hold sway, and the list of metaethical concerns – in metaphysics, epistemology, phenomenology and moral psychology, as well as in semantics and the theory of meaning – bears this

out. Positions in metaethics can be defined in terms of the answers they give to these sorts of question. Some examples of metaethical theories are moral realism, non-cognitivism, error-theory and moral anti-realism.

1.3.2. Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism

Consider a particular moral judgement, such as the judgement that murder is wrong. What sort of psychological state does this express? Some philosophers, called cognitivists, think that a moral judgement such as this expresses a belief. Beliefs can be true or false: they are truth-apt, or apt to be assessed in terms of truth and falsity. So cognitivists think that moral judgements are capable of being true or false. On the other hand, non-cognitivists think that moral judgements express non-cognitive states such as emotions or desires. Desires and emotions are not truth-apt. So moral judgements are not capable of being true or false. (Note that, although it may be true that I have a desire for a pint of beer and false that I have a desire to see Ethiopia win the World Cup, this does not imply that desires themselves can be true or false.)

1.3.2.1. Strong Cognitivism: Naturalism

A *strong cognitivist* theory is one which holds that moral judgements (a) are apt for evaluation in terms of truth and falsity, and (b) can be the upshot of cognitively accessing the facts which render them true. Strong cognitivist theories can be either *naturalist* or *non-naturalist.* According to a naturalist, a moral judgement is rendered true or false by a natural state of affairs, and it is this natural state of affairs to which a true moral judgement affords us access. But what is a natural state of affairs? G. E. Moore's characterization: *“By 'nature', then, I do mean and have meant that which is the subject matter of the natural sciences and also of psychology.”*

A natural property is a property which figures in one of the natural sciences or in psychology: examples might include the property of being conducive to the greatest happiness of the greatest number and the property of being

conducive to the preservation of the human species. A natural state of affairs is simply a state of affairs that consists in the instantiation of a natural property.

Naturalist cognitivists hold that moral properties are identical to (or reducible to) natural properties. The Cornell realists (e.g. Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Boyd, and David Brink) think that moral properties are irreducible natural properties in their own right. Naturalist reductionists (e.g. Richard that moral properties are reducible to the other natural properties that are the subject matter of the natural sciences and psychology. Both the Cornell realists and the naturalist reductionists are moral realists: they think that there really are moral facts and moral properties, and that the existence of these moral facts and instantiation of these moral properties is constitutively independent of human opinion.

1.3.2.1.1. Strong Cognitivism: Non-Naturalism

Non-naturalists think that moral properties are not identical to or reducible to natural properties. They are irreducible and *sui generis.* We will look at two types of strong cognitivist non-naturalism: Moore's ethical non-naturalism, as developed in his *Principia Ethica* (first published in 1903), according to which the property of moral goodness is non-natural, simple, and unanalysable; and the contemporary version of non-naturalism that has been developed by John McDowell and David Wiggins (roughly from the 1970s to the present day). Again, both types of non-naturalist are moral realists: they think that there really are moral facts and moral properties, and that the existence of these moral facts and instantiation of these moral properties is constitutively independent of human opinion.

1.3.2.1.2. Strong Cognitivism without Moral Realism: Mackie's 'Error-Theory'

John Mackie has argued that although moral judgements are apt to be true or false, and that moral judgements, if true, would afford us cognitive

access to moral facts, moral judgements are in fact always *false*. This is because there simply are no moral facts or properties in the world of the sort required to render our moral judgements true: we have no plausible epistemological account of how we could access such facts and properties, and, moreover, such properties and facts would be *metaphysically queer,* unlike anything else in the universe as we know it. A moral property would have to be such that the mere apprehension of it by a moral agent would be sufficient to motivate that agent to act. Mackie finds this idea utterly problematic. He concludes that there are no moral properties or moral facts, so that (positive, atomic) moral judgements are uniformly false: our moral thinking involves us in a radical *error.* Because Mackie denies that there are moral facts or properties, he is not a moral realist, but a *moral antirealist.*

1.3.2.1.3. Weak Cognitivism about Morals without Moral Realism: 'Best Opinion' Theories

A *weak cognitivist* theory is one which holds that moral judgements

(c) are apt for evaluation in terms of truth and falsity, but
(d) cannot be the upshot of cognitive access to moral properties and states of affairs.

Weak cognitivism thus agrees with strong cognitivism on (a), but disagrees on (b). An example of a weak cognitivist theory would be one which held that our best judgements about morals *determine* the extensions of moral predicates, rather than being based upon some faculty which *tracks, detects* or *cognitively accesses* facts about the instantiation of moral properties. (The extension of a predicate is the class of things, events or objects to which that predicate may correctly be applied.)

Moral judgements are thus capable of being true or false, even though they are not based on a faculty with a tracking, accessing or detecting role - in

other words, even though true moral judgements are not the upshot of cognitive access to moral states of affairs. This view thus rejects moral realism, not by denying the existence of moral facts (like the error-theory), but by denying that those facts are constitutively independent of human opinion.

1.3.3. Non-Cognitivism

Non-cognitivists deny that moral judgements are even apt to be true or false. Non-cognitivists thus disagree with both weak and strong cognitivism. We shall look at a number of arguments which the non-cognitivist uses against cognitivism. An example of such an argument is the *argument from moral psychology.*

Suppose that moral judgements can express beliefs, as the cognitivist claims. Being motivated to do something or to pursue a course of action is always a matter of having a belief and a desire. For example, I am motivated to reach for the fridge because I believe that it contains water and I have a desire for water. But it is an internal and necessary fact about an agent that, if she sincerely judges that X is good, she is motivated to pursue the course of action X. So if a moral judgement expressed a belief, it would have to be a belief which sustained an internal and necessary connection to a desire: it would have to be a necessary truth that an agent who possessed the belief would *inter alia* possess the desire. But no belief is necessarily connected to a desire because, as Hume claimed, 'beliefs and desires are distinct existences', and it is impossible to have a necessary connection between distinct existences. So it cannot be the case that moral judgements express beliefs. So moral judgements are not truth-apt. If moral judgements cannot express beliefs, ***what do they express?***

We shall look at three versions of non-cognitivism which give different answers to this question:

- ✓ J. Ayer's ***emotivism*** (1936), according to which moral judgements express emotions, or sentiments of approval or disapproval;
- ✓ Simon Blackburn's ***quasi-realism*** (1984), according to which moral judgements express our dispositions to form sentiments of approval or disapproval; and
- ✓ Allan Gibbard's ***norm-expressivism*** (1990), according to which our moral judgements express our acceptance of norms.

Perhaps the main challenge to non-cognitivism is what is called the *Frege - Geach* problem. According to emotivism, for example, judging that murder is wrong is really just like shouting 'Boo for murder!' (when I shout 'Boo!' I am evincing my disapproval; I am not attempting to *describe* something). But what about 'If murder is wrong, then it is wrong to murder your mother-in-law'? This makes sense. But on the emotivist interpretation it doesn't (what would it sound like on an emotivist interpretation?).

1.3.3.1. Internalism and Externalism, Humeanism and Anti-Humeanism

One of the premises in the argument from moral psychology above is the claim that there is an internal and necessary connection between sincerely making a moral judgement and being motivated to act in the manner prescribed by that judgement. This claim is known as ***internalism****,* because it says that there is an *i**nternal*** or ***conceptual*** connection between moral judgement and motivation.

Some cognitivist philosophers respond to the argument from moral psychology by denying internalism. They claim that the connection between ***judgement and motivation*** is only external and contingent. Such philosophers are known as ***externalists.*** Other cognitivist philosophers respond to the argument from moral psychology by denying another premise of the argument, the claim that motivation always involves the presence of *both* beliefs and desires (this premise is known as the ***Humean***

theory of motivation, since it received a classic exposition by Hume). McDowell and Wiggins advance an ***anti-Humean theory of motivation***, according to which beliefs themselves can be intrinsically motivating.