Ethical Theories

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Basic Ethical Approaches
On What Basis Do We Make Moral Decisions? (1)

- Divine Command -- “Do what the sacred book tells you” - the will of God
- Utilitarianism -- “Make the world a better place”
- Virtue Ethics -- “Be a good person”
- The Ethics of Duty -- “Do your duty”
- Immanuel Kant -- Categoric imperativ
- Ethical Egoism -- “Watch out for #1”
On What Basis Do We Make Moral Decisions? (2)

- The Ethics of Natural and Human Rights -- "...all people are created ...with certain unalienable rights"
- Social Contract Ethics
- Moral Reason versus Moral Feeling
- Evolutionary Ethics
Divine Command Theories

- Being good is equivalent to doing whatever the Bible, Qur’an, Buddhist sacred scriptures or some other sacred text or source of revelation—tells you to do.

- “What is right” equals “What God tells me to do.”
List of sacred texts of various religions

- 5.1 Ancient Greece
- 5.2 Atenism
- 5.3 Ayyavazhi
- 5.4 Bahá’í Faith
- 5.5 Bön
- 5.6 Buddhism
- 5.7 Cheondoism
- 5.8 Christianity
- 5.9 Confucianism
- 5.10 Discordianism
- 5.11 Druze
- 5.12 Ancient Egyptian religion
- 5.13 Etruscan religion
- 5.14 Hermeticism
- 5.15 Hinduism
- 5.16 Islam
- 5.17 Jainism
- 5.18 Judaism
- 5.19 LaVeyan Satanism
- 5.20 Lingayatism
- 5.21 Mandaeanism
- 5.22 Manichaeism
- 5.23 Meher Baba
- 5.24 New Age religions
- 5.25 Orphism
- 5.26 Pastafarianism
- 5.27 Rastafari movement
- 5.28 Samaritanism
- 5.29 Scientology
- 5.30 Shinto
- 5.31 Sikhism
- 5.32 Spiritism
- 5.33 Swedenborgianism
- 5.34 Taoism
- 5.35 Tenrikyo
- 5.36 Thelema
- 5.37 Unification Church
- 5.38 Yazidi
- 5.39 Zoroastrianism

Hedonistic utilitarianism: Seeks to reduce suffering and increase pleasure or happiness

Epicurus (341-270 BC) Greek
“We count pleasure as the originating principle and the goal for the blessed life”. (Letter to Menoeceus)

Frances Hutcheson (1694-1747) Irish
“The action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest number; and that worst, which in like manner, occasions misery.” (An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil, 3.8)

Bentham’s Utilitarian Calculus

Mill’s Utilitarianism
“Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote [general] happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of [general] happiness. (Utilitarianism, 2)

http://www.utilitarism.net/ (in Swedish)
Virtue Ethics

- One of the oldest moral theories. Ancient Greek epic poets and playwrights Homer and Sophocles describe the morality of their heroes in terms of virtues and vices.

- **Plato** - cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Even accepted by early Christian theologians.

- **Aristotle**: The Nichomachean Ethics

  - Morality is a matter of being a good person, which involves having virtuous character traits.

  - Seeks to develop individual character
The Ethics of Duty

- Ethics is about doing your duty.
- Medieval philosophers: duties to God, self and others
- Kant: only moral duties to self and others
- Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694): moral duties spring from our instinctive drive for survival – we should be sociable in order to survive.

- Intuitionism: we don’t logically deduce moral duties, we know them as thy are!
- For each duty there is a corresponding virtue.
Immanuel Kant’s Moral Theory

- Human reason makes moral demands on our lives

- The categorical imperative: Act so that the maxim [determining motive of the will] may be capable of becoming a universal law for all rational beings."

- We have moral responsibility to develop our talents
Ethical Egoism

- Says the only person to look out for is yourself
- Ayn Rand, *The Ethics of Selfishness*
- Well known for her novel, especially *Atlas Shrugged*

- Ayn Rand sets forth the moral principles of “Objectivism”, the philosophy that holds that man's life--the life proper to a rational being--as the standard of moral values.

- It regards altruism as incompatible with man's nature, with the requirements of his survival, and with a free society.

  *shrug* - To raise (the shoulders), especially as a gesture of doubt, disdain, or indifference
The Ethics of Rights

- The most influential moral notion of the past two centuries
- Established minimal conditions of human decency
- Human rights: rights that all humans supposedly possess.
- Natural rights: some rights are grounded in the nature rather than in governments.
- Moral rights, positive rights, legal rights, civil rights
The Ethics of Rights

- **Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)**
  right from nature implies a liberty to protect myself from attack in any way that I can.

- **John Locke (1632-1704)**
  principal natural rights: life, health, liberty and possessions.
Moral Reason versus Moral Feeling

- Morality is strictly a matter of rational judgment: Samuel Clarke (1675-1729)
- Since time of Plato: moral truths exist in a spiritual realm.
- Moral truths like mathematical truths are eternal.
- Morality is strictly a matter of feeling (emotion): David Hume (1711-1729)
- We have a moral sense
Evolutionary Ethics

- Human social behavior is an extended development of biological evolution.
- Evolutionary ethics: moral behavior is that which tends to aid in human survival.
- Darwin: Origin of Species focuses on the evolutionary mechanisms of nonhuman animals.
- Biologists and philosophers of nineteenth century attempted to frame morality as an extension of the evolutionary biological process.
- Problem of the theory: what is progress? What is good? Any signs of moral improvement since Plato?
An Example of Applied Ethics: Business Ethics

As an example of applied ethics, let us look briefly at Business ethics, as a part of Professional Ethics.
Business ethics (also known as Corporate ethics) is a form of applied ethics or professional ethics that examines ethical principles and moral or ethical problems that arise in a business environment. It applies to all aspects of business conduct and is relevant to the conduct of individuals and business organizations as a whole.
Business Ethics

Ethics of property, property rights and intellectual property rights
Ethics of economic systems and International business ethics
Ethics of human resource management
Ethics of finance
Ethics of sales and marketing
Ethics of production
Ethics of technology
Discrimination issues include discrimination on the bases of age, gender, race, religion, disabilities, weight and attractiveness.

Relationships between employers and employees, also known as *At-will employment*.

Representation of employees and the democratization of the workplace: unions, strike breaking.
Business Ethics - Some Issues

- **Privacy** of the *employee*, **workplace surveillance**.
- Issues affecting the privacy of the *employer*: **whistle-blowing**.
- Issues relating to the **fairness of the employment contract** and the balance of power between employer and employee and **employment law**.
- **Occupational safety and health**.
Individual Ethical Decision-Making Styles

Stanley Krolick identifies four individual ethical decision-making styles.

1. The Individualist and this decision maker is driven by natural reason, personal survival, and preservation. The self is the only criteria involved in decisions for this style while ignoring other stakeholders.

2. Altruists who are primarily concerned for others. This approach is almost opposite to that of the Individualist. Altruists will disregard their own personal security for the benefit of others. The primary mission of Altruists is to generate the greatest amount of good for the largest number of people.
3. Idealist who is driven by principles and rules. It is values and rules of conduct that determine the behaviors exhibited by Idealists. Idealists display high moral standards and tend to be rigid in their approach to ethical situations.

4. Pragmatists who focus on current situations and not specifically with the self or others. It is facts and the current situation that guide this decision maker’s decision.