

ET 2.1 – Introduction to Christian Ethics

Non-Christian Ethical Frameworks

Further reading:

- Dictionary and encyclopaedia articles
- Mel Thompson - *Ethics* -- pp.1-117
- D.Robinson and C.Garratt - *Introducing Ethics*
- John Frame – *Lecture Outlines* pp.11-42
- David Cook – *The Moral Maze* – pp.18-41
- Stanley Grenz – *The Moral Quest* – pp.22-94
- Peter Vardy and Paul Grosch – *The Puzzle of Ethics* – pp.1-140
- Hollinger, Hill, Fagothey, Clyde-Jones etc
- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* - <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

Grenz - "We have been walking round in a cul-de-sac." p.57

Robinson/Garratt - "The story of post-war ethics is one of accelerated disillusion and uncertainty. ... Ethics is in trouble – its language is merely an expression of emotional noises, the 'human' nature on which it is so often based is only a fiction, and our belief in a transcendent 'reason' as a source of moral wisdom may produce something very different – efficient evil. ... we postmoderns should all now be more aware how slippery, undesirable and fictional are all the paths to any ethical rainbowland." pp.103, 112, 124

1. The Study of Ethics

- a) *Empirical or descriptive ethics* - observation of how it is out there. Non-evaluative
- b) *Normative ethics* - formulation of standards or principles for living. How people should act.
- c) *Analytical or meta-ethics* - exploration of the nature of morality itself
- d) *Words* – ought, should, right, duty, good, virtue, value, moral, ethical

2. Some prior (epistemological) questions

a) *What is the source of your knowledge of what is right / wrong?*

1. Naturalism / Objectivism

The source of our knowledge of what is right / wrong is 'out there' – given not constructed. Moral values can be derived from facts about the world and human nature. The naturalist holds that "is" can imply "ought". The 'is' – the nature of reality, the way things are, how the world is built, how human nature is constructed.

Natural Law. In ethics, believers in natural law hold (a) that there is a natural order to the human world, (b) that this natural order is good, and (c) that people therefore ought not to violate that order. But beware the *naturalistic fallacy* – see G.E. Moore. Widespread - e.g. in discussion of homosexual behaviour – on both sides !

2. Subjectivism

The source of my knowledge of what is right and wrong is inside me – my own moral judgment. I create or recognise value for myself. Constructed not given.

3. Noncognitivism

It is not possible to have knowledge or speak intelligibly of what is right and wrong.

- a) There is no value or truth – nihilism

- b) There may be value or truth but we are in no position to recognise them and/or to speak meaningfully about them. There is no court of appeal. Ethical statements do not carry cognitive meaning. (Logical positivism, linguistic analysis, verification principle).
- c) There may be value and truth but our understanding of what they are is the inevitable result of our economic / social / psychological / biological state. (= Marxist, Freudian, biological (Darwinian/Dawkinsian) reductionism)

b) How do you get your knowledge from there?

1. empiricism – processing “hard facts” from data of the world outside
 - what’s wrong with empiricism?
2. rationalism – developing “eternal truths” from rational principles of the world inside
 - what’s wrong with rationalism?
3. revelation – being given knowledge from the Creator of all worlds
 - in a world of almost infinite interconnectedness, to be certain about anything we need to have knowledge of everything. Only God has that. In his kindness, from his infinite (and therefore certain) knowledge, he tells us what we need to know.

c) To whom does your knowledge apply?

1. Absolutism – there are moral truths/requirements which are to be believed / followed at all times by all people.
2. Pluralism - different moral theories each capture part of truth of the moral life, but none of those theories has the entire answer. Thus all moral views are valid except any moral view that does not believe that all moral views are valid.
3. Relativism
 - a) *Descriptive ethical relativism* simply claims as a matter of fact that different people have different moral beliefs, but it takes no stand on whether those beliefs are valid or not.
 - b) *Normative ethical relativism* claims that each culture’s (or group’s) beliefs are right within that culture, and that it is impossible to validly judge another culture’s values from the outside.
 - c) *Ethical subjectivism* claims that the truth of some ethical judgment as applied to a person's behavior depends on whether the person believes the actions to be right or wrong.

- Relativism:
- philosophically self-destructive
 - practically unworkable
 - evidence against cultural relativism
 - life/truth/property/authority
 - often guilty of is-ought fallacy

3. Main Ethical Schools / Approaches

- a) Consequentialism
- b) Deontologism
- c) Virtue ethics
- d) Other schools / approaches

a) Consequentialist / teleological / utilitarian ethics

Outcome, consequence, result, end.

Consequentialism – what is right / wrong is determined by whether or not it does (or is likely to) result in the right consequences (in ‘the good’)

Teleological ethics – what is right is what achieves the goal/end of ‘the good’.

Hedonism (most consequ-t ethics are hedonist) – ‘the good’ is pleasure

- (i) psychological hedonism – descriptive – all do, in fact, seek pleasure
- (ii) ethical hedonism – prescriptive – all should seek pleasure

(can’t base (ii) upon (i). If (i) is true then (ii) is irrelevant. If (ii) is non- trivial then (i) is false.)

- egoistic ethical hedonism – own pleasure
- altruistic ethical hedonism – pleasure of others

Problems

- identifying pleasure as the highest good (can there be any evil pleasures – and if so, by what standard (higher than pleasure) do you know that? and should not that become the highest good?)
- single-minded pursuit of pleasure is self-defeating
- pleasure is only one part of a well-rounded life
- how define or measure pleasure and pain? esp of others?

Utilitarianism = altruistic ethical hedonism

- rightness of act determined by whether it will result in greater contribution to “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” than the alternatives
- hedonic calculus - duration, intensity, propinquity, extent, certainty, purity, fecundity
- Act utilitarianism - each individual act judged as above
- Rule utilitarianism – construct rules which result in greatest utility and live by them (collapses into act-util-m when get very specific)
- Ideal Utilitarianism – greatest GOOD of greatest number

Jeremy Bentham – 1748-1832

- Rightness or wrongness of an action determined by its consequences.
- Utilitarianism - a general or universal hedonism. The major form of consequentialism.
- Seek the greatest happiness (good) of the greatest number
- Hedonic calculus

- But
- how can we know what will be the outcome of an action?
 - how can we measure pleasure and pain of others?
 - is motive really irrelevant to the moral worth of an action?
 - why should pleasure or the ‘general good’ be my aim?
 - threat to liberty
 - how make people good?

John Stuart Mill_ 1806-73

- Utilitarianism – responding to criticisms of Bentham
- Introduced ‘qualitative’ measures of pleasure/pain. Util-m not ‘a pig’s philosophy’. Socrates dissatisfied is of greater value than a pig satisfied
- Danger of ‘tyranny of the majority’

b) Deontologism

‘Duty ethics’

Intrinsic rightness; rightness ‘regardless of consequences’; rules/principles /imperative; certain things ‘MUST’ be done; right is done for its own sake.

The rightness or wrongness of actions depends on whether they correspond to our duty or not. Greek word for duty (deon - neuter participle of dei, used as a substantive - ‘that which is needful, due, proper’ - Acts 19.36, I Peter 1.6, I Tim 5.13)

Immanuel Kant – 1724-1804

- Deontologist par excellence.
- Kant – wanted philosophical justification for belief that there are rules to be obeyed.
- Morality is about duty rather than desire. Obeying rules rather than seeking results.
- Hypothetical Imperative. A conditional command, such as, "If you want to lose weight, stop eating chocolate."
- Categorical Imperative - an unconditional duty one is required to perform – regardless of the consequences, this is your duty. Intrinsically good (not considered good as a means to an end or for the sake of something else).
- Often regarded as a secularized version of "The Golden Rule."
- Formulations: “Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a Universal Law of Nature” (“Universalizability”)
“Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.”

“Act always on the maxim of such a will in us can at the same time look upon itself as making universal law.”

But

- WHY should loyalty to obligation to be rational be the supreme value?
- can make a categorical imperative for self - ‘everyone with my fingerprints’
- how choose between rules which cannot both be kept?
- on what grounds?

How many rules?

a) One rule/principle:

principle monism - one, supreme, absolute principle

Kant - one guiding principle - ‘*the categorical imperative*’

Situational ethics - ‘always do the loving thing’

b) More than one principle:

pluralistic deontologism - e.g. 10 commandments

c) If more than one principle, what if they conflict?

hierarchicalism or *graded absolutism*

But

- a) means isn’t universalizable or absolute (unless include exceptions in definition) and
- b) how know?

Problems:

- 1) How do you know what is right?
- 2) What do with conflict between two 'duties'?

Note also that sharp distinction between consequentialism and deontology breaks down if go to detail:

- Consequentialism – esp rule utilitarianism – gets close to 'must do this' ...
- Deontology – how about a rule which says 'pay attention to the possible outcome'?

c) Virtue ethics

Character; internal traits; dispositions. development of the virtuous individual; moral actions as those performed by moral agents whose inner state is truly human. The development of practical wisdom, of the right "mind". And of right loves and hates.

Moral evaluation of persons rather than actions or outcomes.

Concentrate more on people we should be than things we should do.

Questions:

- What would the virtues be?
- How do you know?
- How do you know when a virtuous person is being inconsistent?
- How do you become virtuous (and is not 'education' as to what constitutes virtue a part of the process?)

Aristotle – 384–322 BC

- Driven by belief that 'the ultimate meaning of all things can be understood from an examination of their different ends'.
- Telos of humans is 'the good' - happiness / flourishing (eudaemonia).
- Ethics is essentially self-realization.
- Reason pursues 'the good' - activity in accordance with reason is the distinctive function of human beings.
- Moves from 'all desire happiness' to 'all should pursue it' ('naturalistic fallacy')
- Virtue as a skill or ability that can be developed. Practice it.
- Moral virtues - dispositions when guided by reason and so appropriate to the situation. Avoidance of excess or deficiency - golden mean - e.g.:

<i>Excess</i>	<i>Virtue</i>	<i>Deficiency</i>
rashness	courage	cowardice
licentiousness	temperance	insensibility
prodigality	liberality	illiberality
vulgarity	magnificence	pettiness
irascibility	patience	lack of spirit
shyness	modesty	shamelessness
		etc ...

d) Other schools / approaches

- a. Non-cognitivism – ethics does not give us and/or language cannot convey cognitive content
- b. Emotivism – A J Ayer - boo-hoorah. Ethical statements / moral judgments are simply expressions of positive or negative feelings – they express an emotional response.
- c. Prescriptivism – R M Hare - 'moral utterances as veiled commands' - personal evaluations which have a commending function.

- d. Intuitionism – G E Moore - Ethical truth is self-evident rather than being inferred from elsewhere. Direct perception of goodness. Like yellow, can't define 'good' but can point to it.
- e. Feminist ethics – are there 'female' virtues? S.H.E. (sane, humane, ecological). "...feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar faults traditional western ethics for failing women in five related ways. First, it shows little concern for women's as opposed to men's interests and rights. Second, it dismisses as morally uninteresting the problems that arise in the so-called private world, the realm in which women cook, clean, and care for the young, the old, and the sick. Third, it suggests that, on the average, women are not as morally developed as men. Fourth, it overvalues culturally masculine traits like independence, autonomy, separation, mind, reason, culture, transcendence, war, and death, and undervalues culturally feminine traits like interdependence, community, connection, body, emotion, nature, immanence, peace, and life. Fifth, and finally, it favors culturally masculine ways of moral reasoning that emphasize rules, universality, and impartiality over culturally feminine ways of moral reasoning that emphasize relationships, particularity, and partiality (Jaggar, "Feminist Ethics," 1992)." - Rosemary Tong, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/feminism-ethics/> accessed 6th March 2005
- f. Evolutionary ethics - genetic social instinct and variants. "... attempts to explain ethical behaviour, especially altruistic behaviour, as the outcome of some evolutionary process, which could be biological or social or both." (Ben Cooper) "Claims that justice is merely a side-effect of evolution.." Is itself arbitrary (where do the values come from? do we believe that something is "virtuous" because we are programmed to think so for evolutionary advantage? that "truthfulness" is by the by? (then why try to argue for it etc)
- g. Marxist ethics Social being determines consciousness. Morality is ideology masking bourgeois or other economic interests; 'False consciousness' – think being moral but really economically determined; Revolutionary intellectuals uncontaminated by false consciousness.
- h. Nietzschean ethics - God is dead – replacement of the authoritarian and metaphysical structure of thought by the elevation of human reason; *Übermensch* – "The Superman is the meaning of the earth." Create own values; Will to power – affirmation of life, will to move forward – master values of slave values (*Beyond Good and Evil*)
- i. Postmodernism
- celebration of relativism
 - radical pluralism
 - knowledge as 'construct' used by powerful to oppress the weak
 - no more ethical 'grand narratives'
 - moral choices made without philosophical grounds

4. Some other key figures in the history of ethics

Protagoras – 490-? BC

- Sophists - **relativism** - 'man is the measure of all things'.
- Moral statements are about my preferences. May give reasons for my preference but they have no authority over others - that wd require independent standards.
- Kill/kiss equally good - how could you know that one is better than the other?

Socrates:

- We have a real self. Happiness lies in perfecting it.
- Knowledge is about the 'essences' of things, like 'justice' or 'right behaviour'.
- Once you have this knowledge and your 'inner eye' can see it all clearly, you will always know what is right and you will never be wicked.
- Ignorance is the problem. 'Virtue is knowledge' and 'no-one does wrong knowingly'.

Plato – 428–354 BC

- Two worlds; know the real world (of forms/ideals) with reason and this world (of shadows / phenomena) with senses.
- Need specially developed ability to get to know the real world.

- Morality absolute – it's there in the forms/ideals. So independent of human relativities and acknowledgement.
- Euthyphro - gods subject to 'good'.
- Particular virtue of humans is justice - the life of reason.
- No man knowingly does evil.
- Reason for doing good (reason governing appetites, achieving harmonious soul) is that it brings happiness / is more satisfying.

But - where did he get it from?
 - independence of ethics from religion - don't need gods
 - WHY should we not assert that reason shd be subject to the appetites?

Hellenistic ethics

- Mostly based on Aristotle's ideas re fulfillment and happiness.
- Epicureanism – hedonism – equates the good with pleasure
- Cynics – indifference to things out there
- Stoics - good life = 'in accordance with nature / the natural law'

Nicolo Machiavelli – 1469-1527

- *The Prince* (satire, technical, immoral?).
- "It is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain his position to learn how not to be good ...".
- Public and private morality?

Thomas Hobbes – 1588-1679

- Humans basically evil and in conflict;
- 'social contract' – morality a way for wicked by rational beings to avoid conflict.
- Then further contract for establishment of civil authorities to enforce social contract.

David Hume – 1711-76

- Radical empiricism – denies that moral claims are 'knowledge'.
- 'Murder is wrong' is report of subjective feelings about murder.
- What sort of evidence is usable to establish whether an ethical proposition is true or false?

Sigmund Freud – 1856 - 1939

- Whole business of 'motivation' becomes more complex. Unconscious drives. Super-ego (bit like conscience) tells Ego not to.

G.E. Moore – 1873 – 1958

- Naturalistic Fallacy – arguing from 'is' to 'ought'
- Intuitionism – in *Principia Ethica* - Ethical truth is self-evident rather than being inferred from elsewhere. Direct perception of goodness. Like yellow, can't define 'good' but can point to it.

But - what do with disagreements between people? How know which is right?

A.J. Ayer – 1910-89

- Linguistic analysis, logical positivism, verification principle.
- Moral statements are 'meaningless'.
- Emotivism - see above
 - Radical - nothing more
 - Moderate - some sort of judgment implied - meant to express and influence.

Jean Paul Sartre – 1905-80

- Existentialism – can't work from 'human nature' because there is no such thing
- Authentic existence. Radical freedom. Ethics of pure volition. Commitment. Decision.

John Rawls – 1921 –

- *Theory of Justice* – fairness, equality.
- Contractarian - base morality on hypothetical contract (drawn up under the veil of ignorance regarding what position we would occupy in society) we all make with everyone else - no-one's basic interests get sacrificed to others.

Peter Singer – 1946 -

- Preference utilitarianism – take into account the preferences of the person concerned
- Each should be treated in a way that is appropriate (!)

The most obvious evaluative questions

1. how do you know that?
2. on whose authority?
3. where's the evidence?
4. by what standard?
5. how can you deliver / perform?
6. how do you relate the parts of your system?
7. where did you get that from?
8. how do you know it is correct?
9. what is the ultimate epistemological authority?
10. and ethical authority?
11. what sort of knowledge is ethical knowledge?
12. does 'ought' imply 'can'?
13. what is the ground of responsibility?
14. and the degrees?
15. by what standard? by what criteria?
16. what make of human beings?
17. cognitive or non?
18. absolute or relative?
19. do the parts and the whole relate well?
20. is this "system" internally consistent?
21. what are the presuppositions?
22. what are the underlying view of God and man?
23. whence the power to be and do good in this system?
24. does it work and how would you know?
25. what is the good?
26. what is a good person?
27. how relate outcomes / duties / virtue?
28. how specific do we get?
29. what happens when conflict in the system?
30. is there an appeal to nature and of what sort?
31. is there an appeal to moral sense / intuition and of what sort?

Five main areas:

- 1) what is the epistemological underpinning?
- 2) what is the form/content of action-guidance?
- 3) what is the rightness/wrongness of an action?
- 4) is the rightness/wrongness of an action a) absolute? and b) universally applicable?
- 5) how is conflict in the system regarded and dealt with?
- 6) if good can be defined, how is it then produced?

Non-Christian Ethics – Some examples

A. Channel 4 – The New Ten Commandments – Feb 2005

Out went the commandments against breaking the Sabbath, taking the Lord's name in vain and coveting the possessions of others. In came commandments which are positive and generous in spirit. 'There's none of the cynicism you might expect from these times,' comments Jon Snow.

Here are the top 20, in no particular order...

- Be honest
- Don't kill
- Look after the vulnerable
- Respect your mother and father
- Enjoy life
- Nothing in excess
- Be true to your own God
- Treat others as you would like to be treated
- Be true to yourself
- Protect your family
- Try your best at all times
- Look after your health.
- Don't commit adultery
- Live within your means
- Appreciate what you have
- Never be violent
- Protect the environment
- Protect and nurture children
- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Don't steal

B. “Humanism and its aspirations” ... Humanist Manifesto III

(A successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933 and the Second Humanist Manifesto of 1973)

Issued by the American Humanist Association, April 21, 2003

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

The lifestance of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.

This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:

Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.

Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved

cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

C. A debate: "Do we need God to be moral?"

http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1996Debate.htm