

Ethics: Living Philosophy in Contemporary Times

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GOOD?

IS THERE COMMON GOOD?

10 November 2019 at Carindale Library Meeting Room

From the centre of the universe to worlds beyond, we have already had two basic responses; we have already sought to ask ourselves how we feel, or care about such things as goodness and other ways of valuing. The other basic response follows in the next session.

THE ESSAY

(The works listed are not a complete coverage of the contemporary field but to provide the best known and most significant in contemporary discussions. Apologies if anything important has been missed)

For this essay, a glossary is provided at the end, before the bibliography.

And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

Mark 10:18 King James Bible version

What is good? The reply of Jesus of Nazareth has appeal to the modern philosopher, not merely as 'Christian', but even as non-Christian, post-Christian, or anti-Christian. It does not matter for the contemporary ethicist, and even in this observation the Christian ethicist can agree. For Jesus of Nazareth, these types of scripture passage were well aligned in the thinking with the originator of ethics in the western tradition, Socrates of Athens. The philosopher asked the question, "what is the good life?" The religious teacher or spiritual guide was asking, "what is the good in a life?" Socrates would have had little qualm with Jesus' dialogue. He would have just immediately gone to the classical question of whether God was good, and the issues of theodicy.

The philosopher and prophet are in agreement. The good is a judgement; a judgement about, first, the worth of life and, secondly, the semantics of 'God' – whether a supreme personal being or the non-personal being of the universe as we understand (or yet to understand). The stance contrasts with the skeptic and nihilist who argues that we either do

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not need to know (judge) or that our judgements are meaningless. Most contemporary ethicist (if not all), in their diverse arguments, explains why we believe we do know or why it matters.

It helps to see the wider field of ethics as three spheres, from the outer to inner – Meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Our common understanding hinges on the middle sphere, normative ethics, where the theories of ethics are explained. The key question here is to explain the ‘how of the good’ for our understanding, rather than simply ‘what must I do’ (e.g. “And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” Matthew 19:16). To do what one is told, or instructed, or commanded, under a sense of rigid obligation, are matters of moral theory, morality, moralism, and the Law. This is the distinction between ‘moral’ (an ancient Roman concept) and ‘ethics’ (an ancient Greek concept), commonly misunderstood in their popular usage. Ethics is not morality, and certainly not moralism, but questions of rules and laws cannot be excluded from ethical discussion. The challenge of Divine Command Theory, still existing in the contemporary era, means the inescapable debates in ethics between legalism and antinomianism.

The main western traditions in ethics are Aristotelian, Kantian, Utilitarian, and Existentialist, and normative ethics are theoretical debates. There are also three other modern schools or umbrella classes in normative theory: deontology, consequentialism, and contractualism (originally from political theory). There are ‘normative’ judgements which align Kantian philosophy with deontology and Utilitarian philosophy with consequentialism, but such arguments are matters of simple association of ideas in particular cases of philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham, but in most cases the association is not so straightforward. After normative ethics is considered then there are two further steps, being two different directions. First, one can go to the sphere of applied ethics, where the enquirer can look across normative ethics and seek out application in real life situations. The enquirer is not limited to any one theoretical justification (the normative ethics), and may argue a range of options which each would be judge good, according to its own theory. The good in applied ethics is merely that a practical solution is found. It is the other step to meta-ethics which seeks to ask whether such practical good is good enough. Meta-ethics is the judgement upon all theories, and thus upon normative ethics itself. Meta-ethics takes the enquirer closer to the basic question, “What is good?” and “Is that a meaningful question?”

INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATES

Bernard Williams's *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1985) has to stand as the best place to start in the discussion of contemporary ethical debates, for Williams delivers a sustained indictment of systematic moral theory. Williams argues his aim to reorient ethics toward the individual, declaring that modern moral philosophers have retreated to *system*, and so doing deserted individuals in their current social context. He believes that the ethical work of Plato and Aristotle is nearer to the truth of what ethical life is, but at the same time recognizes that the modern world makes unparalleled demands on ethical thought. Williams' key concept is the Self, and he believed that Kant's ideas involved a view of the self we can no longer accept. Modern theories such as utilitarianism and contractualism usually offer criteria that lie outside the self altogether, and this, together with an emphasis on system, has weakened ethical thought. Williams asks why should a set of ideas have any special authority over our sentiments just because it has the structure of a theory. This is the limits of philosophy, to understand the skepticism towards the belief that abstract theory could help the individual answer the Socratic question "How should I live?" In contrast to ethical questions, Williams argues that science (in its widest meaning) is an absolute conception; eventually, those diverse scientific theories converge together under the conception of science. Williams's point is that ethical theories do not work in this way. Ethical theories have an unreducible perspectivism as scientific theories do not. In what Williams calls 'morality', there is the attempt for an absolute conception, but for Williams this is not ethical thought but an appeal to a special obligation; which in Sartre's terms is 'bad faith'.

Raimond Gaita's *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (Routledge, 1991) is the best moral theorist response to Williams's criticism. Gaita argues that questions about morality are inseparable from the preciousness of each human being, an issue we can only address if we place the idea of remorse at the centre of moral life. For Gaita questions about good and evil are still connected to the meaning of our lives, and so a sacred or special obligation in morality is not what Williams believes it is; as being disconnected to selves. As we will see contemporary debates in ethics – as with most of the disciplines – goes back and forth from older schemas and debates to refreshed perspectives. Neither any of normative theories nor any of the meta-critiques are abandoned.

BACK TO THEORY

Allan Gibbard. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgement* (Clarendon Press, 1990) helps to explain the revival of normative ethics. Allan Gibbard believes that we can interpret our normative puzzles towards finding answers to them by examining why our highly social species might have evolved to be gripped by these questions. It alludes to the emergent field of evolutionary ethics, but here there is a general confusion of what naturalists think they are achieving, as opposed to what philosophers traditionally argued is the task in hand. Evolutionary ethics has applied insight, a reading of human evolution in ethical terms. It, however, cannot but fail to explain or critically describe the 'good' of evolution. This is Gibbard's more philosophic task in understanding normative judgement. This brings us to different types of normative ethics.

Moral Theory

In the history of human evolution it did begin with morality, and systematized as moralism. Moral theory is at least very helpful in explaining this bargaining basement in ethical thinking. Judith Jarvis Thomson, in *Rights, Restitution, and Risk: Essay in Moral Theory* (Harvard University Press, 1986), addresses the popular feeling that moral theory should be simple: the moral theorist attends to ordinary human action to explain what makes some acts right and others wrong, and we need no microscope to observe a human act. Judith Thomson, however, shows just how wide an array of moral considerations bears on all but the simplest of problems. No moral theory can simply capture all of the morally relevant facts. This seen in today's language of rights. What is it to have a moral right to life, or any other right? An adequate moral theory must address the relation between the infringement of such rights and restitution, as well as the imposition of risk.

Kantian

What we are seeing in the problems of moral theories and the language of rights is due much to the collapse of Kant's metaphysics of ethics; that is, Kant had created the modern *system* of ethics, and revolt against such inhuman rigidity on many fronts led to its rejection. However, there are neo-Kantian philosophers who believe that Kant's system can be saved, minus its original lack of human compassion and kindness, through modifications in the ethical thinking. Christine Korsgaard, with her work, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge

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University Press, 1992), is extraordinary in redeeming Kantian ethics. Korsgaard identifies and examines four accounts of the source of normativity that have been advocated by modern moral philosophers--voluntarism, realism, reflective endorsement, and Kant's appeal to autonomy. She shows how Kant's autonomy-based account emerges as a synthesis of the other three concepts. The high quality of Korsgaard's discussion in the book is seen in the commentary section of the book, input from G.A. Cohen, Raymond Geuss, Thomas Nagel, and Bernard Williams. The argument is later taken up in Christine Korsgaard's *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Aristotelian

The big revival, however, has been in Aristotelian ethics. It is possible that it might have something to do with Mary Midgley's *Beast and Man: The Root of Human Nature* (Cornell University Press, 1978). This is not a work of ethical thought as such, but her exploration of naturalism and the relationship between human and animal goes to important questions of both Aristotelian and evolutionary ethics (and Midgley was a member of the Aristotelian Society). Midgley's book came three years before Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). It is Alasdair MacIntyre who's most associated with the revival of Aristotelian ethics. MacIntyre provides a bleak view of the state of modern moral discourse, regarding it as failing to be rational, and failing to admit to being irrational. The ancient forms of moral discourse, particularly Aristotle's moral philosophy, were better than the new sciences. The Enlightenment's abandonment of Aristotelianism, and in particular the Aristotelian concept of teleology, meant that modern science is devoid of real scientific content, because the key suppositions and attitudes would not be present. On the other hand, the modern language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the incoherent language of natural science. MacIntyre claims that this failure encompasses the work of many significant Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment moral philosophers, including Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant, and David Hume. In the 1981 work MacIntyre is not clear how he would see modernity and its ethics as redeemable. In his *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) the argument becomes a little clearer. It is clearer that he is arguing for understanding the modern condition from a neo-Aristotelian or Thomistic perspective. Thomistic Aristotelianism, informed by Marx's insights, would provide the resources for constructing a contemporary politics and ethics which both enable and require us to act against modernity from within modernity. Unfortunately, very few believe that there is clarity here where the abstraction can really be translated to applied ethics.

Contractualism

Social Contract theory is at least one area which has achieved significant clarity for practical ends. T. M. Scanlon's *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998) then comes out of 'left-field', an original application of political theory, generally not appreciated by ethicists before as a rich area for investigation. Scanlon is a pluralist about both moral and non-moral values. He overturns several key ideas in ethical thought in the turn to contractualism. Scanlon argues that 1) desires or passions do not provide us with ethical reasons; 2) that states of affairs are also not the primary bearers of value; and 3) that well-being is not as important for rational decision-making as it is commonly held to be. For Scanlon, contractualism must take plurality of values into account, by allowing variability in moral requirements that relativists have claimed, while still accounting for the full force of our judgments of right and wrong.

BACK TO THE META-CRITIQUE

Much of what was described in the above section operated largely in the sphere of normative ethics, even in Macintyre's and Scanlon's unusual perspectives in the field. In the contemporary debates, there are many works where the ethics have been better mixed in perspectives of the Meta-Ethics and Metaphysics. Here Derek Parfit and his *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984) stands out. Derek Parfit argues that certain ethical theories are self-defeating. One such theory is ethical egoism, which Parfit claims is 'collectively self-defeating' due to the prisoner's dilemma, though he does not believe this is sufficient grounds to reject the theory. On similar grounds, Parfit does reject 'common sense morality'. In the second part of the book, Parfit shifts his focus to make an argument against self-interest theory. It involves the relationship between rationality and time, and raises the question of whether we should take into account our past desires, and should I do something I will regret later, even if it seems a good idea now. Derek Parfit's more recent three-volume book, *On What Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2011-2017), defends an objective ethical theory and suggests that we have reasons to act that cannot be accounted for by subjective ethical theories. It is a moral theory that combines the three traditional approaches in moral and political philosophy: Kantian deontology, consequentialism, and contractarianism (of the sort advocated by T. M. Scanlon, and from the tradition of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Rawls). As opposed to Bernard Williams's argument, Parfit believes that these theories converge rather than disagree; "climbing the same mountain on different sides", in Parfit's metaphor.

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Allan Gibbard's previous books *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* and *Thinking How to Live* treated normative discourse as a natural phenomenon, but not as describing the world naturalistically. His theory is a form of expressivism for normative concepts, holding, roughly, that normative statements express states of planning. Gibbard's *Meaning and Normativity* (Oxford University Press, 2012) integrates his expressivism for normative language with a theory of how the meaning of meaning could be normative. The point is that the concept of meaning is normative, on the 'ought' side of Hume's divide between is and ought. The contrast here is between expressivism and non-naturalism. Non-naturalists' explanations mystify, whereas expressivists render normative thinking intelligible as something to expect from beings like us, complexly social products of natural selection who talk with each other.

David Oderberg's *The Metaphysics of Good and Evil* (CRC Press, 2019) demonstrates that the very old, pre-modern ethical thought, also comes back with philosophical force. Oderberg's very recent work is the first, full-length contemporary defence, from the perspective of analytic philosophy, of the Scholastic theory of good and evil – the theory of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and most medieval and Thomistic philosophers. Goodness is analysed as obedience to nature. Evil is analysed as the privation of goodness. Goodness, surprisingly, is found in the non-living world, but in the living world it takes on a special character. The book analyses various kinds of goodness, showing how they fit into the Scholastic theory. The privation theory of evil is given its most comprehensive contemporary defence, including an account of truthmakers for truths of privation and an analysis of how causation by privation should be understood. In the end, all evil is deviance – a departure from the goodness prescribed by a thing's essential nature.

BACK TO SELF AND EMPATHY

Oderberg's work reminds us that much of the contemporary debates are a revival of ancient ethical thought, but this is not true just of the moral theorists. The arch-anti-moralist Bernard Williams, in his *Shame and Necessity* (University of California Press, 1993), also significantly moves in this direction. Williams is interested in ideas from the ancient Greeks of the self, of responsibility, freedom, and shame; the existentialist themes. Williams argues that moderns have not advanced to a more refined moral consciousness. We are, in fact, more like the ancients than we are prepared to acknowledge. For example, we can, and do, understand Greek tragedy when that world is so far from ours. When the ancients speak, they do not merely tell us about themselves, but about ourselves, and we can also understand the differences between ancient and modern worlds by recognising the same

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basic conceptions of ethical life. Williams' work goes to the capacity of historical empathy. It also *fundamentally* goes to the capacity of empathy that Self has. This is a key idea that delivers us from the spheres of the meta-ethics and the normative into the sphere of applied ethics.

BACK TO OUR RELATIONS TO OTHERS

One of the strange perceptions of the discipline is how quick the name, Peter Singer, arises in thinking about applied ethics. Perhaps, it is due to Peter Singer's *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), which is a landmark textbook in the field, covering a number of ethical issues including: race, sex, ability, species, abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, embryo experimentation, the moral status of animals, political violence, overseas aid, and whether we have an obligation to assist others. In Peter Singer's *Ethics in the Real World: 82 Brief Essays on Things That Matter* (Text Publishing, 2016) the list in detail studies expands to climate change, extreme poverty, more on animals, more on abortion, more on euthanasia, more on human genetic selection, sports doping, the sale of kidneys, the ethics of high-priced art, and ways of increasing happiness. Singer's animal rights arguments has certainly been ground-breaking, but the problem with the perception is not Singer, it is the absence that follows in attention to other applied ethicists and arguments on many other questions other than bio-ethics or ecological ethics (as important as they are).

Like Singer, Raimond Gaita is also another significant ethicist from Melbourne, but his ethical writings are often hidden under popular paperbacks and a celebrated cinematic film on life philosophy. In his *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love & Truth & Justice* (The Text Publishing Company, 1999), Gaita explores personal, political and philosophical ideas about the kind of society and the sort of public conversation we might have in the twenty-first century. His ideas about love and hatred, good and evil, guilt and forgiveness are undergirded in his moral theory (as mentioned above). A very different approach in applied ethics comes from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990). Here we have ethical girding in feminism, women's studies, and lesbian and gay studies. Judith Butler argues that gender is a kind of improvised performance. Butler's ideas about gender came to be seen as foundational to queer theory and the advancing of dissident sexual practices during the 1990s.

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Applied ethics can also be seen in many works of social and political philosophy. Martha Nussbaum stands out in this regard. In Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1986) the fundamental ethical problem is that many of the valued constituents of a well-lived life are vulnerable to factors outside a person's control. Like Bernard Williams, Nussbaum takes the appraisal of persons in terms of the ancient philosophers, and in Nussbaum's case it is particularly Aristotle. That Aristotelian perspective contrasts with Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Harvard University Press, 1997) where she makes a classical defence of multiculturalism by drawing on the ideas of Socrates, the Stoics and Seneca. It is a reminder that education is, and expresses, ethical thought and value.

Not so much a discussion of ethical thought (which still it is), but more the history of moral thought as it has developed over three millennia, from Homer's Greece to Mao's China, from ancient India to modern America, is Kenan Malik's *The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics* (Atlantic Books, 2014). The works so far mentioned cover a range of applied ethics questions. There are important works whereby one key applied ethical question are examined. Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion" (Philosophy & Public Affairs, Vol. 1, no. 1, Fall 1971) was a ground-breaking moral philosophy paper. Granting for the sake of argument that the fetus has a right to life, Thomson uses thought experiments to argue that the fetus's right to life does not trump the pregnant woman's right to have jurisdiction over her body, and that induced abortion is therefore not morally impermissible. Her argument has many critics on both sides of the abortion debate, yet continues to receive defense. Peter Unger's *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (Oxford University Press, 1996) argues that for people in the developed world to live morally, they are morally obliged to make sacrifices to help mitigate human suffering and premature death in the third world, and further that it is acceptable (and morally right) to lie, cheat, and steal to mitigate suffering.

Those who are afraid of uncertainty, with uncertain ethical thought, will retreat into simplistic morality tales. The vast majority who are willing to do the work in thought and emotion will journey through this sophisticated landscape that is contemporary ethics.

GLOSSARY

The entries are modifications from Wikipedia with full acknowledgement of this source.

Aristotelian Ethics emphasizes the importance of developing excellence (virtue) of character (Greek *ēthikē aretē*), as the way to achieve what is finally more important, excellent conduct (Greek *energeia*). The highest aims are living well and *eudaimonia* a Greek word often translated as well-being, happiness or 'human flourishing'. Aristotle thinks that the man whose appetites are in the correct order actually takes pleasure in acting moderately. Virtue is practical, and that the purpose of ethics is to become good, not merely to know. The right course of action depends upon the details of a particular situation, rather than being generated merely by applying a law. The type of wisdom which is required for this is called 'prudence' or 'practical wisdom' (Greek *phronesis*), as opposed to the wisdom of a theoretical philosopher (Greek *sophia*). Aristotle grounds his ethics in his ideas of human nature and its relationship to the natural world, and therefore is original form of ethical naturalism.

Antinomianism (from the Greek: *ἀντί*, "against" + *νόμος*, "law") is any view which rejects laws or legalism and argues against moral, religious or social norms (Latin: *mores*), or is at least considered to do so. The term has both religious and secular meanings. In Christian thought, an antinomian is one who takes the principle of salvation by faith and divine grace to the point of asserting that the saved are not bound to follow the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments. Antinomians believe that obedience to the law is motivated by an internal principle flowing from belief rather than from any external compulsion. George Orwell was a frequent user of "antinomian" in a secular (and always approving) sense. In his study of late-20th-century western society the historian Eric Hobsbawm stated that there was a new fusion of demotic and antinomian characteristics that made the period distinct, and appeared to be likely to extend into the future. For him there is now a readiness by the mass of people to have little sense of obligation to obey any set of rules that they consider arbitrary, or even just constraining, whatever its source. See Legalism.

Consequentialism is the class of normative ethical theories holding that the consequences of one's conduct are the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that conduct. Thus, from a consequentialist standpoint, a morally right act (or omission from acting) is one that will produce a good outcome, or consequence. The moral worth of an action is determined by its potential consequence, not by whether it follows a set of written edicts or laws. See Deontology.

Contractualism is a term in philosophy which refers either to a family of political theories in the social contract tradition, thus the term is synonymous with contractarianism, the theories of social contract, including from Hugo Grotius (1625), Thomas Hobbes (1651), Samuel Pufendorf (1673), John Locke (1689), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), and Immanuel Kant (1797); more recently, John Rawls (1971), David Gauthier (1986) and Philip Pettit (1997). It is T. M. Scanlon in *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998) who brings this political schema into ethical theory.

Deontological ethics or deontology (from Greek δέον, deon, "obligation, duty") is the normative ethical theory that the morality of an action should be based on whether that action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules, rather than based on the consequences of the action. It is sometimes described as duty-, obligation- or rule-based ethics. See Consequentialism.

Divine command theory (also known as theological voluntarism) is a meta-ethical theory which proposes that an action's status as morally good is equivalent to whether it is commanded by God. The theory asserts that what is moral is determined by what God commands, and that for a person to be moral is to follow his commands. Followers of both monotheistic and polytheistic religions in ancient and modern times have often accepted the importance of God's commands in establishing morality.

Ethical egoism is the normative ethical position that moral agents ought to act in their own self-interest. It differs from psychological egoism, which claims that people can only act in their self-interest. Ethical egoism also differs from rational egoism, which holds that it is rational to act in one's self-interest. Ethical egoism holds, therefore, that actions whose consequences will benefit the doer can be considered ethical in this sense. Ethical egoism contrasts with ethical altruism, which holds that moral agents have an obligation to help others.

Existentialist Ethics, following the tradition of philosophical enquiry which is called existentialism, takes as its starting point the experience of the human subject—not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual. Unlike other schools or classes of theory, the body of existential ethics crosses genre boundaries into literature, art, and different sub-field of philosophy. Søren Kierkegaard is generally considered to have been the first existentialist philosopher, and he proposed that each individual—not society

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or religion—is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately and sincerely, or ‘authentically’. Thus the starting point in existentialist ethics is ‘the existential attitude’, or the individual’s sense of disorientation, confusion, or dread in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world. This individualism has created several significant theoretical conflicts among the existentialists. Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) introduced the concept of bad faith, which describe the phenomenon in which human beings, under pressure from social forces, adopt false values and disown their innate freedom, hence acting inauthentically. It is closely related to the concepts of self-deception and resentment (consult Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche for these terms).

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) demonstrated the impossibility of having an ethical *system* based on her partner Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. De Beauvoir begins by reinstating Sartre’s ethical principles. Man [meaning human beings generally] is fundamentally free, a freedom that comes from his ‘nothingness,’ which is an essential aspect of his ability to be self-aware, to be conscious of himself: “... the nothingness which is at the heart of man is also the consciousness that he has of himself.” The ambiguity is that each of us is subject and object, freedom and facticity; man is also a thing, a ‘facticity,’ an object for others, while the existence that is the subject. The key ethical implication is to reject any notion of an absolute goodness or moral imperative that exists on its own: “...there exists no absolute value before the passion of man, outside of it, in relation to which one might distinguish the useless from the useful.” Values come only from our choices. However, de Beauvoir goes further than Sartre to reconcile personal freedom and the freedom of others through a hierarchical staging of various types of responses to freedom, until genuine freedom is reached, which takes the excitement of the *adventurer* and the passion of the *passionate man* and includes with them a concern for other people, other freedoms, as well: “Passion is converted to genuine freedom only if one destines his existence to other existences ...”; “To will oneself free is also to will others free.”

Expressivism is a theory about the meaning of moral language. According to expressivism, sentences that employ moral terms – for example, “It is wrong to torture an innocent human being” – are not descriptive or fact-stating; moral terms such as ‘wrong’, ‘good’, or ‘just’ do not refer to real, in-the-world properties. The primary function of moral sentences, according to expressivism, is not to assert any matter of fact, but rather to express an evaluative attitude toward an object of evaluation. Because the function of moral language is non-descriptive, moral sentences do not have any truth conditions. Hence, expressivists either do not allow that moral sentences have truth value, or rely on a notion of truth that does not appeal to any descriptive truth conditions being met for moral sentences. See Non-naturalism.

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Kantian Ethics developed as a result of Enlightenment rationalism, and is based on the view that the only intrinsically good thing is a good will; an action can only be good if its maxim—the principle behind it—is duty to the moral law. Central to Kant's construction of the moral law is the categorical imperative, which acts on all people, regardless of their interests or desires. Kant formulated the categorical imperative in various ways. His principle of universalizability requires that, for an action to be permissible, it must be possible to apply it to all people without a contradiction occurring. If a contradiction occurs the act violates Aristotle's 'Non-contradiction' concept which states that just actions cannot lead to contradictions. Kant's formulation of humanity, the second section of the Categorical Imperative, states that as an end in itself humans are required never to treat others merely as a means to an end, but always, additionally, as ends in themselves. The formulation of autonomy concludes that rational agents are bound to the moral law by their own will, while Kant's concept of the Kingdom of Ends requires that people act as if the principles of their actions establish a law for a hypothetical kingdom. Kant also distinguished between perfect and imperfect duties. A perfect duty, such as the duty not to lie, always holds true; an imperfect duty, such as the duty to give to charity, can be made flexible and applied in particular time and place.

Legalism (or nomism), in Christian theology, is the act of putting law above gospel by establishing requirements for salvation beyond repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and reducing the broad, inclusive and general precepts of the Bible to narrow and rigid moral codes. Legalism, in the Western sense, is an approach to the analysis of legal questions characterized by abstract logical reasoning focusing on the applicable legal text, such as a constitution, legislation, or case law, rather than on the social, economic, or political context. Legalism has occurred both in civil and common law traditions. See Antinomianism.

Moral Theory addresses the concept of morality, rather than the 'ethos'. **Morality** (from Latin: *moralis*, lit. 'manner, character, proper behavior') is the differentiation of intentions, decisions and actions between those that are distinguished as proper and those that are improper. Morality can be a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion or culture, or it can derive from a standard that a person believes should be universal. Morality may also be specifically synonymous with 'goodness' or 'rightness'.

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Non-naturalism is the meta-ethical view which claims that:

1. Ethical sentences express propositions.
2. Some such propositions are true.
3. Those propositions are made true by objective features of the world, independent of human opinion.
4. These moral features of the world are not reducible to any set of non-moral features.

This makes ethical non-naturalism a non-definist form of moral realism, which is in turn a form of cognitivism. Ethical non-naturalism stands in opposition to ethical naturalism, which claims that moral terms and properties are reducible to non-moral terms and properties, as well as to all forms of moral anti-realism, including ethical subjectivism (which denies that moral propositions refer to objective facts), error theory (which denies that any moral propositions are true), and non-cognitivism (which denies that moral sentences express propositions at all). See Expressivism.

Utilitarian Ethics is related across a family of consequentialist ethical theories that promotes actions that maximize happiness and well-being for the majority of a population. Although different varieties of utilitarianism admit different characterizations, the basic idea behind all of them is to in some sense maximize utility, which is often defined in terms of well-being or related concepts. For instance, Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism, described utility as “that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness...[or] to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered.” Unlike other forms of consequentialism, such as egoism and altruism, utilitarianism considers the interests of all beings equally. Proponents of utilitarianism have disagreed on a number of points, such as whether actions should be chosen based on their likely results (act utilitarianism) or whether agents should conform to rules that maximize utility (rule utilitarianism). There is also disagreement as to whether total (total utilitarianism), average (average utilitarianism) or minimum utility should be maximized. In any case the common thought is that ethics is calculus, a quantifiable judgement.

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