

C. D. PUBLICATIONS

---

***SELECTED  
QUESTIONS  
FROM DOING  
ETHICS (4TH ED.)  
BY LEWIS  
VAUGHN  
ANSWERED***

---

C. D. CHESTER

## ***PARTS 1 AND 2 QUESTIONS BY PAGE***

- ✚ Page 2
  - When can it be said that your moral beliefs are not really yours?
  - What is the unfortunate result of accepting moral beliefs without questioning them?
- ✚ Page 3
  - Can our feelings be our sole guide to morality?
- ✚ Page 4
  - Do you think that morality ultimately depends on God (that God is the author of the moral law)?
- ✚ Page 6
  - How does racial discrimination violate the principle of impartiality?
- ✚ Page 7
  - Does objectivism entail intolerance?
  - Does objectivism require absolutism?
- ✚ Page 8
  - What is emotivism? How does emotivism differ from objectivism?
- ✚ Page 9
  - How does subjective relativism imply moral infallibility?
  - According to moral subjectivism, are moral disagreements possible?
- ✚ Page 10
  - What is the argument for cultural relativism? Is the argument sound?
- ✚ Page 12
  - What does cultural relativism imply about the moral status of social reformers?
- ✚ Page 13
  - What is the emotivist view of moral disagreements?
  - According to emotivism, how do reasons function in moral discourse?
- ✚ Page 15
  - Are all persuasive arguments valid?
- ✚ Page 16
  - What kind of premises must a moral argument have?
  - What is the best method for evaluating moral premises?
  - Is it immoral to believe a claim without evidence?
- ✚ Page 17
  - If moral reasoning is largely about providing good reasons for moral claims, where do feelings enter the picture?

 PART 1 – FUNDAMENTALS

❖ Chapter 1 – Ethics and the Examined Life

➤ Review Questions

 1. *When can it be said that your moral beliefs are not really yours?*

- “If you accept and never question the moral beliefs handed to you by your culture, then those beliefs are not really yours—and they, not you, control the path you take in life. Only if you critically examine these beliefs *yourself* and decide for *yourself* whether they have merit will they be truly yours. Only then will you be in charge of your own choices and actions.” (p4)

 3. *What is the unfortunate result of accepting moral beliefs without questioning them?*

- “First, it undermines your personal freedom [as] ... those beliefs are not really yours—and they, not you, control the path you take in life. Second, the no-questions-asked approach increases the chances that your responses to moral dilemmas or contradictions will be incomplete, confused, or mistaken. If someone blindly embraces the morality bequeathed to him by his society, he may very well be a fine embodiment of the rules of his culture and accept them with certainty. But he also will lack the ability to defend his beliefs by rational argument against criticism.” (p4)

 4. *Can our feelings be our sole guide to morality?*

- “There are other easy roads—roads that also bypass critical and thoughtful scrutiny of morality. We can describe most of them as various forms of subjectivism ... You may decide, for example, that you can establish all your moral beliefs by simply consulting your feelings. In situations calling for moral judgments, you let your emotions be your guide. If it feels right, it is right. Alternatively, you may come to believe that moral realities are relative to each person, a view known as subjective relativism ... That is, you think that what a person believes or approves of determines the rightness or wrongness of actions. But these facile ways through ethical terrain are no better than blindly accepting existing norms. Even if you want to take the subjectivist route, you still need to critically examine it to see if there are good reasons for choosing it—otherwise your choice is arbitrary and therefore not really yours. And unless you thoughtfully consider the merits of moral beliefs (including subjectivist beliefs), your chances of being wrong about them are substantial.” (pp 4-5)

➤ **Discussion Questions**

✚ 1. *Do you think that morality ultimately depends on God (that God is the author of the moral law)?*

➤ "Any fruitful discussions about morality undertaken between people from different religious traditions or between believers and nonbelievers will require a common set of ethical concepts and a shared procedure for deciding issues and making judgments.

For many people, the most interesting query about the relationship between religion and morality is this: Is God the maker of morality? That is, is God the author of the moral law? Those who answer yes are endorsing a theory of morality known as the divine command theory. It says that right actions are those that are willed by God, that God literally defines right and wrong. Something is right or good only because God makes it so. In the simplest version of the theory, God can determine right and wrong because he is omnipotent. He is all-powerful—powerful enough even to create moral norms. On this view, God is a divine lawgiver, and his laws constitute morality. In general, believers are divided on whether the divine command theory gives an accurate account of the source of morality.

Critics say that if an action is right only because God wills it (that is, if right and wrong are dependent on God), then many heinous crimes and evil actions would be right if God willed them.

If the rightness of an action depended on God's will alone, he could not have reasons for willing what he wills. No reasons would be available and none required. Therefore, if God commanded an action, the command would be without reason, completely arbitrary. Neither the believer nor the nonbeliever would think this state of affairs plausible. On the other hand, if God wills an action because it is morally right (if moral norms are

independent of God), then the divine command theory must be false. God does not create rightness; he simply knows what is right and wrong and is subject to the moral law just as humans are.

For some theists, this charge of arbitrariness is especially worrisome.

Leibniz, for example, rejects the divine command theory, declaring that it implies that God is unworthy of worship.

In any case, it seems that through critical reasoning we can indeed learn much about morality and the moral life. After all, there are complete moral systems (some of which are examined in this book) that are not based on religion, that contain genuine moral norms indistinguishable from those embraced by religion, and that are justified not by reference to religious precepts but by careful thinking and moral arguments. As the philosopher Jonathan Berg says, “Those who would refuse to recognize as adequately justified any moral beliefs not derived from knowledge of or about God, would have to refute the whole vast range of arguments put by Kant and all others who ever proposed a rational basis for ethics!” Moreover, if we can do ethics—if we can use critical reasoning to discern moral norms certified by the best reasons and evidence—then critical reasoning is sufficient to guide us to moral standards and values. Since we obviously can do ethics ... morality is both accessible and meaningful to us whether we are religious or not.” (pp 10-12)

 9. *How does racial discrimination violate the principle of impartiality?*

- “From the moral point of view, all persons are considered equal and should be treated accordingly. This sense of impartiality is implied in all moral statements. It means that the welfare and interests of each individual should be given the same weight as the welfare and interests of all others. Unless there is a morally relevant difference between people, we should treat them the same ...

... [W]e would reject a moral rule that says something like “Everyone is entitled to basic human rights—except Native Americans.” Such a rule would be a prime example of unfair discrimination based on race. We can see this blatant partiality best if we ask what morally relevant difference there is between Native Americans and everyone else. Differences in income, social status, skin color, ancestry, and the like are not morally relevant. Apparently[,] there are no morally relevant differences. Because there are none, we must conclude that the rule sanctions unfair discrimination.” (p8)

❖ Chapter 2 – Subjectivism, Relativism, and Emotivism

➤ Review Questions

1. Does objectivism entail intolerance?  
2. Does objectivism require absolutism?

➤ "... [M]oral objectivism, the doctrine that some moral norms or principles are valid for everyone—universal, in other words—regardless of how cultures may differ in their moral outlooks. However, you need not hold that the objective principles are rigid rules that have no exceptions (a view known as absolutism) or that they must be applied in exactly the same way in every situation and culture." (p20)

"Contrary to the popular view, rejecting cultural relativism (embracing moral objectivism) does not entail intolerance. In fact, it provides a plausible starting point for tolerance. A moral objectivist realizes that [he/]she can legitimately criticize other cultures—and that people of other cultures can legitimately criticize [his/]her culture. A recognition of this fact together with an objectivist's sense of fallibility can lead [him/]her to an openness to criticism of [his/]her own culture and to acceptance of everyone's right to disagree.

We not only criticize other cultures, but we also compare the past with the present. We compare the actions of the past with those of the present and judge whether moral progress has been made." (p27)

4. *What is emotivism? How does emotivism differ from objectivism?*

- “Emotivism is the view that moral utterances are neither true nor false but are expressions of emotions or attitudes. It leads to the conclusion that people can disagree only in attitude, not in beliefs. People cannot disagree over the moral facts, because there are no moral facts. Emotivism also implies that presenting reasons in support of a moral utterance is a matter of offering nonmoral facts that can influence someone’s attitude. It seems that any nonmoral facts will do, as long as they affect attitudes. Perhaps the most far-reaching implication of emotivism is that nothing is actually good or bad. There simply are no properties of goodness and badness. There is only the expression of favorable or unfavorable emotions or attitudes toward something.” (p31)  
“... [M]oral objectivism, the doctrine that some moral norms or principles are valid for everyone—universal, in other words—regardless of how cultures may differ in their moral outlooks. However, you need not hold that the objective principles are rigid rules that have no exceptions (a view known as absolutism) or that they must be applied in exactly the same way in every situation and culture.” (p20)

 5. *How does subjective relativism imply moral infallibility?*

- "... [S]ubjective relativism implies that in the rendering of any moral opinion, each person is incapable of being in error. Each of us is morally infallible. If we approve of an action—and we are sincere in our approval—then that action is morally right. We literally cannot be mistaken about this, because our approval makes the action right. If we say that inflicting pain on an innocent child for no reason is right (that is, we approve of such an action), then the action is right. Our moral judgment is correct, and it cannot be otherwise. Yet if anything is obvious about our moral experience, it is that we are not infallible. We sometimes are mistaken in our moral judgments. We are, after all, not gods." (p22)

 6. *According to moral subjectivism, are moral disagreements possible?*

- "... [An] obvious feature of our commonsense moral experience is that from time to time we have moral disagreements ... Subjective relativism, however, implies that such disagreements cannot happen. Subjective relativism says that when ... [someone] states that capital punishment is right, ... [they are] just saying that ... [they approve] of it ... [When someone] states that ... [something] is wrong, ... [they're] just saying that ... [they disapprove] of it. But they are not really disagreeing, because they are merely describing their attitudes toward[s it] ..." (pp 22-23)

 7. *What is the argument for cultural relativism? Is the argument sound?*

- “We can lay out the argument like this:
1. People’s judgments about right and wrong differ from culture to culture.
  2. If people’s judgments about right and wrong differ from culture to culture, then right and wrong are relative to culture, and there are no objective moral principles.
  3. Therefore, right and wrong are relative to culture, and there are no objective moral principles.

As we have seen, Premise 1 is most certainly true. People’s judgments about right and wrong do vary from culture to culture. But what of Premise 2? Does the diversity of views about right and wrong among cultures show that right and wrong are determined by culture, that there are no universal moral truths? There are good reasons to think this premise false.

Premise 2 says that because there are disagreements among cultures about right and wrong, there must not be any universal standards of right and wrong. But even if the moral judgments of people in various cultures do differ, such difference in itself does not show that morality is relative to culture. Just because people in different cultures have different views about morality, their disagreement does not prove that no view can be objectively correct ...

Another reason to doubt the truth of Premise 2 comes from questioning how deep the disagreements among cultures really are. Judgments about the rightness of actions obviously do vary across cultures. But people can differ in their moral judgments not just because they accept different moral principles, but also because they have divergent nonmoral beliefs. They may actually embrace the same moral principles, but their moral judgments conflict because their nonmoral beliefs lead them to apply those principles in very different ways. If so, the diversity of moral

judgments across cultures does not necessarily indicate deep disagreements over fundamental moral principles or standards.” (pp 24-25)

“Some philosophers argue that a core set of moral values—including, for example, truth telling and prohibitions against murder—must be universal, otherwise cultures would not survive.

These points demonstrate that Premise 2 of the argument for cultural relativism is false. The argument therefore gives us no good reasons to believe that an action is right simply because one’s culture approves of it. For many people, however, the failure of the argument for cultural relativism may be beside the point. They find the doctrine appealing mainly because it seems to promote the humane and enlightened attitude of tolerance toward other cultures.” (p26)

11. What does *cultural relativism* imply about the moral status of social reformers?

- “Cultural relativism also has the peculiar consequence that social reformers of every sort would always be wrong. Their culture would be the ultimate authority on moral matters, so if they disagree with their culture, they could not possibly be right. If their culture approves of genocide, genocide would be right, and antigenocide reformers would be wrong to oppose the practice. In this upside-down world, the antigenocide reformers would be immoral and the genocidal culture would be the real paragon of righteousness. Reformers such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Mary Wollstonecraft (champion of women’s rights), and Frederick Douglass (American abolitionist) would be great crusaders—for immorality. Our moral experience, however, suggests that cultural relativism has matters exactly backward. Social reformers have often been right when they claimed their cultures were wrong, and this fact suggests that cultural relativism is wrong about morality.” (p26)

12. What is the emotivist view of moral disagreements?

13. According to emotivism, how do reasons function in moral discourse?

➤ “The commonsense view of moral judgments is that they ascribe moral properties to such things as actions and people and that they are therefore statements that can be true or false. This view of moral judgments is known as cognitivism. The opposing view, called noncognitivism, denies that moral judgments are statements that can be true or false; they do not ascribe properties to anything. Probably the most famous noncognitivist view is emotivism, which says that moral judgments cannot be true or false because they do not make any claims—they merely express emotions or attitudes.” (p28)

“Emotivists also take an unusual position on moral disagreements. They maintain that moral disagreements are not conflicts of beliefs, as is the case when one person asserts that something is the case and another person asserts that it is not the case. Instead, moral disagreements are disagreements in attitude.

The disagreement is emotive, not cognitive.

Like subjective relativism, emotivism implies that disagreements in the usual sense are impossible. People cannot disagree over the moral facts, because there are no moral facts. But we tend to think that when we disagree with someone on a moral issue, there really is a conflict of statements about what is the case. Of course, when we are involved in a conflict of beliefs, we may also experience conflicting attitudes. But we do not think that we are only experiencing a disagreement in attitudes.

Emotivism also provides a curious account of how reasons function in moral discourse. Our commonsense view is that a moral judgment is the kind of thing that makes a claim about moral properties and that such a claim can be supported by reasons.

For the emotivist, “moral” reasons have a very different function. Here reasons are intended not to support statements (since there are no moral statements) but to influence the emotions or attitudes of others. Since moral utterances express emotions or attitudes, “presenting reasons” is a matter of offering nonmoral facts that can influence those emotions and attitudes.

This conception of the function of reasons, however, implies that good reasons encompass any nonmoral facts that can alter someone’s attitude. On this view, the relevance of these facts to the judgment at hand is beside the point. The essential criterion is whether the adduced facts are sufficiently influential. They need not have any logical or cognitive connection to the moral judgment to be changed.” (p29)

✚ PART 2 – MORAL REASONING

❖ Chapter 3 – Evaluating Moral Arguments

➤ Review Questions

✚ 1. *Are all persuasive arguments valid?*

- “In a valid argument, if the premises are true, then the conclusion absolutely has to be true.

In an invalid argument, it is not the case that if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.

Notice that the validity or invalidity of an argument is a matter of its form, not its content. The structure of a deductive argument renders it either valid or invalid, and validity is a separate matter from the truth of the argument’s statements. Its statements (premises and conclusion) may be either true or false, but that has nothing to do with validity. Saying that an argument is valid means that it has a particular form that ensures that if the premises are true, the conclusion can be nothing but true. There is no way that the premises can be true and the conclusion false.” (p44)

8. *What kind of premises must a moral argument have?*  
9. *What is the best method for evaluating moral premises?*

- “Recall that arguments are made up of statements (premises and conclusions), and thus moral arguments are too. What makes an argument a moral argument is that its conclusion is always a moral statement. A moral statement is a statement affirming that an action is right or wrong or that a person (or one’s motive or character) is good or bad.” (p51)
- “We can radically change or add premises until we have a sound argument or at least a valid one with plausible premises. But how can we evaluate moral premises? After all, we cannot check them by consulting a scientific study or opinion poll as we might when examining nonmoral premises. Usually the best approach is to use counterexamples.” (p53)

➤ **Discussion Questions**

1. *Is it immoral to believe a claim without evidence?*

- “But even though in life ethics is inescapable and important, you are still free to take the easy way out, and many people do. You are free not to think too deeply or too systematically about ethical concerns. You can simply embrace the moral beliefs and norms given to you by your family and your society. You can just accept them without question or serious examination. In other words, you can try not to do ethics. This approach can be simple and painless—at least for a while—but it has some drawbacks.” (p4)

2. *If moral reasoning is largely about providing good reasons for moral claims, where do feelings enter the picture?*

➤ “Doing ethics typically involves grappling with our feelings, taking into account the facts of the situation (including our own observations and relevant knowledge), and trying to understand the ideas that bear on the case.” (p6)

“Our use of critical reasoning and argument helps us keep our feelings about moral issues in perspective. Feelings are an important part of our moral experience. They make empathy possible, which gives us a deeper understanding of the human impact of moral norms. They also can serve as internal alarm bells, warning us of the possibility of injustice, suffering, and wrongdoing. But they are unreliable guides to moral truth. They may simply reflect our own emotional needs, prejudices, upbringing, culture, and self-interests. Careful reasoning, however, can inform our feelings and help us decide moral questions on their merits.” (p7)

“Emotions have a role to play in the moral life. In moral arguments, however, the use of emotions alone as substitutes for premises is a fallacy. We commit this fallacy when we try to convince someone to accept a conclusion not by providing them with relevant reasons but by appealing only to fear, guilt, anger, hate, compassion, and the like.” (p57)

## **PART 3 QUESTIONS BY PAGE**

- ✚ Page 20
  - What are the two main categories of moral theory?
- ✚ Page 21
  - According to Kant's moral theory, what makes an action right?
  - What are the three moral criteria of adequacy?
- ✚ Page 22
  - What is ethical egoism? What is the difference between act- and rule-egoism?
  - What is psychological egoism?
  - What is the psychological egoist argument for ethical egoism?
  - Is psychological egoism true?
  - In what way is ethical egoism not consistent with our considered moral judgments?
- ✚ Page 23
  - What is the main difference between the ways that Mill and Bentham conceive of happiness? Which view seems more plausible?
- ✚ Page 24
  - What is the principle of utility?
  - What is the difference between act- and rule utilitarianism?
  - How do act- and rule-utilitarians differ in their views on rules?
  - Is act-utilitarianism consistent with our considered moral judgments regarding justice?
- ✚ Page 25
  - What is the significance of a "good will" in Kant's ethics?
  - What is the difference between a hypothetical and a categorical imperative?
- ✚ Page 26
  - What is the moral principle laid out in the first version of Kant's categorical imperative?
  - How does Kant distinguish between treating someone as a means and treating someone merely as a means?
  - How can the absolutism of Kant's theory lead to judgments that conflict with moral common sense?
  - How might the subjectivity of Kant's theory lead to the sanctioning of heinous acts?
- ✚ Page 28
  - What is the difference between perfect and imperfect duties?
- ✚ Page 29
  - What is natural law theory?
  - According to natural law theorists, how can nature reveal anything about morality?
  - According to natural law theory, how are moral principles objective? How are they universal?
  - How can the absolutism of natural law theory lead to moral judgments that conflict with moral common sense?

SELECTED QUESTIONS FROM *DOING ETHICS* (4TH ED.) BY LEWIS VAUGHN ANSWERED



Page 31

- What is the doctrine of double effect?



Page 32

- How does virtue ethics differ from duty-based ethics?
- What important elements do virtue ethicists think are missing from traditional duty-based ethics?
- How do virtue ethicists use moral exemplars?
- What is the chief argument against virtue ethics? How can the virtue ethicist respond?



Page 35

- What, according to Aristotle, [what] must humans do to achieve eudaimonia?
- What is the ethics of care?

✚ PART 3 – THEORIES OF MORALITY

❖ Chapter 4– The Power of Moral Theories

➤ Review Questions

✚ 5. *What are the two main categories of moral theory?*

- “Moral philosophers have traditionally grouped theories of morality into two major categories: consequentialist (or teleological) and nonconsequentialist (or deontological). In general, consequentialist moral theories say that what makes an action right is its consequences. Specifically, the rightness of an action depends on the amount of good it produces. A consequentialist theory may define the good in different ways—as, for example, pleasure, happiness, well-being, flourishing, or knowledge. But however good is defined, the morally right action is the one that results in the most favorable balance of good over bad. Nonconsequentialist moral theories say that the rightness of an action does not depend entirely on its consequences. It depends primarily, or completely, on the nature of the action itself. To a nonconsequentialist, the balance of good over bad that results from an action may matter little or not at all. What is of primary concern is the kind of action in question.”  
(p69)

 7. *According to Kant's moral theory, what makes an action right?*

- “Kant wants to establish as the foundation of his theory a single principle from which all additional maxims can be derived, a principle he calls the categorical imperative. One way that he states his principle is “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

The categorical imperative, Kant says, is self-evident—and therefore founded on reason. The principle and the maxims derived from it are also universal (applying to all persons) and absolutist, meaning that they are moral laws that have no exceptions. Kant's theory, then, is the view that the morally right action is the one done in accordance with the categorical imperative.

An action is right, he says, if and only if you could rationally will the rule to be universal ...” (p70)

 8. *What are the three moral criteria of adequacy?*

- “Criterion 1: Consistency with considered judgments.  
Criterion 2: Consistency with our moral experiences.  
Criterion 3: Usefulness in moral problem solving.” (p75)

❖ Chapter 5 – Consequentialist Theories: Maximize the Good

➤ Review Questions

1. What is ethical egoism? What is the difference between act- and rule-egoism?
2. What is psychological egoism?
3. What is the psychological egoist argument for ethical egoism?
4. Is psychological egoism true?
5. In what way is ethical egoism not consistent with our considered moral judgments?

- “Ethical egoism is the theory that the right action is the one that advances one’s own best interests. It promotes self-interested behavior but not necessarily selfish acts. The ethical egoist may define his self-interest in various ways—as pleasure, self-actualization, power, happiness, or other goods. The most important argument for ethical egoism relies on the theory known as psychological egoism, the view that the motive for all our actions is self-interest. Psychological egoism, however, seems to ignore the fact that people sometimes do things that are not in their best interests. It also seems to misconstrue the relationship between our actions and the satisfaction that often follows from them. We seem to desire something other than satisfaction and then experience satisfaction as a result of getting what we desire.” (pp 94-95)

7. *What is the main difference between the ways that Mill and Bentham conceive of happiness? Which view seems more plausible?*

➤ “Both Bentham and Mill define happiness as pleasure.

They differ, though, on the nature of happiness and how it should be measured. Bentham thinks that happiness varies only in quantity—different actions produce different amounts of happiness. To judge the intensity, duration, or fecundity of happiness is to calculate its quantity. Mill contends that happiness can vary in quantity and quality. There are lower pleasures, such as eating, drinking, and having sex, and there are higher pleasures, such as pursuing knowledge, appreciating beauty, and creating art. The higher pleasures are superior to the lower ones. The lower ones can be intense and enjoyable, but the higher ones are qualitatively better and more fulfilling. In this scheme, a person enjoying a mere taste of a higher pleasure may be closer to the moral ideal than a hedonistic glutton who gorges on lower pleasures.” (p86)

“The problem for Mill is to justify his hierarchical ranking of the various pleasures. He tries to do so by appealing to what the majority prefers—that is, the majority of people who have experienced both the lower and higher pleasures. But this approach probably will not help, because people can differ drastically in how they rank pleasures. It is possible, for example, that a majority of people who have experienced a range of pleasures would actually disagree with Mill’s rankings. In fact, any effort to devise such rankings using the principle of utility seems unlikely to succeed.” (p87)

- 6. *What is the principle of utility?*
- 8. *What is the difference between act- and rule utilitarianism?*
- 9. *How do act- and rule-utilitarians differ in their views on rules?*
- 10. *Is act-utilitarianism consistent with our considered moral judgments regarding justice?*

➤ “Bentham called the utilitarian principle the principle of utility and asserted that all our actions can be judged by it. (Mill called it the greatest happiness principle.) As Bentham says, “By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness ...” (p85)

“Act utilitarianism says that right actions are those that directly produce the greatest overall happiness, everyone considered. Rule-utilitarianism says that the morally right action is the one covered by a rule that if generally followed would produce the most favorable balance of good over evil, everyone considered.

Critics argue that act-utilitarianism is not consistent with our considered judgments about justice. In many possible scenarios, the action that maximizes utility in a situation also seems blatantly unjust. Likewise, the theory seems to collide with our notions of rights and obligations. Again, it seems relatively easy to imagine scenarios in which utility is maximized while rights or obligations are shortchanged. An act utilitarian might respond to these points by saying that such examples are unrealistic—that in real life, actions thought to be immoral almost never maximize happiness.

Rule-utilitarianism has been accused of being internally inconsistent—of

easily collapsing into act utilitarianism. The charge is that the rules that maximize happiness best are specific to particular cases, but such rules would sanction the same actions that act-utilitarianism does.” (p95)

❖ Chapter 6 – Nonconsequentialist Theories: Do Your Duty

➤ Review Questions

✚ 1. *What is the significance of a “good will” in Kant’s ethics?*

- “In Kant’s ethics, right actions have moral value only if they are done with a “good will”—that is, a will to do your duty for duty’s sake. To act with a good will is to act with a desire to do your duty simply because it is your duty, to act out of pure reverence for the moral law. Without a good will, your actions have no moral worth—even if they accord with the moral law, even if they are done out of sympathy or love, even if they produce good results. Only a good will is unconditionally good, and only an accompanying good will can give your talents, virtues, and actions moral worth.” (p102)

✚ 2. *What is the difference between a hypothetical and a categorical imperative?*

- “A hypothetical imperative tells us what we should do if we have certain desires ... We should obey such imperatives only if we desire the outcomes specified. A categorical imperative, however, is not so iffy. It tells us that we should do something in all situations regardless of our wants and needs.” (p103)

- ✚ 3. *What is the moral principle laid out in the first version of Kant's categorical imperative?*
5. *How does Kant distinguish between treating someone as a means and treating someone merely as a means?*
6. *How can the absolutism of Kant's theory lead to judgments that conflict with moral common sense?*
7. *How might the subjectivity of Kant's theory lead to the sanctioning of heinous acts?*

➤ “The meat of Kant’s theory is the categorical imperative, a principle that he formulates in three versions. The first version says that an action is right if you can will that the maxim of an action becomes a moral law applying to all persons. An action is permissible if (1) its maxim can be universalized (if everyone can consistently act on it) and (2) you would be willing to have that happen.” (p114)

“Kant’s second version of the categorical imperative is probably more famous and influential than the first. (Kant thought the two versions virtually synonymous, but they seem to be distinct principles.) He declares, “So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.” This rule—the means-end principle—says that we must always treat people (including ourselves) as ends in themselves, as creatures of great intrinsic worth, never merely as things of instrumental value, never merely as tools to be used for someone else’s purpose.

This statement of the categorical imperative reflects Kant’s view of the status of rational beings, or persons. Persons have intrinsic value and dignity because they, unlike the rest of creation, are rational agents who are free to choose their own ends, legislate their own moral laws, and assign value to things in the world. Persons are the givers of value, so

they must have ultimate value. They therefore must always be treated as ultimate ends and never merely as means.

Kant's idea is that people not only have intrinsic worth—they also have equal intrinsic worth.

To treat people merely as a means rather than as an end is to fail to recognize the true nature and status of persons. Since people are by nature free, rational, autonomous, and equal, we treat them merely as a means if we do not respect these attributes ...” (p105)

“Kant's theory seems to conflict with our commonsense moral judgments (Criterion 1) and has flaws that limit its usefulness in moral problem solving (Criterion 3). The theory falters on Criterion 1 mainly because some duties generated by the categorical imperative are absolute. Absolute duties can conflict, and Kant provides no way to resolve the inconsistencies, a failure of Criterion 3. Furthermore, we seem to have no genuine absolute duties.” (p114)

“Moreover, we can also envision situations in which we must choose between two allegedly perfect duties, each one prohibiting some action. We cannot fulfill both duties at once, and we must make a choice. Such conflicts provide plausible evidence against the notion that there are exceptionless moral rules.

Conflicts of duties, of course, are not just deficiencies regarding Criterion 1. They also indicate difficulties with Criterion 3. Like many moral theories, Kant's system fails to provide an effective means of resolving major conflicts of duties.” (p107)

“It may be feasible to remedy some of the shortcomings of the first version of the categorical imperative by combining it with the second. Rules such as “Kill everyone with dark skin” or “Lie only to avoid injury, death, or embarrassment to anyone who has green eyes and red hair” would be

unacceptable because they would allow people to be treated merely as a means. But the means-ends principle itself appears to be in need of modification. The main difficulty is that our duties not to use people merely as a means can conflict, and Kant provides no counsel on how to resolve such dilemmas. Say, for example, that hundreds of innocent people are enslaved inside a brutal Nazi concentration camp, and the only way we can free them is to kill the Nazis guarding the camp. We must therefore choose between allowing the prisoners to be used merely as a means by the Nazis or using the Nazis merely as a means by killing them to free the prisoners.” (p108)

 4. *What is the difference between perfect and imperfect duties?*

- “Some of the duties derived from the categorical imperative are, in Kant’s words, perfect duties and some, imperfect duties. Perfect duties are those that absolutely must be followed without fail; they have no exceptions. Some perfect duties cited by Kant include duties not to break a promise, not to lie, and not to commit suicide. Imperfect duties are not always to be followed; they do have exceptions. As examples of imperfect duties, Kant mentions duties to develop your talents and to help others in need.” (p103)

- ✚ 8. *What is natural law theory?*
9. *According to natural law theorists, how can nature reveal anything about morality?*
11. *According to natural law theory, how are moral principles objective? How are they universal?*
13. *How can the absolutism of natural law theory lead to moral judgments that conflict with moral common sense?*

➤ “Like Kantian ethics, natural law theory is universalist, objective, and rational, applying to all persons and requiring that moral choices be backed by good reasons. The emphasis on reason makes morality independent of religion and belief in God, a distinction also found in Kant’s ethics. At the heart of natural law theory is a strong respect for human life, an attitude that is close to, but not quite the same thing as, Kant’s means-ends principle. Respect for life or persons is, of course, a primary concern of our moral experience and seems to preclude the kind of wholesale end-justifies-the means calculations that are a defining characteristic of many forms of utilitarianism.

Natural law theory emphasizes a significant element in moral deliberation that some other theories play down: intention. In general, intention plays a larger role in natural law theory than it does in Kant’s categorical imperative. To many natural law theorists, the rightness of an action often depends on the intentions of the moral agent performing it.

Natural law theory is based on the notion that right actions are those that accord with natural law—the moral principles embedded in nature itself. How nature is reveals how it should be. The inclinations of human nature reveal the values that humans should live by.” (p114)

“According to Aquinas, at the heart of ... traditional [natural law] theory is the notion that right actions are those that accord with the natural law—the

moral principles that we can “read” clearly in the very structure of nature itself, including human nature. We can look into nature and somehow uncover moral standards because nature is a certain way: it is rationally ordered and teleological (goal-directed), with every part having its own purpose or end at which it naturally aims. From this notion about nature, traditional natural law theorists draw the following conclusion: How nature is reveals how it should be. The goals to which nature inclines reveal the values that we should embrace and the moral purposes to which we should aspire.” (p109)

“[Aquinas noted in his writings that humans] ... unlike the rest of nature, are rational creatures, capable of understanding, deliberation, and free choice. Since all of nature is ordered and rational, only rational beings such as humans can peer into it and discern the inclinations in their nature, derive from the natural tendencies the natural laws, and apply the laws to their actions and their lives. Humans have the gift of reason (a gift from God, Aquinas says), and reason gives us access to the laws.

Reason therefore is the foundation of morality. Judging the rightness of actions, then, is a matter of consulting reason, of considering rational grounds for moral beliefs. It follows from these points that the natural (moral) laws are both objective and universal. The general principles of right and wrong do not vary from person to person or culture to culture. The dynamics of each situation may alter how a principle is applied, and not every situation has a relevant principle, but principles do not change with the tide. The natural laws are the natural laws. Further, they are not only binding on all persons, but they can be known by all persons.” (p110)

“The absolutism of natural law theory arises from the notion that nature is authoritatively teleological. Nature aims toward particular ends that are ordained by the divine, and the values inherent in this arrangement cannot

and must not be ignored or altered. How nature is reveals how it should be. Period. But the teleological character of nature has never been established by logical argument or empirical science—at least not to the satisfaction of most philosophers and scientists. In fact, science (including evolutionary theory) suggests that nature is not teleological at all but instead random and purposeless, changing and adapting according to scientific laws, blind cause and effect, chance mutation, and competition among species. Moreover, the idea that values can somehow be extracted from the facts of nature is as problematic for natural law theory as it is for ethical egoism and utilitarianism.” (p113)

“And even if we could accurately identify human inclinations, there seems to be no reliable procedure for uncovering the corresponding moral values or telling whether moral principles should be absolutist.” (p114)

 12. *What is the doctrine of double effect?*

- “As we have seen, moral principles—especially absolutist rules—can give rise to conflicts of duties. Kant’s view on conflicting perfect duties is that such inconsistencies cannot happen. The natural law tradition gives a different answer: Conflicts between duties are possible, but they can be resolved by applying the doctrine of double effect. This principle pertains to situations in which an action has both good and bad effects. It says that performing a good action may be permissible even if it has bad effects, but performing a bad action for the purpose of achieving good effects is never permissible.” (pp 110-111)

❖ Chapter 7 – Virtue Ethics: Be A Good Person

➤ Review Questions

- ✚ 1. How does virtue ethics differ from duty-based ethics?
5. What important elements do virtue ethicists think are missing from traditional duty-based ethics?
6. How do virtue ethicists use moral exemplars?
8. What is the chief argument against virtue ethics? How can the virtue ethicist respond?

- “Nonconsequentialist moral theories are concerned with the moral nature of actions, for the right-making characteristics of actions determine the rightness of conduct. Virtue ethics, however, takes a different turn. Virtue ethics is a theory of morality that makes virtue the central concern. When confronted with a moral problem, a utilitarian or a Kantian theorist asks, “What should I do?” But a virtue ethicist asks, in effect, “What should I be?” For the former, moral conduct is primarily a matter of following or applying a moral principle or rule to a particular situation, and morality is mainly duty-based. For the latter, moral conduct is something that emanates from a person’s moral virtues, from his or her moral character, not from obedience to moral laws.” (p136)
- “Contemporary virtue ethicists are also Aristotelian in believing that a pure duty-based morality of rule adherence represents a barren, one-dimensional conception of the moral life. First, they agree with Aristotle that the cultivation of virtues is not merely a moral requirement—it is a way (some would say the only way) to ensure human flourishing and the good life. Second, they maintain that a full-blown ethics must take into account motives, feelings, intentions, and moral wisdom—factors that they think duty-based morality neglects.” (p137)
- “Virtue-based ethics seems to meet the minimum requirement of

coherence, and it appears to be generally consistent with our commonsense moral judgments and moral experience. Nevertheless critics have taken it to task, with most of the strongest criticisms centering on alleged problems with applying the theory—in other words, with usefulness (Criterion 3).

The critics' main contention is that appeals to virtues or virtuous character without reference to principles of duty cannot give us any useful guidance in deciding what to do. Suppose we are trying to decide what to do when a desperately poor stranger steals money from us. Should we have him arrested? Give him even more money? Ignore the whole affair? According to virtue ethics, we should do what a virtuous person would do, or do what moral exemplars such as Jesus or Buddha would do, or do what is benevolent or conscientious. But what exactly would a virtuous person do? Or what precisely is the benevolent or conscientious action? As many philosophers see it, the problem is that virtue ethics says that the right action is the one performed by the virtuous person and that the virtuous person is the one who performs the right action. But this is to argue in a circle and to give us no help in figuring out what to do. To avoid this circularity, they say, we must appeal to some kind of moral standard or principle to evaluate the action itself. Before we can decide if a person is virtuous, we need to judge if her actions are right or wrong—and such judgments take us beyond virtue ethics.

Some argue in a similar vein by pointing out that a person may possess all the proper virtues and still be unable to tell right from wrong actions.

Likewise, we know that it is possible for a virtuous person to act entirely from virtue—and still commit an immoral act. This shows, critics say, that the rightness of actions does not necessarily (or invariably) depend on the content of one's character. We seem to have independent moral

standards—independent of character considerations—by which we judge the moral permissibility of actions.

The virtue theorist can respond to these criticisms by asserting that there actually is plenty of moral guidance to be had in statements about virtues and vices.

Another usefulness criticism crops up because of apparent conflicts between virtues. What should you do if you have to choose between performing or not performing a particular action, and each option involves the same two virtues but in contradictory ways?

The proponent of virtue ethics has a ready reply to this criticism: Some duty-based moral theories, such as Kantian ethics, are also troubled by conflicts (conflicts of rules or principles, for example). Obviously the existence of such conflicts is not a fatal flaw in duty-based ethics, and so it must not be in virtue approaches either. When principles seem to conflict, the duty-based theorist must determine if the conflict is real and, if so, if it can be resolved (by, say, weighting one principle more than another). Virtue ethics, the argument goes, can exercise the same kind of options. Some might observe, however, that incorporating a weighting rule or similar standard into virtue ethics seems to make the theory a blend of duty-based and virtue-based features." (pp 139-141)

3. *What, according to Aristotle, [what] must humans do to achieve eudaimonia?*

- “For Aristotle, every living being has an end toward which it naturally aims. Life is teleological; it is meant not just to be something but to aspire toward something, to fulfill its proper function. What is the proper aim of human beings? Aristotle argues that the true goal of humans—their greatest good—is eudaimonia, which means “happiness” or “flourishing” and refers to the full realization of the good life. To achieve eudaimonia, human beings must fulfill the function that is natural and distinctive to them: living fully in accordance with reason. The life of reason entails a life of virtue because the virtues themselves are rational modes of behaving. Thus Aristotle says, “Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with complete or perfect virtue.” The virtuous life both helps human beings achieve true happiness and is the realization of true happiness. Virtues make you good, and they help you have a good life.” (p136)

9. *What is the ethics of care?*

- “Associated with virtue ethics is an approach known as the ethics of care. The ethics of care is a perspective on moral issues that emphasizes close personal relationships and moral virtues such as compassion, love, and sympathy. It contrasts dramatically with traditional moral theories that are preoccupied with principles, rules, and legalistic moral reasoning. The ethics of care is probably best characterized as an important component of virtue ethics (or of any approach to morality), though some prefer to think of it as a full-fledged moral theory in its own right.” (p141)