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**A Short Primer on Ethics**

[The following definitions were excerpted from The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu)]

Virtue Ethics:

Virtue ethics is currently one of three major approaches in normative ethics. It may, initially, be identified as the one that emphasizes the virtues, or moral character, in contrast to the approach which emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that which emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism). Suppose it is obvious that someone in need should be helped. A utilitarian will point to the fact that the consequences of doing so will maximise well-being, a deontologist to the fact that, in doing so the agent will be acting in accordance with a moral rule such as “Do unto others as you would be done by” and a virtue ethicist to the fact that helping the person would be charitable or benevolent.

Utilitarian Ethics:

Utilitarianism is one of the most powerful and persuasive approaches to normative ethics in the history of philosophy. Though not fully articulated until the 19th century, proto-utilitarian positions can be discerned throughout the history of ethical theory.

Though there are many varieties of the view discussed, utilitarianism is generally held to be the view that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good. There are many ways to spell out this general claim. One thing to note is that the theory is a form of consequentialism: the right action is understood entirely in terms of consequences produced. What distinguishes utilitarianism from egoism has to do with the scope of the relevant consequences. On the utilitarian view one ought to maximize the overall good — that is, consider the good of others as well as one's own good.

The Classical Utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, identified the good with pleasure, so, like Epicurus, were hedonists about value. They also held that we ought to maximize the good, that is, bring about ‘the greatest amount of good for the greatest number.

Deontology Ethics:

The word deontology derives from the Greek words for duty (deon) and science (or study) of (logos). In contemporary moral philosophy, deontology is one of those kinds of normative theories regarding which choices are morally required, forbidden, or permitted. In other words, deontology falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories), in contrast to (aretaic [virtue] theories) that — fundamentally, at least — guide and assess what kind of person (in terms of character traits) we are and should be. And within that domain, deontologists — those who subscribe to deontological theories of morality — stand in opposition to consequentialists.

Feminist Ethics:

Feminist Ethics is an attempt to revise, reformulate, or rethink traditional ethics to the extent it depreciates or devalues women's moral experience. Among others, feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar faults traditional ethics for letting women down in five related ways. First, it shows less concern for women's as opposed to men's issues and interests. Second, traditional ethics views as trivial the moral issues that arise in the so-called private world, the realm in which women do housework and take care of children, the infirm, and the elderly. Third, it implies that, in general, women are not as morally mature or deep as men. Fourth, traditional ethics overrates culturally masculine traits like “independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, and death,” while it underrates culturally feminine traits like “interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace, and life.” Fifth, and finally, it favors “male” ways of moral reasoning that emphasize rules, rights, universality, and impartiality over “female” ways of moral reasoning that emphasize relationships, responsibilities, particularity, and partiality (Jaggar, “Feminist Ethics,” 1992).

Feminists have developed a wide variety of gender-centered approaches to ethics, each of which addresses one or more of the five ways traditional ethics has failed or neglected women. Some feminist ethicists emphasize issues related to women's traits and behaviors, particularly their care-giving ones. In contrast, other feminist ethicists emphasize the political, legal, economic, and/or ideological causes and effects of women's second-sex status. But be these emphases as they may, all feminist ethicists share the same goal: the creation of a gendered ethics that aims to eliminate or at least ameliorate the oppression of any group of people, but most particularly women (Jaggar, “Feminist Ethics,” 1992).

Environmental Ethics:

Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents. This entry covers: (1) the challenge of environmental ethics to the anthropocentrism (i.e., human-centeredness) embedded in traditional western ethical thinking; (2) the early development of the discipline in the 1960s and 1970s; (3) the connection of deep ecology, feminist environmental ethics, and social ecology to politics; (4) the attempt to apply traditional ethical theories, including consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, to support contemporary environmental concerns; and (5) the focus of environmental literature on wilderness, and possible future developments of the discipline.

Business Ethics:

In concept, business ethics is the applied ethics discipline that addresses the moral features of commercial activity. In practice, however, a dizzying array of projects is pursued under its rubric. Programs of legal compliance, empirical studies into the moral beliefs and attitudes of business people, a panoply of best-practices claims (in the name of their moral merit or their contribution to business success), arguments for (or against) mandatory worker participation in management, and attempts at applying traditional ethical theories, theories of justice, or theories of the state to firms or to the functional areas of business are all advanced as contributions to business ethics—even and especially in its academic literature. These projects vary considerably and often seem to have little in common other than the conviction, held by those who pursue them, that whatever each is pursuing is business ethics.

Business Ethics and Globalization:

Computer ethics today is rapidly evolving into a broader and even more important field, which might reasonably be called “global information ethics”. Global networks like the Internet and especially the world-wide-web are connecting people all over the earth. As Krystyna Gorniak-Kocikowska perceptively notes in her paper, “The Computer Revolution and the Problem of Global Ethics” [Gorniak-Kocikowska, 1996], for the first time in history, efforts to develop mutually agreed standards of conduct, and efforts to advance and defend human values, are being made in a truly global context. So, for the first time in the history of the earth, ethics and values will be debated and transformed in a context that is not limited to a particular geographic region, or constrained by a specific religion or culture. This may very well be one of the most important social developments in history. Consider just a few of the global issues:

Global Laws: If computer users in the United States, for example, wish to protect their freedom of speech on the internet, whose laws apply? Nearly two hundred countries are already interconnected by the internet, so the United States Constitution (with its First Amendment protection for freedom of speech) is just a “local law” on the internet — it does not apply to the rest of the world. How can issues like freedom of speech, control of “pornography”, protection of intellectual property, invasions of privacy, and many others to be governed by law when so many countries are involved? If a citizen in a European country, for example, has internet dealings with someone in a far-away land, and the government of that land considers those dealings to be illegal, can the European be tried by the courts in the far-away country?

Global Cyberbusiness: The world is very close to having technology that can provide electronic privacy and security on the internet sufficient to safely conduct international business transactions. Once this technology is in place, there will be a rapid expansion of global “cyberbusiness”. Nations with a technological infrastructure already in place will enjoy rapid economic growth, while the rest of the world lags behind. What will be the political and economic fallout from rapid growth of global cyberbusiness? Will accepted business practices in one part of the world be perceived as “cheating” or “fraud” in other parts of the world? Will a few wealthy nations widen the already big gap between rich and poor? Will political and even military confrontations emerge?

Global Education: If inexpensive access to the global information net is provided to rich and poor alike — to poverty-stricken people in ghettos, to poor nations in the “third world”, etc. — for the first time in history, nearly everyone on earth will have access to daily news from a free press; to texts, documents and art works from great libraries and museums of the world; to political, religious and social practices of peoples everywhere. What will be the impact of this sudden and profound “global education” upon political dictatorships, isolated communities, coherent cultures, religious practices, etc.? As great universities of the world begin to offer degrees and knowledge modules via the internet, will “lesser” universities be damaged or even forced out of business?

Information Rich and Information Poor: The gap between rich and poor nations, and even between rich and poor citizens in industrialized countries, is already disturbingly wide. As educational opportunities, business and employment opportunities, medical services and many other necessities of life move more and more into cyberspace, will gaps between the rich and the poor become even worse?

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[The following is not from the SEP]

Global Ethics:

According to Kimberly Hutching’s Global Ethics: An Introduction (2010), the concept of Global Ethics can be “defined as a field of theoretical enquiry that addresses ethical questions and problems arising out of the global interconnection and interdependence of the world’s population. On this account, Global Ethics investigates and evaluates the standards that should govern the behavior of individual and collective actors as members of, or participants in, a global world” (9-10).