English 1121, Prof. Sean Scanlan, 2020

**A Short Introduction to Five Types of Ethics**

1. Deontology Ethics:

The word deontology derives from the Greek words for duty (deon). 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 or rules that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories), in contrast to virtue theories that guide and assess what kind of person (in terms of character traits) we are and should be. Deontologists — those who subscribe to deontological theories of morality — stand in opposition to consequentialists (utilitarians).

2. Virtue Ethics:

Virtue ethics addresses this fundamentally important question: what sort of person should I be and how should I live. Virtue ethics focuses on the following ideas: the virtues themselves, motives and moral character, moral education, moral wisdom, friendship and family relationships, a deep concept of happiness, and the role of the emotions in our moral life.

3. Utilitarian Ethics:

Utilitarianism is 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. 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 above three types of ethics are known as normative ethics.

4. Feminist Ethics:

Feminist Ethics is an attempt to revise, reformulate, or rethink traditional ethics because traditional ethics often devalues women's moral experience. Philosopher Alison Jaggar faults traditional ethics for letting women down in five related ways. First, traditional normative ethics often show 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, traditional ethics 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, traditional ethics 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).

5. 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). Such behaviors are connected these major focal points: access to global markets, climate change, and a broad set of human rights related to health, education, clean air and water, labor rights, living wages, and equality for all.

Example:

The following example helps us to recognize the differences between these five types of ethics. Suppose that someone has fallen and it is obvious that they should be helped up. A deontologist might point to the fact that in doing so the person will be acting in accordance with a moral rule such as “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” or “I would like to be helped up if I were to fall down.” A virtue ethicist might point to the fact that helping the person would be charitable or benevolent, and if one calls herself a benevolent person, then she must help. A utilitarian might point to the fact that the consequences of helping the person who has fallen will maximize that person’s well-being; but a utilitarian might not help the person if her back is tender and might get hurt by helping (self-interest); additionally, a utilitarian might help the fallen person even if doing so hurts another person (the outcome is more important than the steps taken). The feminist might help the person if she (or he) identifies with those who care for the elderly, the young, the frail, or believes in sharing, trust, and body issues. A global ethicist might help the person up because the fallen person is interrelated in terms of being human, and it is ethical to treat all equally. [note that this is a very simplified example and real-world ethical decisions do not fit neatly into any one category. Sometimes ethical types overlap]

The top three definitions are adapted from *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu). If you would like to read more on these types, I suggest using this encyclopedia.