Prof. Sean Scanlan

Spring 2012

**A Short Introduction to Ethics**

 The following definitions are adapted 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. Virtue ethics focuses on the following ideas: the virtues themselves, motives and moral character, moral education, moral wisdom or discernment, friendship and family relationships, a deep concept of happiness, the role of the emotions in our moral life and the fundamentally important questions of what sort of person I should be and how we should live.

The following example helps us to recognize the differences between the three types of normative ethics (virtue, utilitarian, deontic): 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 will point 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 will point to the fact that helping the person would be charitable or benevolent.

Utilitarian Ethics:

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. 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.

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 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.

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).

\*\*\*The following is not from the SEP, but may be helpful

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).