

Ethical Systems Handout

Some Ethical Decision Systems (Pollock 2014, p. 25-48)

Structured set of principles that define what is moral. We use ethical systems to make judgements.

Ethics of Virtue:

Moral virtue comes from habit. One does good because of pattern of lifetime.

What is good is that which confirms to the "Golden Mean". Four virtues of Socrates and Plato are justice, wisdom, fortitude, and temperance. One does good because of patterns of a lifetime. Six pillars of character are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

Natural Law:

(St. Augustine): What is good is that which is natural; presupposes what is good natural is what is good.

Preservation of one's own being is a natural inclination.

"Natural" human rights.

Without reference to supernatural figure.

Religion:

What is good is that which conforms to "God's"/gods will. Provides guidelines and directions on how to live one's life. Only possible controversy comes from human interpretation of God's commands. "Golden rule" in many religions. The authority of the god/gods figure is the root of all morality; basic conceptions of good and evil come from interpretations of "God's" will.

Ethical Formalism:

(Kant): What is good that which conforms to the categorical imperative. Deontological system emphasizing the intent of the actor as the element of morality. If action is from good will, it is moral even if it resulted in bad consequences. Individuals must follow self-imposed moral laws and reason to determine right actions.

Utilitarianism:

(Bentham, Mill, and Locke) What is good is that which results in the greatest utility for the greatest number. Teleological system concerned with the consequences or ends of an action to determine goodness. "The end justifies the means." Looks to the long-term consequences of rules to determine morality.

Ethics of Care:

What is good is that which meets the needs of those concerned. Rousseau argued compassion is basis of human action and morality is based in emotion rather than rationality. Leads to different questions, not necessarily different outcomes.

Egoism:

What is good is that which benefits me. What is good for one's individual survival and happiness is moral. Impossible to perform a completely selfless act. Smith argued individuals pursuing their own personal good would lead nations to prosper as well.

Five-Step Solution to Clarify Dilemmas (Pollock 2014, p. 24)

1. Identify the facts;
2. Identify the relevant values and concepts;
3. Identify all the possible dilemmas for each party;
4. Decide the most immediate moral or ethical issue facing the individual; and
5. Resolve the dilemma by utilizing an ethical system (Pollock 2014, p. 17). Ethical systems are a source of moral beliefs, underlying premises from which you make judgments (*ibid*, p.24).