# Unit 1 Assignment

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BU 642-8 Business and Labor Law

When the topic of ethics surfaces, it is usually in the context of a public official and the public office that is held by that person. The terms ethics violations, ethics trial, and ethics case are common place with public office. It would seem that politics is the only place where ethics is relevant. This is due to the public nature of the political arena and the fact that public office is “public”. Therefore, this sector comes across in mass and digital media, e.g. mostly news reports, and receives a lot of exposure.

Ethics covers more space, in reality, than is actually perceived and crosses all boundaries. In fact, ethics is without bounds. Ethics applies to individual and personal/private lives, and our public lives such as our life within our community and our country. This reality is not obvious due to the private nature of the private sector, thus ethical issues remain private in such settings. In this paper we will examine ethics, the three ethical theories, compare and contrast each of them, exam the strengths and weakness of each, and the philosophers of those particular frameworks.

“Ethics: A theory or system dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions.” (Fieser, 2017)

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ethics as “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.” ("Ethics", n.d.) This good character can be relative to one’s surroundings and thus ethics is a matter of learned behavior. Character, good behavior is taught and is not a matter of law. Laws are enforced, required, and punishable by the government. Though largely unwritten, ethics address what is considered to be right as opposed to what is considered to be bad. Therefore, ethics endorses what is considered to be “right” behavior.

A closer look at ethics reveals that ethics can reach a higher level of complexity. Ethics can be official or unofficial. One can have choices or there can be no choices and the ethical action can be required. In a community setting, people can elect to abide by ethics or not. The choice to disregard ethics in the community may be met with little or no repercussions. In a business setting, ethics take a slightly different form and become official and enforceable to the looming threat of written reprimands and eventually being fired from job placement.

Oftentimes, the word ethics is used to describe morals. Though very similar there is a slight difference between morals and ethics. Morals are more individualistic and serve as a personal code of conduct we choose to follow. The keyword being choose. We actually select the morals we wish to follow, which may be learned in a variety of ways. Morals serve as the basis of ethics. When morals are standardized as written rules regarding the level of conduct expected of everyone within a particular setting, it is then that morals evolve into ethics.

“Ethics deals with codes of conduct set my policies in the workplace and morality is the standards that we individually set for ourselves in regards to right and wrong.” (Weinstein, 2018)

There are three theorical schools of thought regarding ethics:

1. Consequentialist theories
2. Deontology
3. Ethics of Virtue
4. **Consequentialist ethical theory**

In the simplest of terms Consequentialist ethical theory bases what can be considered the correct ethical behavior through the examination of the consequences of the behavior. This ethical theory is all about the impact.

There are a couple of subdivisions of Consequentialist ethical theory

1. **Philosophical Egoism**
   1. Morals are based on personal interests or personal desires. As long as one’s personal interest is satisfied, the morals appear to be right. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is a philosopher belonging to the ethical theory of philosophical egoism. This theory is concerned with the outcome of the personal benefits, hence the egoism of the philosophy.
2. **Utilitarianism**
   1. Morals are based on the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people. This ethical philosophy is in direct opposition to philosophical egoism. It is void of the ego component and considers the group over the individual. It interesting that this is a quantitative approach rather than qualitative. Philosophical egoism is certainly more qualitative
3. **Deontology**

Where consequentialist ethical theory focuses on the consequences, i.e. results, deontology does not consider the consequences. How then can right and wrong, what is ethical, be determined? According to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) an action is morally right if it can be applied to all beings in a consistent manner. This consistency can be accomplished through generalization. This generalization comes in the form a set of principles that all should follow regardless of the outcome. For instance, always tell the truth. Whether it is embarrassing to one’s self or others, could mean the difference to admitting fault and avoiding responsibility of the fault, it adheres to honesty and integrity.

1. **Ethics of Virtue**

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) believed that people should develop their virtues while decreasing vices. The ethics of virtue can be viewed as developing the correct levels of character. We have a natural inclination or urge. There is deficient level of character and an excessive level and in between the two exists a proper balance, virtuous mean. Example: we have a natural desire toward fear of danger. Cowardice is the deficient vice while Rashness is the excessive vice. The proper balance between both is courage.

**Table 1.**

**Aristotle’s Twelve Virtues**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Desire | Vice of Deficiency | Virtuous Mean | Vice of Excess |
| Anger | Spiritlessness | Good Temper | Ill-Temper |
| Fear of Danger | Cowardice | Courage | Rashness |
| Pleasure | Insensibility | Temperance | Intemperance |
| Give Money | Stinginess | Generosity | Extravagance |
| Self-worth | Self-loathing | Self-respect | Arrogance |
| Great-giving | Pettiness | Magnanimity | Vulgarity |
| Achievement | Under-Ambition | Proper-ambition | Over-Ambition |
| Truth | False modesty | Truthfulness | Boastfulness |
| Social life | Unfriendliness | Friendliness | Flattery |
| Amusement | Humorlessness | Wittiness | Buffoonery |
| Fear of Disgrace | Shamelessness | Proper shame | Excessive shame |
| Resent injustice | Malice | Righteous indignation | Envy |

Note. Reprinted from VIRTUES (2017), by Fieser, retrieved from https://www.utm.edu/staff/jfieser/class/300/virtues.htm

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ethical Theory | Strength | Weakness |
| Consequentialist | Flexible | Consequentially oriented  Self-centered  Correct behavior is relative to desire. |
| Deontology | Non-consequentially oriented  Encourages ethical behavior cause it is the right thing to do.  Selfless | Less flexible |
| Virtue | Character development  Broad | Limited  Lacks focus |

I, personally, believe that best ethical theory is relative to the situation.

**Conclusion**

Morals are individually correct conduct. They are unwritten and unofficial rules that are usually self-subscribed. Ethics arises from morals. Ethics are official rules regarding correct conduct that all members of the setting are expected to follow. That group setting can be business, civic, socially-oriented. There are three theorical schools of thought regarding ethics:

1. Consequentialist theories
2. Deontology
3. Ethics of Virtue

Each ethical theorical school has strengths and weaknesses. One theory may be better suited for a particular circumstance.

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