





**MBA 818**  
**BUSINESS ETHICS AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

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## **CONTENTS**

### **PAGE**

<u>Introduction.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Course Contents.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Course Aim.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Course Objectives.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Course Materials.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Study Units.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>The Assignment File.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Tutor-Marked Assignment.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Final Examination and Grading.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Summary .....</u>	<u>4</u>

## **Introduction**

MBA 818 Business Ethics and Corporate Governance, is a semester course work of two (2) credit units. It is a form of preparation for all students taking the MBA programme in the School of Business and Human Resources Management.

The course consists of 21 units. It provides an introduction to basic ethical theory. Each unit in the last three parts on ethics devotes several pages to laying out the empirical information that the decision maker

must have if he or she is to apply morality to reality. The second part of the course concentrates on why corporate governance is important. The goal of every firm is to increase its shareholders' wealth. However, the firm's value diminishes when it does not have the trust of its shareholders.

Without the trust of investors, firms will not be able to obtain capital and grow. The entire economy suffers when trust is broken. Ineffective corporate governance can instill confidence and trust in companies and markets. How this can be achieved is fully covered in the course.

The final two units of the course cover decided cases for discussion in tutorial classes.

### **What You Will Learn in this Course**

The course contents consist of An overview of Business Ethics; Ethical Practices in Business; Moral Development and Reasoning; Business Ethics and Morality in International Context; Ethics Theory; Ethics, Justice and Business; The Business System; Ethics in the Marketplace; The Ethics of Consumer Production and Marketing; Ethics and Environmentalism; The Ethics of Job Description; The Individuals in the Organisation; Corporations and Corporate Governance; Executive Incentives; Accountants and Auditors; The Board of Directors; Investment Banking and Security Analysts; Creditors and Credit Rating Agencies; Shareholders and Shareholders Activism; Corporate Takeovers; The Governance Mechanism; Corporate Citizenship.

### **Course Aims**

The main aim of this course is to further expose students to Business Ethics and Corporate Governance as regards ethical behavior as the best long-term business strategy for a company.

The course is also aimed at making students appreciate the importance of trust of investors without which firms will not be able to obtain new capital and grow.

The aims will be achieved by:

- Explaining business and ethics
- Explaining corporate governance
- Identifying the importance of applying morality to reality
- Identifying the importance of corporate governance to the entire economy of a nation.

- Identifying the major contributors to business ethics and corporate governance.
- Identifying the contribution of the “whistleblowers.”

## Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- Explain the meaning of business ethics
- Explain corporate governance
- Identify the importance of corporate governance
- Apply morality to reality.
- Apply effective corporate governance and instill confidence and trust in various companies and markets.

## Course Materials

The major components of the course are:

- The Course Guide
- Study Units
- Text books
- The Assignment File

## Study Units

### Module 1

<u>Unit 1</u>	<u>An Overview of Business Ethics</u>
<u>Unit 2</u>	<u>Ethical Principles in Business</u>
<u>Unit 3</u>	<u>Moral Development and Reasoning</u>
<u>Unit 4</u>	<u>Business Ethics and Morality in International Context</u>
<u>Unit 5</u>	<u>Ethics Theory</u>

### Module 2

<u>Unit 1</u>	<u>Ethics, Justice and Business</u>
<u>Unit 2</u>	<u>The Business System</u>
<u>Unit 3</u>	<u>Ethics in the Market Place</u>
<u>Unit 4</u>	<u>The Ethics of Consumer Production and Marketing</u>
<u>Unit 5</u>	<u>Ethics and Environmentalism</u>

### Module 3

<u>Unit 1</u>	<u>The Ethics of Job Discrimination</u>
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<u>Unit 2</u>	<u>The Individual In the Organisation</u>
<u>Unit 3</u>	<u>Corporations and Corporate Governance</u>
<u>Unit 4</u>	<u>Executive Incentives</u>
<u>Unit 5</u>	<u>Accountants and Auditors</u>

#### **Module 4**

<u>Unit 1</u>	<u>The Board of Directors</u>
<u>Unit 2</u>	<u>Investment Banks and Securities Analysts</u>
<u>Unit 3</u>	<u>Creditors and Credit Rating Agencies</u>
<u>Unit 4</u>	<u>Shareholders and Shareholders Activism</u>
<u>Unit 5</u>	<u>Corporate Takeovers: A Governance Mechanism</u>
<u>Unit 6</u>	<u>Corporate Citizenship</u>

The first eleven units of this course concentrate on Business Ethics Concepts i.e., Units 1 to 11, while the next ten units (Units 12 to 21) concentrate on Corporate Governance.

Each study unit will take at least two hours to handle. They all contain an introduction, objectives, the main content, exercises, conclusion, summary, references and the tutor- marked assignment.

You are expected to study the materials, reflect on them and do the exercises. Some of the exercises will necessitate your visiting some business organisation and web sites.

You are advised to do so in order to appreciate the importance of Ethics and Corporate Governance to the growth of the economy of a nation and the world at large.

There are also lists of textbooks, under references and further readings. They are to give you additional information.

Practise the tutor- marked assignments and the self assessment exercises in each unit for additional and greater understanding of the course. By doing all these, you will achieve the stated learning objectives.

#### **The Assignment File**

There will be five assignments and you are expected to do all assignments by following the schedule presented below.

Business Ethics Concepts and Cases  
(Units 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) -----1

Business Ethics Concepts and Cases



(Units 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11) -----2

Corporate Governance

(Units 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16) ----3

Corporate Governance

(Units 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21) -----4

### **Tutor-Marked Assignment**

In doing the tutor- marked assignment, you are expected to

- Apply what you have learnt in the the study units
- Turn in your assignment to you tutor for grading. They are five in number and they constitute 30% of the total score.

### **Final Examination and Grading**

At the end of the course, you will write the final examination. It will attract the remaining 70%, this makes a total final score of 100%.

### **Summary**

Course MBA 818 Business Ethics and Corporate Governance should equip you with an in depth knowledge and appreciation of the importance of ethics in business and corporate governance in the economy. On completion of the course you will find out that without the trust of investors, firms will not be able to obtain new capital and grow and then the entire economy will suffer. Effective corporate governance can instill confidence, and as a result trust in our companies and markets.

MBA 818  
GOVERNANCE

BUSINESS ETHICS AND CORPORATE

| Course Code

MBA 818

Course Title

Business Ethics and Corporate  
Governance

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<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>Module 1 .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Unit 1 An Overview of Business Ethics.....	1
Unit 2 Ethical Principles in Business.....	10
Unit 3 Moral Development and Reasoning.....	24
Unit 4 Business Ethics and Morality in International Context.....	43
Unit 5 Ethics Theory.....	69
<b>Module 2 .....</b>	<b>94</b>
Unit 1 Ethics, Justice and Business.....	94
Unit 2 The Business System.....	111
Unit 3 Ethics in the Market Place.....	138
Unit 4 The Ethics of Consumer Production and Marketing.....	169
Unit 5 Ethics and Environmentalism .....	193
<b>Module 3 .....</b>	<b>219</b>
Unit 1 The Ethics of Job Discrimination.....	219
Unit 2 The Individuals in the Organisation.....	233
Unit 3 Corporations and Corporate Governance.....	252
Unit 4 Executive Incentives.....	264
Unit 5 Accountants and Auditors.....	274
<b>Module 4 .....</b>	<b>283</b>
Unit 1 The Board of Directors.....	283
Unit 2 Investment Bank Security Analysts.....	298
Unit 3 Creditors and Credit Rating Agencies.....	307
Unit 4 Shareholders and Shareholders Activism.....	316
Unit 5 Corporate Takeovers: A Governance Mechanism.....	324
Unit 6 Corporate Citizenship.....	335

## **MODULE 1**

Unit 1 An Overview of Business Ethics

Unit 2 Ethical Principles in Business

Unit 3 Moral Development and Reasoning

Unit 4 Business Ethics and Morality in International Context

Unit 5 Ethics Theory

## **UNIT 1 AN OVERVIEW OF BUSINESS ETHICS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Meaning of Business Ethics
  - 3.2 Business Ethics and its Issues
  - 3.3 Morality
  - 3.4 Ethics and the Law
  - 3.5 Significance of Business Ethics
  - 3.6 Influences on Business Ethics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We begin in this unit by discussing some preliminary topics like the definition of ethics and business ethics; the nature of business ethics and some of the issues it raises. Finally, the unit introduces you to moral reasoning as it relates to business ethics.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- define Ethics and Business Ethics
- identify the six basic stages of moral development.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Meaning of Business Ethics

Business ethics has been a growth area in the business world in recent times. Before the advent of business ethics, business transactions have largely been conducted on the principle of caveat emptor, *meaning* *buyer beware*. Much has changed in recent times. The law is the most important source of ensuring that consumers receive a fair deal from retailers and manufacturers. Some of these laws in Nigeria include: the Price Control Act of 1970 as amended by the Price Control Act, 1977; Nigeria Standard Organisation of Nigeria Act of 1971; National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control Act of 1974; Weight and Measures Act of 1974, etc. These and other related laws are essentially an imposition of moral consideration on business.

However, this does not imply that business surrenders to the law to resolve its moral dilemmas. And this is where business ethics becomes relevant. What is ethics? And what is business ethics?

Ethics refers to the principles and standards of moral behaviour that are accepted by society as right versus wrong. To make the right choice, or at least the best choice from among competing alternatives, individuals must think through the consequences of their actions. Ethics can be defined as a set of principles of right conduct. It can also be defined as a theory or a system of moral values. Business ethics is the application of moral standards to business situations.

Many firms have a set of policies on business conduct and compliance. The policies embrace ethics, internal controls, conflict of interest and a host of other areas, all of which are designed to promote good and ethical business practices. Employees are acquainted with these policies and are made to sign undertakings to maintain them. As a matter of policy, the company is ready to concede business opportunity in favour of its code of ethics

#### 3.2 Business Ethics and its Issues

In a now-classic study of the Ethics of Business Managers, Raymond Baum had asked more than 100 businesspeople, “What does ethical principles mean to you?” Typical of their replies were the following:

“Before coming to the interview, to make sure that I knew what we would talk about, I looked up ethics in my dictionary. I read it and can’t understand it. I don’t know what the concept means...”

“Ethics is what my feelings tell me is right. But this is not a fixed standard, and that makes problems. Ethics means accepted standards in terms of your personal and social welfare; what you believe is right. But what confuses me...is the possibility that I have been misguided, or that somebody else has been poorly educated. Maybe each of us thinks he knows what is ethical, but we differ. How can you tell who is right then?”

Of the businesspeople Baum had interviewed, 50 per cent defined ethics as “what my feelings tell me is right,” 25 per cent defined it in religious terms as what is “in accord with my religious beliefs,” and 18 per cent defined it as what “conforms to the golden rule.” Yet feelings are a notoriously inadequate basis on which to make decisions of any sort, and religious authority and the golden rule have been rather devastatingly criticised as inadequate foundations for judging the ethics of business companies. What then do ethics and ethical principles mean?

According to the dictionary, the term ethics has a variety of meanings. One of the meanings given to it is: “the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group.” Another definition of ethics is given as “the study of the general nature of moral choices to be made by a person .Ethics can also be defined as “the rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession e.g. auditing ethics, medical ethics”. We sometimes use the term personal ethics, for example, when referring to the rule by which an individual lives his or her personal life. We use the term accounting ethics when referring to the code that guides the professional conduct of accountants (ICAN).

A more important meaning of ethics according to the dictionary is this: Ethics is “the study of morality.” Ethicists use the term ethics to refer primarily to the study of morality, just as chemists use the term chemistry to refer to a study of the properties of chemical substances. Although ethics deals with morality, it is not quite the same as morality. Ethics is a kind of investigation and that includes both the activity of investigating as well as the results of that investigation whereas morality is the subject matter that ethics investigates.

### **3.3 Morality**

So then, what, is morality? We can define morality as the standards that an individual or a group has about what is right and wrong, or good and evil.

Moral standards include the norms we have about the kinds of actions we believe are morally right and wrong as well as the values we place

on the kinds of actions we believe are morally good and morally bad. Moral norms can usually be expressed as general rules or statements, such as “Always tell the truth,” “It is wrong to kill innocent people,” or “Actions are right to the extent that they produce happiness.” Moral values can usually be expressed as statements describing objects or features of objects that have worth, such as “Honesty is good” and “Injustice is bad.”

Where do these standards come from? Typically, a person's standards are first imbibed as a child from family, friends and various societal influences such as church, school, television, magazines, music and associations. Later, as the person grows up, experience, learning and intellectual development may lead the maturing person to revise these standards. Some are discarded and new ones may be adopted to replace them. Through this maturing process, the person may develop standards that are more intellectually adequate and so more suited for dealing with the moral dilemmas of adult life.

What are the characteristics that distinguish moral standards from standards that are not moral? This is not an easy question to answer. However, ethicists have suggested five characteristics that help to pin down the nature of moral standards. First, moral standards deal with matters that we think can seriously injure or seriously benefit human beings. For example, most people in Nigerian society hold standards against theft, rape, enslavement, murder, child abuse, assault, slander, fraud, lawbreaking, and so on. All these plainly deal with matters that people feel are quite serious forms of injury.

Second, moral standards are not established or changed by the decisions of particular authoritative bodies. Laws and legal standards are established by the authority of a legislature or the decisions of voters. Moral standards, however, are not established by any authority, nor does their validity rest on voting procedures. Instead, the validity of moral standards rests on the adequacy of the reasons that are taken to support and justify them; so long as these reasons are adequate, the standards remain valid.

Third, and perhaps most striking, we feel that moral standards should be preferred to other values including (especially) self-interest. That is, if a person has a moral obligation to do something, then he or she is supposed to do it even if this conflicts with other, non-moral values or self-interest.

Fourth, and generally, moral standards are based on impartial considerations. The fact that you will benefit from a lie and that I will be harmed is irrelevant to whether lying is morally wrong or not.



Recent philosophers have expressed this point by saying that moral standards are based on “the moral point of view” that is, a point of view that does not evaluate standards according to whether they advance the interests of a particular individual or group, but one that goes beyond personal interests to a “universal” standpoint in which everyone’s interests are impartially counted as equal. Other philosophers have made the same point by saying that moral standards are based on the kinds of impartial reasons that an “ideal observer” or an “impartial spectator” would accept, or that in deciding moral matters “each counts for one and none for more than one.” As we shall see in the next unit, however, although impartiality is a characteristic of moral standard, it must be balanced with certain kinds of partiality, in particular, with the partiality that arises from legitimate caring and preference for those individuals with whom we have a special relationship, such as family members and friends. Although morality says that we should be impartial in those contexts where justice is called for, such as assigning salaries in a public company; it also identifies certain contexts, such as taking care of family members, where preferential caring for individuals may be morally legitimate and perhaps even morally required.

Last, moral standards are associated with special emotions and a special vocabulary. For example, if I act contrary to a moral standard, I will normally feel guilty, ashamed, or remorseful; I will characterise my behaviour as “immoral” or “wrong” and I will feel bad about myself and experience loss of self-esteem.

### **3.4 Ethics and the Law**

Many of the most important ethical values form the basis for legislation which governs business activity in general. However, while ethics deals with personal moral principles and values, laws express the standards of a society that can actually be enforced in court. Often, there is fine judgment to be made. If behaviour is not subject to legal penalties and seems reasonably ethical, it is still acceptable.

Using the framework of ethics and the law, a business may be strictly operated on principles which strive to be:

- **Ethical and legal:** Legal and ethical actions are both acceptable within the legal framework and societal norms. For example, any company with a moral and legal conduct falls into this category. This category involves private firms that are licensed in Nigeria which are equally into legal business e.g. legal chambers, auditing firms.

- Unethical and legal (e.g. selling arms to brutal military dictators). Legal and unethical is when the law supports what you are doing but it is unethical because the society frowns at it; e.g. the sale and use of tobacco products (cigarettes and cigars). The former minister of health, Professor Eytayo Lambo's article stated that about 100million people die of tobacco-related/induced/sicknesses every year in the world and 1million die every year in Nigeria .If a lot of people die from smoking tobacco yearly, it is then unethical.
- Ethical but illegal: (e.g. publishing stolen but revealing documents about government mismanagement). The law frowns at it but the society does not. Ethical but illegal patterns of behaviour also include offer of bribes (incentives) in order to secure a contract. In Nigeria, offering of bribe is seen as a way of life.
- Unethical and illegal: Unethical and illegal actions would imply making offerings that have been outlawed and are against societal norms, for example, the drug trade. Employing child labour is also illegal and unethical. The law does not support it and it is also unethical because the society frowns at it, e.g. marketing and consumption of cocaine and other hard drugs are banned and seen as unethical in Nigeria and most countries. Abortion is illegal and unethical in Nigeria.

The differences between legal and ethical behaviour is well represented in the model below.

Illegal & unethical	Legal & unethical
Illegal & ethical	Legal & ethical

Figure 1.1 The Legal and Ethical Dimensions of Marketing the Activity

Laws and regulations are promulgated especially in business to right the wrongs and unwholesome practices by businessmen. Therefore, laws and regulations exist to achieve the following:

- Protect consumers
- Regulate competition
- Protect organisations from each other
- Protect the society

### 3.5 Significance of Business Ethics

Why should businessmen be ethical in their conduct? Appearing to be ethical, it may be suggested, is simply good business. Other more specific significance of business ethics are as follows:

- Consumers are, arguably, more likely to buy from a company which can be seen to be acting ethically.
- Graduates are more likely to be attracted to companies which treat their employees fairly and give customers a fair deal.
- Ethical business practice is a means of forestalling legislation and stringent government regulations.
- Business ethics requires companies doing their bit to contribute towards a just and fair society, while also ensuring that environmental pollution is brought under control.
- Another significance of business ethics stems from the fact that businesses need to retain the vast amount of social power entrusted to them by the public.

### 3.6 Influences on Business Ethics

The extent of ethical behaviour of businesses is influenced by the following factors:

- Cultural differences: Culture is the way of life of people and transmitted from one generation to another. The extent of ethical behaviour is therefore a function of the culture of a particular country. For instance, what does it mean for a business to do the right thing in China, USA or Nigeria? Taking bribe is considered unethical in USA, whereas kick-back is considered a norm in Nigeria and several Third-World nations.
- Knowledge: Greater knowledge increases the chance of making the right decision. Business decisions not based on facts or a clear understanding of the consequences could harm employees, customers, the company, and other stakeholders. An employee or manager is held responsible for his/her decisions, actions or inactions. Therefore, the right questions should be asked all the time before decisions are taken.
- Organisational behaviour: The foundation of an ethical business climate is ethical awareness and clear standards of behaviour. Companies that strongly enforce company codes of conduct and provide ethics training help employees recognise and reason through ethical problems. Similarly, companies with strong ethical practices set a good example for employees to follow. On

the other hand, companies that commit unethical acts in the course of doing business open the door for employees to follow suit.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

You should have learnt and understood generally, the overview of business ethics and the basis for legislation which governs business activity.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Ethics is the theory or system of moral values. It is the rules or standards governing the conduct of a person, organisation or company.

Business is a commercial activity engaged in as a means of livelihood or profit or an entity which engages in such activities. Hence, business ethics is the study of moral right and wrong as they apply to business organisations, institutions and behaviours. The basic stages of moral development and the nature of moral standards are:

- Moral standards deal with matters that we think can seriously injure or seriously benefit human beings
- Moral standards are not established or changed by the decisions of particular authoritative bodies.
- Moral standards should be preferred to other values including self-interest.
- Moral standards should be based on impartial considerations.
- Moral standards are associated with special emotions.

Laws exist to regulate business activities. Laws are enacted to actually take care of unethical behaviours or behaviours that are below moral/ethical standards. The differences between ethical and legal behaviour further explained by four are in ethical and legal models as follows:

- Illegal and Unethical
- Legal but Unethical
- Legal and Ethical
- Illegal and Ethical

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Identify and discuss the five basic stages of moral development of business ethics.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

Jack N. Behrman, (1988). *Essays on Ethics in Business and the Professions. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.*

Norman E. Bowie, (1999). *Business Ethics, A Kantian Perspective.* Blackwell.

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## CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Ethics
  - 3.2 Business Ethics
  - 3.3 The Concept of Ethical Conduct
  - 3.4 Code of Conduct
  - 3.5 Applying Ethics to Corporate Organizations
  - 3.6 Globalization, Multinational and Business Ethics
  - 3.7 Business Ethics and Cultural Differences
  - 3.8 Technology and Business Ethics
  - 3.9 Theories of Business Ethics
    - 3.9.1 Stakeholder Theories**
    - 3.9.2 Social Contract Theory
    - 3.9.3 Legitimacy Theory
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The introductory unit has presented a general overview of business and the general basis for legislation which governs businesses. This unit treats the topic; Ethics and Business extensively.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- explain in detail, ethics and business
- identify the application of moral standards to business
- examine the moral responsibility of a person in business.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Ethics

Boyd et al defined ethics as concerned with the development of moral standards by which actions, situations and behaviour can be judged. Stanton et al gave the simplest definition of ethics as standards of conduct. Ethics is the discipline that examines one's moral standards or

the moral standards of a society. It asks how these standards apply to our lives and whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable, that is, whether they are supported by good reasons or poor ones. Therefore, a person starts to do ethics when he or she takes the moral standards absorbed from the family, church and friends and asks: "What do these standards imply for the situations in which I find myself? Do these standards really make sense? What are the reasons for or against these standards? Why should I continue to believe in them? What can be said in their favour and what can be said against them? Are they really reasonable for me to hold? Are their implications in this or that particular situation reasonable?"

Ethics is the study of moral standards, the process of examining the moral standards of a person or society to determine whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable in order to apply them to concrete situations and issues. The ultimate aim of ethics is to develop a body of moral standards that we feel are reasonable to hold standards that we have thought about carefully and have decided are justified standards for us to accept and apply to the choices that fill our lives.

Ethics is not the only way to study morality. The social sciences such as anthropology, sociology and psychology also study morality, but do so in a way that is quite different from the approach to morality that is characteristic of ethics. Although ethics is a normative study the social sciences engage in a descriptive study of ethics.

A normative study is an investigation that attempts to reach normative conclusions, that is, conclusions about what things are good or bad or about what actions are right or wrong. In short, a normative study aims to discover what should be. As we have seen, ethics is the study of moral standards whose explicit purpose is to determine as far as possible which standards are correct or supported by the best reasons, and so it attempts to reach conclusions about moral right and wrong and moral good and evil.

A descriptive study is one that does not try to reach any conclusion about what things are truly good, bad or right or wrong. Instead, a descriptive study attempts to describe or explain the world without reaching any conclusions about whether the world is at what it should be. Anthropologists and sociologists, for example, may study the moral standards that a particular village or culture holds. In doing so, they attempt to develop accurate description of the moral standards of that culture and perhaps even to formulate an explanatory theory about their structure. As anthropologists or sociologists, however, it is not their aim to determine whether these moral standards are correct or incorrect.

### **3.2 Business Ethics**

This characterisation of ethics is intended to convey the idea of what ethics is all about. Our concern here however, is not with ethics in general, but with a particular field of ethics: business ethics. Business ethics is a specialised study of moral right and wrong, as they apply to business institutions, organisations, and behaviours. A brief description of the nature of business institutions should clarify this. A ~~society~~ society is a group of people who have common ends and whose activities are organised by a system of institutions designed to achieve these ends. That men, women, and children have common ends is obvious. There is the common end of establishing, nurturing, and protecting family life; producing and distributing the materials on which human life depends; restraining and regularising the use of force; organising the means of making collective decisions; and creating and preserving cultural values such as art, knowledge, technology, and religion. Members of a society achieve these ends by establishing the relatively fixed patterns of activity that we call institutions: familial, economic, legal, political, and educational.

The most influential institutions within contemporary societies may be their economic institutions. These are designed to achieve two ends: (a) production of the goods and services the members of the society want and need, and (b) distribution of these goods and services to the various members of the society. Thus, economic institutions determine who will carry out the work of production, how that work will be organised, what resources that work will consume, and how its products and benefits will be distributed among the society's members.

Business organisations are the primary economic institutions through which people in modern societies carry on the task of producing and distributing goods and services. They provide the fundamental structure within which members of a society combine their scarce resources – land, labour, capital and technology- into useable goods, and ~~they~~ provide channels through which these goods are distributed in the form of consumer products, employee salaries, investors' return, and government taxes. Mining, manufacturing, retailing, banking, marketing, transporting, insuring, constructing and advertising are all different facets of the productive and distributive processes of modern business institutions.

Business ethics is a study of moral standards and how these apply to the social systems and organisations through which modern societies produce and distribute goods and services and to the behaviours of the people who work within these organisations. Business ethics, in other words, is a form of applied ethics. It not only includes the analysis of moral norms and moral values but also attempts to apply the conclusions



of these analyses to that assortment of institutions, organisations, activities and pursuits that we call business.

As this description of business ethics suggests, the issues that business ethics covers encompass a wide variety of topics. To introduce some order into this variety, it helps if we distinguish three different kinds of issues that business ethics investigates: systemic, corporate and individual.

Systemic issues in business ethics are ethical questions raised about the economic, political, legal, and other social systems or institutions within which businesses operate. These include questions about the morality of capitalism or of the laws, regulations, industrial structures and social practices within which businesses operate.

Corporate issues in business ethics are ethical questions raised about a particular organisation. These include questions about the morality of the activities, policies, practices or organisational structure which an individual company takes.

Finally, individual issues in business ethics are ethical questions raised about a particular individual or particular individuals within a company and their behaviours and decisions. These include questions about the morality of the decisions, actions or character of such individuals. It is helpful when analysing the ethical issues raised by a particular decision or case to sort out the issues in terms of whether they are systemic, corporate or individual issues.

Often the world presents us with decisions that involve a large number of extremely complicated and interrelated kinds of issues that can cause confusion unless the different kinds of issues are first carefully sorted out and distinguished from each other. Moreover, the kinds of solutions that are appropriate in dealing with systemic or corporate issues are not the same as the kinds of solutions that are appropriate in dealing with individual issues. If a company is trying to deal with a systemic issue such as a government culture that permits bribery then the issue must be dealt with on a systemic level; that is, it must be dealt with through the coordinated actions of many different social groups. On the other hand, corporate ethical issues can be solved only through corporate or company solutions. If a company has a culture that encourages moral wrongdoing, for example, then changing that culture requires the cooperation of the many different people that constitute the company. Finally, individual ethical issues need to be resolved through individual decisions and, perhaps, individual reforms.

### **3.3 Concept of Ethical Conduct**

Having known the meaning and importance of business ethics, we can see that wanting to be an ethical corporate citizen is not enough. Individuals in business must actively practice ethical conduct. In business, besides obeying laws and regulations, a good and ethical conduct involves the followings:

- Competing fairly and honestly: Businesses are expected to compete fairly and honestly and not knowingly deceive, intimidate, or misrepresent customers, competitors, clients, or employees.
- Communicating truthfully: Ethical conduct requires that companies refrain from issuing false or misleading communications. Businesses should recognise that their communications reflect their image and therefore refrain from untruthful, offensive and misleading communications.
- Not causing harm to others: Some business executives put their own personal interests ahead of that of employees and shareholders thereby causing harm to them. Corporate managers can mislead investors by withholding vital information; they sometimes take advantage of the investor by using the company's earnings or resources for personal gain.

### 3.4 Code of Conduct

A code of conduct is a written statement setting forth the principles that guide an organisation's decision. An effective code of conduct requires the following:

- Top management commitment
- Employee communications efforts
- Employee commitment to follow it
- Formal training programmes
- A system that supports reporting unethical or illegal actions at work
- A system of action.

Often, ethical codes do not provide specific guidance on particular issues and may conflict with the priorities of the commercial world. In such cases, individuals may find themselves torn between the "moral ideals" which they live by, and the legal obligations, that is, personal or contractual loyalties which bind them to an employer. Ethical standards would typically cover matters such as:

- Contribution or payment to government officials or political parties
- Relations with customers or suppliers
- Conflicts of interest
- Accuracy of records
- Fair and acceptable human resource practices
- Competition matters
- Corporate social responsibility.

### 3.5 Applying Ethics to Corporate Organisations

The statement that corporate organisations can be ethical or unethical raises a puzzling issue. Can we really say that the acts of organisations are moral or immoral in the same sense that the actions of human individuals are? Can we say that corporate organisations are morally responsible for their acts in the same sense that human individuals are? Or must we say that it makes no sense to apply moral terms to organisations as a whole but only to the individuals who make up the organisation? Can moral notions like responsibility, wrongdoing and obligation be applied to groups such as corporations, or are individual people the only real moral agents?

Two views have emerged in response to this problem. At one extreme is the view of those who argue that, because the rules that tie organisations together allow us to say that corporations act as individuals and have “intended objectives” for what they do, we can also say that they are “morally responsible” for their actions and that their actions are “moral” or “immoral” in exactly the same sense that a human being’s are. The major problem with this view is that organisations do not seem to “act” or “intend” in the same sense that individual human do, and organisations differ from human beings in morally important ways: Organisations feel neither pain nor pleasure and they cannot act except through human beings. At the other extreme is the view of philosophers who hold that it makes no sense to hold business organisations “morally responsible” or to say that they have “moral” duties. These philosophers argue that business organisations are the same as machines whose members must blindly and undeviatingly conform to formal rules that have nothing to do with morality. Consequently, it makes no more sense to hold organisations “morally responsible” for failing to follow moral standards than it makes to criticise a machine for failing to act morally. The major problem with this second view is that, unlike machines, at least some of the members of organisations usually know what they are doing and are free to choose whether to follow the organisation’s rules or not or even to change these rules. When an organisation’s members collectively, but feely and knowingly, pursue immoral objectives, it ordinarily makes perfect good sense to say that

the actions they perform for the organisation are “immoral” and that the organisation is “morally responsible” for this immoral action.

Which of these two extreme views is correct? Perhaps neither. The underlying difficulty with which both views are trying to struggle is this: Although we say that corporate organisations “exist” and “act” like individuals, they obviously are not human individuals. Yet our moral categories are designed to deal primarily with individual humans who feel, reason and deliberate, and who act on the basis of their feelings, reasoning’s, and deliberations. Therefore, how can we apply these moral categories to corporate organisations and their “acts”? We can see our way through these difficulties only if we first accept that corporate organisations and their acts depend on human individuals. Organisations are composed of related human individuals that we conventionally agree to treat as a single unit, and they “act” only when we conventionally agree to treat the actions of these individuals as the actions of that unit. We can express this precisely in two somewhat technical claims that build on the work of philosopher John Searle.

- A corporate organisation “exists” only if:
  - There are certain human individuals who are in certain circumstances and relationships, and
  - Our linguistic and social conventions lay down that when those kinds of individuals exist in those kinds of circumstances and relationships, they shall count as a corporate organisation.
- A corporate organisation “acts” only if:
  - Certain human individuals in the organisation performed certain actions in certain circumstances and
  - Our linguistic and social conventions lay down that when those kinds of individuals perform those kinds of actions in those kinds of circumstances, this shall count as an act of the corporate organisation.

Our own social and legal conventions, for example, say that a corporation exists when there exists a properly qualified group of individuals who have agreed among themselves to incorporate and they have performed the necessary legal acts of incorporation. Our social conventions also say that a corporation acts when properly qualified members of the corporation carry out their assigned duties within the scope of their assigned authority.

### 3.6 Globalisation, Multinational and Business Ethics

Many of the most pressing issues in business ethics today are related to the phenomenon of globalisation. Globalisation is the worldwide process by which the economic and social systems of nations have become connected together so that goods, services, capital, knowledge and cultural artifacts are traded and moved across national borders at an increasing rate. This process has several components, including the lowering of trade barriers and the rise of worldwide open markets, the creation of global communication and transportation systems such as the Internet and global shipping, the development of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that have facilitated the international flow of capital, and the spread of multinational corporations. For centuries, of course, people have moved and traded goods across national boundaries. Merchants were carrying goods over the trading routes of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas almost since civilisation dawned in each of these places. But the volume of goods that are traded across national boundaries has grown almost exponentially since World War II ended, and it has transformed the face of our world to an extent that was never before possible. Globalisation has resulted in a phenomenon that is familiar to anyone who travels outside their country: The same products, music, foods, clothes, inventions, books, magazines, movie, brand names, stores, cars and companies that we are familiar with at home are available and enjoyed everywhere in the world. Multinational corporations are at the heart of the process of globalisation and are responsible for the enormous volume of international transactions that take place today. A multinational corporation is a company that maintains manufacturing, marketing, service or administrative operations in many different host countries.

### 3.7 Business Ethics and Cultural Differences

When faced with the fact that different cultures have different moral standards, the managers of some multinationals have adopted the theory of ethical relativism. Ethical relativism is the theory that, because different societies have different ethical beliefs, there is no rational way of determining whether an action is morally right or wrong other than by asking whether the people of this or that society believe it is morally right or wrong. To put it another way, ethical relativism is the view that there are no ethical standards that are absolutely true and that apply or should be applied to the companies and people of all societies. Instead, relativism holds that something is right for the people or companies in one particular society if it accords with their moral standards and wrong for them if it violates their moral standards.

The multinational company or businessperson who operates in several different countries, then, and who encounters societies with many

different moral standards is advised by the theory of ethical relativism in this way: In one's moral reasoning, one should always follow the moral standards prevalent in whatever society one finds oneself. After all, because moral standards differ and since there are no other criteria of right and wrong, the best a company can do is to follow the old adage: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." However, is this view of ethical relativism a reasonable view to hold?

Considered clearly, there are numerous practices that are immoral by some societies which other societies have deemed morally acceptable, including polygamy, abortion, infanticide, slavery, homosexuality, racial and sexual discrimination, genocide, patricide and the torture of animals. Yet critics of ethical relativism have pointed out that it does not follow that there are no moral standards that are binding on people everywhere. Critics of ethical relativism have argued, in fact, that there are certain moral standards that the members of any society must accept if the society is to survive and if its members are to interact with each other effectively. Thus, all societies have norms against injuring or killing other members of the society, norms about using language truthfully when communicating with members of one's society, and norms against taking the personal goods of other members of one's society.

Moreover, other critics of the theory of ethical relativism point out that, because different people have different moral beliefs on some issues, it does not follow logically that there is no objective truth about that issue or that beliefs about that issue are equally acceptable. When two people or two groups have different beliefs, philosophers are fond of pointing out that, at least one of them is wrong. For example, the philosopher James Rachels put the matter quite succinctly: The fact that different societies have different moral codes proves nothing. There is also disagreement from society to society about scientific matters: in some cultures it is believed that the earth is flat, and that disease is caused by evil spirits. We do not on that account conclude that there is no truth in geography or in medicine. Instead, we conclude that in some cultures people are better informed than in others. Similarly, disagreement in ethics might signal nothing more than that some people are less enlightened than others. At the very least, the fact of disagreement does not, by itself, entail that truth does not exist. Why should we assume that, if ethical truth exists, everyone must know it?

Perhaps the most troubling criticisms ethical relativism must deal with are those that claim that ethical relativism has incoherent consequences. If ethical relativism was true, opponents claim, and then it would make little sense to criticise the practices of other societies so long as their practices conformed to their own standards.

The fundamental problem with ethical relativism, critics allege, is that it holds that the moral standards of a society are the only criteria by which actions in that society can be judged. The theory gives the moral standards of each society a privileged place that is above all criticism by members of that society or by anyone else: A society's moral standards cannot be mistaken. Clearly, opponents say, this implication of ethical relativism indicates that the theory is mistaken. We recognise that the moral standards of our own society as well as those of other societies can be wrong. This recognition implies that the moral standards a society happens to accept cannot be the only criteria of right and wrong. But even if the theory of ethical relativism is ultimately rejected, this does not mean that it has nothing to teach us. The ethical relativist correctly reminds us that different societies have different moral beliefs and that we should not simply dismiss the moral beliefs of other cultures when they do not match our own. However, ethical relativism may be mistaken in its basic claim that all moral beliefs are equally acceptable and that the only criteria of right and wrong are the moral standards prevalent in a given society.

### **3.8 Technology and Business Ethics**

Technology consists of all those methods, processes, and tools that humans invent to manipulate their environment. To an extent never before realised in history, contemporary business is being continuously and radically transformed by the rapid evolution of new technologies that raise new ethical issues for business.

This is not the first time that new technologies have had a revolutionary impact on business and society. Several thousand years ago, during what is sometimes called the Agricultural Revolution, humans developed the farming technologies that enabled them to stop relying on foraging and on the luck of the hunt and to develop, instead, reasonably constant supplies of food. The invention of irrigation, the harnessing of water and wind power, and the development of levers, wedges, hoists and gears during this period eventually allowed humans to accumulate more goods than they could consume, and out of this surplus grew trade, commerce and the first businesses.

The result was the large corporations that came to dominate our huge economies and that brought with them a host of ethical issues for business, including the possibilities of exploiting the workers who laboured at the new machines, manipulating the new financial markets that financed these large enterprises, and producing massive damage to the environment.

New technologies developed in the closing decades of the 20th century and the opening years of the 21st century are again transforming society and business and creating the potential for new ethical problems. among these developments are the revolutions in biotechnology and in what is sometimes called information technology, including not only the use of extremely powerful and compact computers but also the development of the Internet, wireless communications, digitalisation and numerous other technologies that have enabled us to capture, manipulate and move information in new and creative ways.

Almost all ethical issues raised by new technologies are related in one way or another to questions of risk: Are the risks of a new technology predictable? How large are the risks and are they reversible? Are the benefits worth the potential risks, and who should decide? Do the persons on whom the risks will fall know about the risk, and have they consented to bear these risks? Will they be justly compensated for their losses? Are the risks fairly distributed among the various parts of society, including the poor and the rich, the young and the old, future generations and present ones?

Information technologies have also raised difficult ethical issues about the nature of the right to property when the property in question is (such as computer software, computer code, or any other kind of data-text, numbers, pictures, sounds-that have been encoded into a computer file) or computer services (access to a computer or a computer system). Computerised information (such as a software programme or digitised pictures) can be copied perfectly countless times without in any way changing the original. What kind of property rights does the original creator of the information have and how does it differ from the property rights of someone who buys a copy? Is it wrong for me to make a copy without the permission of the original creator when doing so in no way changes the original? What, if any, harm will society or individuals suffer if the people are allowed to copy any kind of computerised information at will? Will people stop creating information? For example, will they stop writing software and producing music? What kind of property rights does one have over computer systems? Is it wrong to use my company's computer system for personal business, such as to send personal e-mail or log on to websites that have nothing to do with my work? Is it wrong for me to electronically break into another organisation's computer system if I do not change anything on the system but merely "look around"? Is it ethical for business to market and distribute such unpredictable engineered organisms throughout the world?

### 3.9 Theories of Business Ethics



### **3.9.1 Stakeholder Theories**

The stakeholder theory of the firm is used as a basis to analyse those groups to whom the firm should be responsible. In this sense, the firm can be described as a series of connections of stakeholders that the managers of the firm attempt to manage. A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives. Stakeholders are typically analysed into primary and secondary stakeholders. A primary stakeholder group is one without whose continuing participation the corporation cannot survive as a going concern. A primary group includes shareholders and investors, employees, customers and suppliers, together with what is defined as the public stakeholder group: the governments and communities that provide infrastructures and markets, whose laws and regulations must be obeyed, and to whom taxes and obligations may be due. The secondary groups are defined as those who influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by the corporation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the corporation and are not essential for its survival.

### **3.9.2 Social Contract Theory**

The social contract theory has a long tradition in ethical and political theory. In general, this theory considers the society as a series of social contracts between members of society and society itself. The social contract theory in business ethics argues that corporate rights and responsibilities can be inferred from the terms and conditions of an imaginary contract between business and society.

In the context of business ethics, an alternative possibility is not that business might act in a responsible manner because it is in its commercial interest, but because it is part of how society implicitly expects business to operate.

An integrated social contracts theory, as a way for managers to take decisions in an ethical context, has been developed. Here, distinction is made between macro social contracts and micro social contracts. Thus, a macro social contract in the context of communities, for example, would be an expectation that business provides some support to its local community and the specific form of involvement would be the micro social contract. Hence companies who adopt a view of social contracts would describe their involvement as part of "societal expectation".

### **3.9.3 Legitimacy Theory**

Legitimacy is defined as a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions. There are three types of organisational legitimacy:

- Pragmatic
- Moral
- Cognitive.

It should be pointed out that legitimacy management rests heavily on communication – therefore in any attempt to involve legitimacy theory, there is a need to examine some forms of corporate communications.

Finally, an organisation may employ four broad legitimating strategies when faced with different legitimating threats:

- Seek to educate its stakeholders about the organisation's intentions to improve that performance
- Seek to change the organisation's perceptions of the event (but without changing the organisation's actual performance)
- Distract (i.e. manipulate) attention away from the issue of concern
- Seek to change external expectations about its performance.

Thus, there is a need to examine any particular corporate behaviour in context and in particular to look for alternative motivations. Legitimacy might therefore be seen as a key reason for undertaking corporate social behaviour, and then using that activity as a form of publicity or influence.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Define the following concepts: ethics, business ethics and code of conduct.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Business ethics is a specialised study of moral right and wrong and concentrates on moral standards as they apply to individuals, business institutions, organisations and behaviour.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Ethics applies to all human activities. Business cannot survive without ethics.

Ethics is consistent with profit seeking customers and employees must

care about ethics.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

“Ethics has no place in business” Discuss.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 3 MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND REASONING**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives

### 3.0 Main Content

#### 3.1 Moral Development

#### 3.2 Moral Reasoning

##### 3.2.1 Analysing Moral Reasoning

#### 3.3 Arguments for and Against Business Ethics

##### 3.3.1 Three Objections to Bringing Ethics into Business

##### 3.3.2 The Case for Ethics in Business

#### 3.4 Moral Responsibility and Blame

##### 3.4.1 Corporate Responsibility

##### 3.4.2 Subordinates' Responsibility

#### 3.5 Reasons for Ethical Behaviour

### 4.0 Conclusion

### 5.0 Summary

### 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

### 7.0 References/Further Resources

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we noted that ethics is the study of morality and that a person begins to do ethics when he or she turns to look at the moral standards that have been absorbed from the family, friends, and society whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable and whether these standards imply for situation and issues. In this unit, we shall examine more closely this process of appraising one's moral standards and of applying them to concrete situations and issues. We begin by describing how a person's ability to use and critically evaluate moral standards develops in the course of a person's life, and then we will describe the reasoning processes through which these moral standards are employed and evaluated.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

When you complete this unit, you should be able to:

- define moral development
- define moral reasoning
- identify argument for and against business ethics
- examine three objections to bringing ethics into business
- examine the cases for ethics in business
- analyse moral responsibility and blame
- identify subordinate's responsibility.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Moral Development

We sometimes assume that a person's values are formed during childhood and do not change after. In fact, a great deal of psychological research, as well as one's own personal experience, demonstrates that as people mature, they change their values in very deep and profound ways. Just as people's physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities develop as they age, so also their ability to deal with moral issues develops as they move through their lives. In fact, just as there are identifiable stages of growth in the physical development, so the ability to make reasoned moral judgments also develops in identifiable stages.

As children, we are simply told what is right and what is wrong, and we obey so as to avoid punishment: The child's adherence to moral standards is essentially self-absorbed for the avoidance of pain. As we mature into adolescence, these conventional moral standards are gradually internalised. Adherence to moral standards is now based on living up to the expectation of family, friends, and the surrounding society. We do what is right because it is what our groups expect of us.

It is only as rational and experienced adults that we acquire the capacity to critically reflect on the conventional moral standards bequeathed to us by our families, peers, culture, or religion. We then begin to rationally evaluate these moral standards and their consequences and to revise them where they are inadequate, inconsistent or unreasonable. We begin, in short, to do ethics, and our morality now increasingly consists of moral standards that are more impartial and that take into account more of the interests of others, or that more adequately balance taking care of others with taking care of ourselves.

There is a good deal of psychological research that shows people's moral views develop more or less in this manner. The psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, for example, who pioneered research in this field, concluded on the basis of over 20 years of research that there is a sequence of six identifiable stages in the development of a person's ability to deal with moral issues.

Kohlberg's theory is useful because it helps us understand how our moral capacities develop and reveals how we can become increasingly sophisticated and critical in our use and understanding of the moral standards we hold. Research by Kohlberg and others has shown that, although people generally progress through the stages in the same sequence, not everyone progresses through all the stages. Kohlberg found that many people remain stuck at one of the early stages throughout their lives. For those who remain at the pre-conventional level, right and wrong always continue to be defined in the egocentric terms of avoiding punishment and doing what powerful authority figures say; for those who reach the conventional level but never get any

further, right and wrong continue to be defined in terms of conventional norms of their social groups or the laws of their nation or society. However, for those who reach the post-conventional level and take a reflective and critical look at the moral standards they have been raised to hold, moral right and wrong are decided in terms of moral principles they have chosen for themselves as more reasonable and adequate.

It is important to notice that Kohlberg implies that the moral reasoning of people at the later stages of moral development are better than the reasoning of those at earlier stages. First, people at the later stages have the ability to see things from a wider and fuller perspective than those at earlier stages. The person at the pre-conventional level can see situations only from the person's own egocentric point of view; the person at the conventional level can see situations only from the familiar viewpoints of people in the person's own social groups; and the person at the post-conventional point of view has the ability to look at situations from a perspective that tries to take into account everyone affected by the decision.

Second, people at the later stages have better ways of justifying their decisions to others than those at earlier stages. The person at the pre-conventional level can justify decisions only in terms of how the person's own interests will be affected, and therefore justifications are ultimately persuasive only to the person. The person at the conventional level can justify decisions in terms of the norms of the group to which the person belongs, and therefore justifications are ultimately persuasive only to members of the person's group. Finally, the person at the post-conventional level can justify what the person does on the basis of moral principles that are impartial and reasonable and that can therefore appeal to any reasonable person.

Kohlberg's theory has, however, been subjected to a number of criticisms. First, Kohlberg has been criticised for claiming that the higher stages are morally preferable to the lower stages. This criticism is surely right. Although the higher Kohlberg levels incorporate broader perspectives and widely acceptable justifications, it does not follow that these perspectives are morally better than the lower ones. To establish that the higher stages are morally better will require more argument than Kohlberg provides. In later units, we shall see what kind of reasons can be given for the view that the perspectives and justifications of the moral principles characteristic of the later Kohlberg stages are morally preferable to those of the earlier stages.

### 3.2 Moral Reasoning

We have used the term moral reasoning repeatedly. What does it mean?

Moral reasoning refers to the reasoning process by which human behaviours, institutions, or policies are judged to be in accordance with or in violation of moral standards. Moral reasoning always involves two essential components:

An understanding of what reasonable moral standards require prohibits value or condemn;

Evidence or information that shows that a particular person, policy, institution, or behaviour has the kinds of features that these moral standards require, prohibit value or condemn.

In many cases, one or more of the three components involved in a person's moral reasoning are not expressed. More often than not, people will fail to make explicit the moral standards on which their moral judgments are based. The main reason that moral standards are often not made explicit is that they are generally presumed to be obvious. People put more of their efforts into producing evidence that a given policy, institution, or action conforms to, or violates their unexpressed standards than they put into identifying or explaining the moral standards on which their judgments rely.

Failure to make one's moral standards explicit leaves one vulnerable to all the problems created by basing critical decisions on unexamined assumptions: The assumptions may be inconsistent, they may have no rational basis, and they may lead the decision maker into unwittingly making decisions with undesirable consequences. We saw at the end of the last section two arguments that tried to show that managers should not be ethical but both of which were based on assumed moral standards that were unacceptable once they were made explicit.

To uncover the implicit moral standards on which a person's moral judgments are founded, one has to retrace the person's moral reasoning back to its bases. This involves asking:

What factual information does the person accept as evidence for this moral judgment?

What moral standards are needed to relate this factual information (logically) to the moral judgment? For example, suppose I judge that capital punishment is morally wrong. Further, suppose I base my judgment on the factual evidence that capital punishment occasionally results in the death of innocent people. Then, in order to relate this factual information to my judgment, I must accept this general moral principle: Whatever occasionally results in the death of innocent people is morally wrong. This general moral principle is needed if there is to be a (logical) connection between the factual information ("capital

punishment occasionally results in the death of innocent people”) and the moral judgment that is based on this fact (“capital punishment is morally wrong”). Without the moral principle, the factual information would have no logical relation to the judgment and would therefore be irrelevant.

The moral standards on which adults base their moral judgments are usually much more complex than this simple example suggests. Developed moral standards (as we see) incorporate qualifications, exceptions and restrictions that limit their scope. Also, they may be combined in various ways with other important standards. However, the general method of uncovering unexpressed moral standards remains roughly the same whatever their complexity. One may ask: ~~What~~ **What** moral standards relate a person’s factual evidence to his or her moral judgments?

It is hoped that this account of ethical reasoning has not suggested that it is always easy to separate factual information from moral standards in a piece of moral reasoning; nothing could be farther from the truth. In practice, the two are sometimes intertwined in ways that are difficult to disentangle. There are several theoretical difficulties in trying to draw a precise line separating the two. Although the difference between the two is usually clear enough for practical purposes, the reader should be aware that sometimes they cannot be clearly distinguished.

### **3.2.1 Analysing Moral Reasoning**

There are various criteria that ethicists use to evaluate the adequacy of moral reasoning. First and primarily, moral reasoning must be logical. The analysis of moral reasoning requires that the logic of the arguments used to establish a moral judgment be rigorously examined, all ~~the~~ **the** spoken moral and factual assumptions be made explicit, and both assumptions and premises be displayed and subjected to criticism.

Second, the factual evidence cited in support of a person’s judgment must be accurate, relevant and complete. If the moral reasoning is to be adequate, statistics and relationships must be accurate: They must rest on reliable statistical methods and well-supported scientific theory. In addition, evidence must be relevant: It must show that the behaviour, policy or institution being judged has precisely those characteristics that are prescribed by the moral standards involved. Evidence must ~~be~~ **be** complete: It must take into account all relevant information and must not selectively advert only to the evidence that tends to support a single point of view.



Third, the moral standards involved in a person's moral reasoning must be consistent. They must be consistent with each other and with the other standards and beliefs the person holds. Inconsistency between a people's moral standards can be uncovered and corrected by examining situations in which these moral standards require incompatible things.

Suppose that I believe that:

- It is wrong to disobey an employer whom one has contractually agreed to obey, and I also believe that.
- It is wrong to help someone who is endangering innocent people's lives. Then suppose that one day my employer insists that I work on a project that might result in the death of several innocent people. The situation now reveals an inconsistency between these two moral standards: I can either obey my employer or avoid disloyalty, or I can disobey him and avoid helping to endanger people's lives, but I cannot do both.

When inconsistencies between one's moral standards are uncovered in this way, one (or both) of the standards must be modified. In this example, I might decide that orders of employers have to be obeyed except when they threaten human life. Notice that, to determine what kinds of modifications are called for, one has to examine the reasons one has for accepting the inconsistent standards and weigh these reasons to see what is more important and worth retaining and what is less important and subject to modification. In this example, for instance, I may have decided that the reason that employee loyalty is important is that it safeguards property, but the reason that the refusal to endanger people is important is that it safeguards human life. Human life, I then decide, is more important than property. This sort of criticism and adjustment of one's moral standards is an important part of the process through which moral development takes place.

There is another kind of consistency that is perhaps even more important in ethical reasoning. Consistency also refers to the requirement that one must be willing to accept the consequences of applying one's moral standards consistently to all persons in similar circumstances. This consistency requirement can be phrased as follows:

If I judge that a certain person is morally justified (or unjustified) in doing A in circumstances C, then I must accept that it is morally justified (or unjustified) for any other person to perform any act relevantly similar to A in any circumstances relevantly similar to C.

### **3.3 Arguments For and Against Business Ethics**

We have described business ethics as the process of rationally evaluating our moral standards and applying them to business situations. However, many people have raised objections to the very idea of applying moral standards to business activities. In this section, we will address some of these objections and also look at what can be said in favour of bringing ethics into business.

### 3.3.1 Three Objections to Bringing Ethics into Business

Occasionally people object to the view that ethical standards should be applied to the behaviour of people in business organisations. Persons involved in business, they claim, should single-mindedly pursue the financial interests of their firm and not sidetrack their energies or their firm's resources into "doing good works." Three different kinds of arguments are advanced in support of this view.

First, some have argued that in perfectly competitive free markets, the pursuit of profit will by itself ensure that the members of society are served in the most socially beneficial ways. To be profitable, each firm has to produce only what the members of society want and has to do this by the most efficient means available. The members of society will benefit most, then, if managers do not impose their own values on a business, but instead devote themselves to the single-minded pursuit of profit and thereby to producing efficiently what the members of society value.

Arguments of this sort conceal a number of assumptions that require a much, lengthier discussion than we can provide at this stage. Because we examine many of these claims in greater detail in the units that follow, here we only note some of the more questionable assumptions on which the argument rests. First, most industrial markets are not "perfectly competitive" as the argument assumes, and to the extent that firms do not have to compete they can maximise profits through inefficient production. Second, the argument assumes that any steps taken to increase profits will necessarily be socially beneficial, when in fact several ways of increasing profits actually injure society: allowing harmful pollution to go uncontrolled, deceptive advertising, concealing product hazards, fraud, bribery, tax evasion, price fixing, and so on. Third, the argument assumes that, by producing whatever the buying public wants (or values), firms are producing what all the members of society want, when in fact the wants of large segments of a society (the poor and disadvantaged) are not necessarily met because they cannot participate fully in the marketplace. Fourth, the argument is essentially making a normative judgment ("managers should devote themselves to the single-minded pursuit of profits") on the basis of some assumed but

unproved moral standards (“people should do whatever will benefit those who participate in markets”). Thus, although the argument tries to show that ethics does not matter, it can do this only by assuming an unproved moral standard that at least appears mistaken.

A second kind of argument sometimes advanced to show that business managers should single-mindedly pursue the interests of their firms and should ignore ethical considerations is embodied in what Alex C. Michaels called the “loyal agent’s argument.” The argument can be paraphrased as follows:

As a loyal agent of his or her employer, the manager has a duty to serve the employer as the employer would want to be served (if the employer had the agent’s expertise).

An employer would want to be served in whatever ways will advance his or her self-interests. Therefore, as a loyal agent of the employer, the manager has a duty to serve the employer in whatever ways will advance the employer’s self interests.

The argument can be, and often has been, used to justify a manager’s unethical or illegal conduct. For example, the officer of a corporation may plead that, although he engaged in certain illegal or unethical conduct (e.g., price fixing), he should be excused because he did it not for himself, but to protect the best interests of his company, its shareholders, or its workers. The loyal agent’s argument underlies this kind of excuse. More generally, if we replace employer with *government* and manager with *officer*, we get the kind of argument that Nazi officers used after World War II to defend their involvement in Hitler’s morally corrupt government.

The loyal agent’s argument relies on several questionable assumptions. First, the argument tries to show, again, that ethics does not matter by assuming an unproved moral standard (“the manager should serve the employer in whatever way the employer wants to be served”). But there is no reason to assume that this moral standard is acceptable as it stands and some reason to think that it would be acceptable only if it were suitably qualified (e.g., “the manager should serve the employer in whatever moral way the employer wants to be served”). Second, the loyal agent’s argument assumes that there are no limits to the manager’s duties to serve the employer, when in fact such limits are an express part of the legal and social institutions from which these duties arise. An agent’s duties are defined by what is called the law of agency (i.e., the law that specifies the duties of persons [agents] who agree to act on behalf of another party and who are authorised by the agreement so to act). Lawyers, managers, engineers, stockbrokers, and so on all act as

agents for their employers in this sense. By freely entering an agreement to act as someone's agent, then, a person accepts a legal (and moral) duty to serve the client loyally, obediently, and in a confidential manner as specified in the law of agency.

Yet, the law of agency states that "in determining whether or not the orders of the [client] to the agent are reasonable, business or professional ethics are to be considered," and "in no event would it be implied that an agent has a duty to perform acts which are illegal or unethical." The manager's duties to serve the employer, then, are limited by the constraints of morality, because it is with this understanding that the duties as a loyal agent are defined. Third, the loyal agent's argument assumes that if a manager agrees to serve a firm, then this agreement automatically justifies whatever the manager does on behalf of the firm. However, this assumption is false: Agreements to serve other people do not automatically justify doing wrong on their behalf. For example, it is clearly wrong for me to kill an innocent person to advance my own interests.

Suppose that one day I enter an agreement to serve your interests and that later it turns out that your interests require that I kill an innocent person for you. Does the agreement now justify my killing the innocent person? Obviously, it does not because agreements do not change the moral character of wrongful acts. If it is morally wrong, then, for a manager to do something out of self-interest, it is also morally wrong for the manager to do it in the interests of the company even though the manager has agreed to serve the company. The assumptions of the loyal agent's argument, then, are mistaken.

A third kind of objection is sometimes made against bringing ethics into business. This is the objection that to be ethical it is enough for businesspeople merely to obey the law: Business ethics is essentially obeying the law. For example, when an accountant was asked to prepare a business ethics report for the board of directors of Seven - Eleven Stores, his report excluded allegations that a store manager was trying to bribe New York tax officials. When asked why the alleged bribery was excluded from the report, he replied that he did not feel the incident was unethical because it was not illegal, implying that unethical and illegal are the same. .

It is wrong, however, to see laws and ethics as identical. It is true that some laws require behaviour that is the same as the behaviour required by our moral standards. Examples of these are laws that prohibit murder, rape, theft, fraud, and so on. In such cases, law and morality coincide, and the obligation to obey such laws is the same as the obligation to be moral. However, law and morality do not always coincide. Some laws

have nothing to do with morality because they do not involve serious matters. These include parking laws, dress codes, and other laws covering similar matters.

Other laws may even violate our moral standards so that they are actually contrary to morality. Pre-Civil War slavery laws, for example, required slave owners to treat slaves like property, and the laws of Nazi Germany required anti-Semitic behavior. The laws of Saudi Arabia today require that businesses discriminate against women and Jews in ways that most people would say are clearly immoral. Thus, it is clear that ethics is not simply following the law.

This does not mean, of course, that ethics has nothing to do following the law. Our moral standards are sometimes incorporated into the law when enough of us feel that a moral standard should be enforced by the pressures of a legal system. In contrast, laws are sometimes criticised and eliminated when it becomes clear that they blatantly violate our moral standards.

Moreover, most ethicists agree that all citizens have a moral obligation to obey the law so long as the law does not require clearly unjust behaviour. This means that, in most cases, it is immoral to break the law. Tragically, the obligation to obey the law can create terrible conflicts when the law requires something that the businessperson believes is immoral. In such cases, a person will be faced with a conflict between the obligation to obey the law and the obligation to obey his or her conscience

### **3.3.2 The Case For Ethics in Business**

We have looked at several arguments attempting to establish that ethics should not be brought into business and we found them all wanting. Is there anything to be said for the opposite claim that ethics should be brought into business? One way to argue that ethics should be brought into business is simply by pointing out that, ethics should govern all voluntary human activities. And because business is a voluntary human activity, ethics should also govern business. In short, there is nothing about business that would prevent us from applying the same standards of ethics to business activities that should be applied to all voluntary human activities.

Another argument for the view that ethics should be part of business points out that business activities, like any other human activities, cannot exist unless the people involved in the business and its surrounding community adhere to some minimal standards of ethics. Business is a cooperative activity whose very existence requires ethical

behaviour. First, any individual business will collapse if all of its managers, employees, and customers come to think that it is morally permissible to steal from the organisation, lie to, or break their agreement with the company.

Because no business can exist entirely without ethics, the pursuit of business requires at least a minimal adherence to ethics on the part of those involved in it. Second, all businesses require a stable society in which to carry on business dealings. Yet the stability of any society requires that its members adhere to some minimal standards of ethics. In a society without ethics, as the philosopher Hobbes once wrote, distrust and unrestrained self-interest would create “a war of every man against every man,” and in such a situation life would become “nasty, brutish, and short.”

The impossibility of conducting business in such a society—one in which lying, theft, cheating, distrust, and unrestrained self-interested conflict is the norm—is shown by the rate at which business activities break down in societies torn by strife, conflict, distrust, and civil war. Because businesses cannot survive without ethics, then, it is in the best interests of business to promote ethical behaviour both among its own members as well as within its larger society.

Another persuasive way to argue that ethics should be brought into business is by showing that ethical considerations are consistent with business pursuits, in particular with the pursuit of profit. That ethics is consistent with the pursuit of profit can be shown by simply examining the histories of companies where the history of good ethics has existed side by side with the history of profitable operations.

### 3.4 Moral Responsibility and Blame

So far, our discussion has focused on judgments of right and wrong and of good and evil. Moral reasoning, however, is sometimes directed at a different kind of judgment: determining whether a person is morally responsible for an injury or for a wrong. A judgment about a person's moral responsibility for wrongdoing is a judgment that the person acted intentionally and so should be blamed, punished, or forced to restitution.

The kind of moral responsibility we are discussing here should not be confused with a second but distinct form of moral responsibility. The term moral responsibility is sometimes used to mean “moral duty” or “moral obligation.” “moral responsibility” means “moral obligation.” This is not the kind of moral responsibility that we are talking about

here. We are concerned here with the kind of moral responsibility a person has when we say a person is to blame for something. "Morally responsible" is used to mean "to blame."

People are not always morally responsible for the injuries they inflict on others. A person, for example, who injures someone by accident, is "excused" from any blame. So when is a person morally responsible-or to blame-for an injury? The traditional view can be summarised like this: A person is morally responsible for an injury when the person caused the injury and did so knowingly and freely. But this characterisation ignores the fact that people are sometimes responsible for injuries which they did not cause but which they could and should have prevented, that is, they are morally responsible for their omissions when they had a duty to act. So a more accurate-but more complicated-way of characterising moral responsibility is as follows:

- A person is morally responsible for an injury or a wrong if:
- The person caused or helped cause it, or failed to prevent it when he could and should have; and
- The person did so knowing what he or she was doing
- The person did so of his own free will.

Moral responsibility for an injury or a wrong, then, requires three things:

- The person must cause or fail to prevent the injury or wrong when he could and should have done so
- The person must know what he is doing
- The person must act of his own free will. This means the absence of any of these three elements will completely eliminate a person's responsibility for an injury and so will fully "excuse" a person from any blame for the injury.

It is important to understand these three conditions well enough to judge whether a party was morally responsible for something.

Let us begin by examining the first requirement for moral responsibility:

The person must either cause the injury or wrong or else must fail to prevent it when she could and should have done so. In many cases, it is easy to determine whether a person's actions "caused" an injury or a wrong (such actions are "commissions"). But this is not so easy when a party does not cause an injury but merely fails to prevent it (such actions are "omissions"). Nike, the athletic shoe company, for example, has been at the center of a controversy over its responsibility for the mistreatment of the workers who make its shoes. Nike does not actually manufacture any of the athletic shoes it sells. Instead, Nike designs its

shoes in Seattle, Washington, and then pays companies in developing countries to make the shoes according to these designs. It is these foreign supplier companies (in China, Indonesia, India, etc.) that have directly mistreated and exploited their workers. Nike has claimed that it is not morally responsible for this mistreatment because the injuries inflicted by the supplier companies they hired, so Nike itself did not cause the injuries.

Critics have responded that although it is true that Nike did not directly cause the injuries, Nike could have prevented those injuries by forcing its suppliers to treat their workers humanely. If it is true that Nike had the power to prevent the injuries, and should have done so, then Nike met the first condition for moral responsibility. But if Nike was truly powerless to prevent these injuries if Nike had no control over the actions of its suppliers then it did not meet the first condition.

Notice that the first condition says that people are morally responsible for an injury when they failed to prevent it, only if they "should have" prevented it. This qualification is necessary because people cannot be held morally responsible for all the injuries they know about and fail to prevent. Each of us is not morally responsible, for example, for failing to save all the members of all the starving groups in the world that we learn about by reading the newspapers, even if we could have saved some of them. If we were morally responsible for all these deaths, then we would all be murderers many times over and this seems wrong.

Instead, we must say that a person is responsible for failing to prevent an injury only when, for some reason, the person had an obligation to prevent that particular injury. Such an obligation generally requires some sort of special relationship to the injury or the injured party. For example, if I know I am the only person near enough to save a drowning child, and I can do so easily, then my special physical relationship to the child creates in me an obligation to save the child and so I am morally responsible for the child's death if I fail to prevent it. Or if I am a police officer on duty and see a crime that I can easily prevent, because it is my job to prevent such crimes, I have a specific obligation to prevent this crime and am morally responsible if I fail to do so. Employers likewise have a special obligation to prevent work injuries from being inflicted on their employees and so are morally responsible for any foreseen work injuries they could have prevented.

The second requirement for moral responsibility is this: The person must know what he/she is doing. This means that if a person is ignorant of the fact that their actions will injure someone else, then they cannot be morally responsible for that injury. Ignorance, however, does not always excuse a person. One exception is when a person deliberately claims



ignorant of a certain matter to escape responsibility. For example, if Nike managers told their suppliers that they did not want to know what was going on in their factories, they would still be morally responsible for whatever mistreatment went on that they could have prevented. A second exception is when a person negligently fails to take adequate steps to become informed about a matter that is of known importance.

A manager in an asbestos company, for example, who has reason to suspect that asbestos may be dangerous but who fails to become informed on the matter out of laziness, cannot later plead ignorance as an excuse. A person may be ignorant of either the relevant facts or the relevant moral standards. For example, I may be sure that bribery is wrong (a moral standard) but may not have realized that in tipping a customs official, I was actually bribing him into cancelling certain import fees (a fact). In contrast, I may be genuinely ignorant that bribing government officials is wrong (a moral standard), although I know that in tipping the customs official I am bribing him into reducing the fees I owe (a fact). If I genuinely did not know that what I was doing was wrong, then I am not morally responsible for that wrong.

Ignorance of fact eliminates moral responsibility for the simple reason that a person cannot be held responsible for something over which he or she has no control. Because people cannot control matters of which they are ignorant, their moral responsibility for such matters is eliminated. Negligently or deliberately created ignorance is an exception to this principle because such ignorance can be controlled. Insofar as we can control the extent of our ignorance, we become morally responsible for it and, therefore, also for its injurious consequences. Ignorance of the relevant moral standards generally also removes responsibility because a person is not responsible for failing to meet obligations of whose existence he or she is genuinely ignorant. However, to the extent that our ignorance of moral standards is the result of freely choosing not to ascertain what these standards are, we are responsible for our ignorance and for its wrongful or injurious consequences.

The third requirement for moral responsibility is that the person must act of his own free will. A person acts of his/her own free will when that person acts deliberately or purposefully and their actions are not the result of some uncontrollable mental impulse or external force. In other words, a person acts of his own free will when he chooses to do something for a reason or a purpose and is not forced to do it by some internal or external force over which he has no control. A person is not morally responsible, for example, if he causes an injury because he lacked the power, skill, opportunity, or resources to prevent his actions from resulting in the injury. Nor is a person morally responsible when he is not physically forced to inflict an injury on someone else or

physically restrained from doing something to prevent the injury, nor when a person's mind is psychologically impaired in a way that prevents him/her from controlling his/her actions.

### 3.4.1 Corporate Responsibility

Within the modern corporation, responsibility for a corporate act is often distributed among a number of cooperating parties. Corporate acts are normally brought about by several actions or omissions of many different people all cooperating together so that their linked actions and omissions jointly produce the corporate act. For example, one team of managers designs a car, another team tests it, and a third team builds it; one person orders, advises, or encourages something and others act on these orders, advice, or encouragement; one group knowingly defrauds buyers and another group knowingly but silently enjoys the resulting profits; one person contributes the means and another person accomplishes the act; one group does the wrong and another group compals it. The variations on cooperation are endless.

The question is, "who is morally responsible for such jointly produced acts"? The traditional view is that those who knowingly and freely did what was necessary to produce the corporate act are each responsible. In this view, situations in which a person needs the actions of others to bring about a wrongful corporate act are no different in principle from situations in which a person needs certain external circumstances to commit a wrong. For example, if I want to shoot an innocent person, I must rely on my gun going off (an external circumstance). If I want to defraud the stockholders of a corporation, I must rely on others to do their part in the fraud. In both cases, I can bring about the wrongful injury only by relying on something someone other than myself. In both cases, if I knowingly and freely about the fraud, then I am morally responsible for the wrongful injury.

Bringing about a wrongful act with the help of others, then, does not differ in a morally significant way from deliberately bringing about a wrongful act with the help of inanimate instruments: The person is fully responsible for the wrong or the injury even if this responsibility is shared with others. If, for example, as a member of the board of a corporation, with full knowledge and complete freedom, I act on insider information to vote for some stock options that will benefit me but unfairly injure the other stockholders, then I am morally responsible for the wrongful corporate act of the board even if I share this responsibility with other members of the board. By my vote, I was trying to bring about the illegal corporate act and I did so knowingly and freely.

Critics of this traditional view of the individual's responsibility for corporate acts have claimed that when an organised group such as a corporation acts together, their corporate act may be described as the act of the group and, consequently, the corporate group and not the individuals who make up the group must be held responsible for the act. For example, we normally credit the manufacturer of a defective car to the corporation that made it and not to the individual engineers involved in its manufacture.

The law typically attributes the acts of a corporation's managers to the corporation (so long as the managers act within their authority) and not to the managers as individuals. Traditionalists, however, can reply that, although we sometimes attribute acts to corporate groups, this linguistic and legal fact does not change the moral reality behind all such corporate acts: Individuals had to carry out the particular actions that brought about the corporate act. Because individuals are morally responsible for the known and intended consequences of their free actions, any individual who knowingly and freely joins his actions together with those of others, intending thereby to bring about a certain corporate act, will be morally responsible for that act.

### **3.4.2 Subordinates' Responsibility**

In a corporation, employees often act on the basis of their superiors' orders. Corporations usually have a hierarchical structure of authority in which orders and directives pass from those higher in the structure to a variety of agents at lower levels. A vice president tells several middle managers that they must reach certain production goals and the middle managers try to attain them. A plant manager tells the foremen to close down a certain line and the foremen do it. An engineer tells a clerk to write up a certain report and the clerk does it. Who is responsible when a superior orders a subordinate to carry out an act that both of them know is wrong?

People sometimes suggest that when a subordinate acts on the orders of a legitimate superior, the subordinate is absolved of all responsibility for that act: Only the superior is morally responsible for the wrongful act even though the subordinate was the agent who carried it out. Several years ago, for example, the managers of a national semiconductor plant allegedly ordered their employees to write a government report that falsely stated that certain computer components sold to the government had been tested for defects. Some employees objected, but when the managers allegedly insisted, the employees complied with their orders. When the falsified reports were discovered, the managers argued that only the corporation as a whole should be held responsible for the

falsified reports. No individual employee should be held morally responsible, they argued, because each employee was simply an agent who was following orders.

It is clearly mistaken, however, to think that an employee who freely and knowingly does something wrong is absolved of all responsibility when "following orders." Moral responsibility requires merely that one acts freely and knowingly, and it is irrelevant that one's wrongful act is that of freely and knowingly choosing to follow an order. For example, if I am ordered by my superior to murder a competitor and I do so, I can hardly later claim that I am totally innocent because I was "following orders." The fact that my superior ordered me to perform what I knew was an immoral act in no way alters the fact that I was performing that act I knew what I was doing and I freely chose to do it and so I am morally responsible for it. As we noted when discussing the "loyal agent" argument, there are limits to an employee's obligation to obey a superior: An employee has no obligation to obey an order to do what is immoral. Of course, a superior can put significant economic pressures on an employee and such pressures can mitigate the employee's responsibility, but they do not totally eliminate it.

Thus, when a superior orders an employee to carry out an act that both of them know is wrong, the employee is morally responsible for that act if the employee carries it out. Is the superior also morally responsible? Obviously, the superior is also morally responsible because in ordering the employee, the superior is knowingly and freely bringing about the wrongful act through the instrumentality of the employee. The fact that a superior uses a human being to bring about the wrongful act does not change the fact that the superior brought it about.

### **3.5 Reasons for Ethical Behaviour**

Why do organisations need to be ethical?

- To Reverse Declining Public Confidence: As far as many people are concerned, organisational/business image and reputation are sometimes highly questionable. This is as a result of negative business practices such as poor product quality, misleading package labels, false advert claims, etc. To reverse this trend, businesses must demonstrate convincingly that they are aware of their ethical responsibility by setting and enforcing high ethical standards.
- To Avoid Increase in Government Regulation: This is applicable where businesses operate in relatively free economic systems, devoid of government regulations. To justify this,

businesses must act ethically in such a way that their customers and other stakeholders have no reasons to complain about their activities and attract government attention. Note that in a free economic system, everybody is given the liberty to operate.

- **To Retain the Power Granted by the Society:** Businesses wield enormous social power as they influence markets, economic issues and consumers' behaviour. Unethical behaviour will result in an erosion of this. To avoid this, businesses should act in a socially acceptable manner.
- **To Protect the Company's Image:** Public relation is an element of promotion in marketing. Big organisations make use of public relation to promote the patronage of their goods and services. An organisation that is ethically conscious on its operations is likely to spend less on public relations. For example, former BATA now F&amp;P does not sell its products to middlemen, discovering that distributors are fond of charging exorbitant prices in breach of the retail price maintained by the company. Other examples are the Indomie noodles crisis, and always sanitary towels which were rumoured to have health implications to the consumers. The above mentioned examples were handled by the public relations unit of the affected companies to help retain their customers and to equally create a good image for their companies.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Define the following concepts; autonomous morality, moral reasoning, pre conventional morality, conventional morality, consistency requirement, ethic relativism and moral responsibility.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Morality should govern all voluntary activities and as business is a voluntary human activity, morality should also govern business. There is nothing about business that would prevent us from applying the same moral standards to its activities as should be applied to all other human activity.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Having described morality in business as the process of rationally evaluating our moral standards and applying them to business situations, many people have raised objections to the very idea of applying moral

standards to business activities where an employee is regarded as and remains a “loyal agent” of his or her employer. Thus, employees are constantly faced with a conflict between the obligation to obey the law and the obligation to obey their conscience (moral standards).

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Kohlberg’s views of moral development show that the more morally mature a person becomes, the more likely it is that the person will obey the moral norms of his or her society. Discuss this statement.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 4 BUSINESS ETHICS AND MORALITY IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Ethics of Care
    - 3.1.1 Partiality and Care
    - 3.1.2 Objection to Care
  - 3.2 Integrating Utility, Rights, Justice, and Caring
  - 3.3 Virtue Ethics
    - 3.3.1 The Nature of Virtue
    - 3.3.2 The Moral Virtue
    - 3.3.3 Virtues, Actions, and Institutions
    - 3.3.4 Virtues and Principles
  - 3.4 Morality in the International Context
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Ethics of Care is an ethics that is focused on persons and their well-being, not on things. It does not seek to foster dependence but nurtures the development of the person so that one becomes capable of making one's own choices and living one's own life.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

When this unit is concluded, you should be able to:

- define the ethics of care
- explain partiality and care
- explain utility, rights, justice and caring
- analyse moral virtues
- identify virtue, action and institution
- explain virtue principle
- describe morality in international contexts.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Ethics of Care

At 8 p.m. on the night of December 11, 1995, an explosion near a boiler room rocked the Malden Mills factory in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Fires broke out in the century-old brick textile factory. Fanned by winds, the fires quickly gutted three factory buildings, injuring 25 workers, destroying nearly all of the plant, and putting nearly 1,400 people out of work 2 weeks before Christmas.

Founded in 1906, Malden Mills, a family-owned company, was one of the few makers of textiles still operating in New England. Most other textile manufacturers had relocated to the South and then to Asia in their search for cheap, non-union labour. President and major owner of the company, Aaron Feuerstein, however, had refused to abandon the community and its workers, who he said were "the most valuable asset that Malden Mills has, not an expense that can be cut." Emerging from a brush with bankruptcy in 1982, Feuerstein had refocused the company on the pricier end of the textile market, where state-of-the-art technology and high-quality goods are more important than low costs.

Shunning low-margin commodity fabrics such as plain polyester sheets, the company focused on a new synthetic material labelled polartee that company workers had discovered how to make through trial and error during the early 1980s. The new material was a fleecy, lightweight material that could wick away perspiration and that required combinations of artificial yarns, raising and shaving the pile, and weaving at specially invented (and patented) machines operated at exactly the right temperature, humidity, and speed. Workers had to develop special skills to achieve the correct weave and quality. Soon recognising polartee as the highest quality and most technically advanced fabric available for performance outdoor clothing, Patagonia, L.L. Bean, Eddie Bauer, Lands' End, North Face, Ralph Lauren, and other upscale outfitters adopted the high-priced material. Polartee sales climbed from \$5 million in 1982 to over \$200 million by 1995. With additional revenues from high-quality upholstery fabrics, Malden Mills' revenues in 1995 had totaled \$403 million, and its employees, who now numbered nearly 3,200, were the highest paid in the country. Feuerstein, who frequently provided special help to workers with special needs, kept an open-door policy with workers.

The morning after the December fire, however, with the factory in smouldering ruins, newspapers predicted that owner Aaron Feuerstein would do the smart thing and collect over \$100 million that insurers



would owe him, sell off the remaining assets, and either shut down the company or rebuild one in a Third World country where labour was cheaper. Instead, Feuerstein announced that the company would rebuild in Lawrence. In a move that confounded the industry, he promised that every employee forced out of work by the fire would continue to be paid full wages, would receive full medical benefits, and would be guaranteed a job when operations restarted in a few months.

Rebuilding in Lawrence would cost over \$300 million and keeping 1,400 laid-off workers on full salaries for a period of up to 3 months would cost an additional \$20 million. "I have a responsibility to the worker, both blue-collar and white-collar," Feuerstein later said. "I have an equal responsibility to the community. It would have been unconscionable to put 3,000 people on the streets and deliver a death blow to the cities of Lawrence and Methuen. Maybe on paper our company is [now] worth less to Wall Street, but I can tell you it's [really] worth more."

The Malden Mills incident suggests a perspective on ethics that is not adequately captured by the moral views we have so far examined. Consider that from a utilitarian perspective Feuerstein had no obligation to rebuild the factory in Lawrence or to continue to pay his workers while they were not working. Moreover, relocating the operations of Malden Mills to a Third World country where labour is cheaper would not only have benefited the company, it would also have provided jobs for Third World workers who are more desperately needy than American workers.

From an impartial utilitarian perspective, then, more utility would have been produced by bringing jobs to Third World workers than by spending the money to preserve the jobs of current Malden Mills employees in Lawrence, Massachusetts. It is true that the Malden Mills workers were close to Feuerstein and that over the years they had remained loyal to him and had built a close-relationship with him. However, from an impartial standpoint, the utilitarian would say such personal relationships are irrelevant and should be set aside in favor of whatever maximises utility.

A rights perspective would also not provide any support for the decision to remain in Lawrence nor to continue to pay workers full wages while the company rebuilt. Workers certainly could not claim to have a moral right to be paid while they were not working. Nor could workers claim to have a moral right to have a factory rebuilt for them. The impartial perspective of a rights theory, then, does not suggest that Feuerstein had any special obligations to his employees after the fire.

Nor, finally, could one argue that justice demanded that Feuerstein build the factory and continue to pay workers while they were working. Although workers were pivotal to the success of the company, the company had rewarded them by paying them very generous salaries over many years. Impartial justice does not seem to require that the company support people while they are not working nor does it seem to require that the company build a factory for them. In fact, if impartial, then it seems more just to move the factory to a Third World country where people are needier than to keep the jobs in the United States where people are relatively well off.

### 3.1.1 Partiality and Care

The approaches to ethics that we have seen, then, all assume that ethics should be impartial and that, consequently, any special relationships that one may have with particular individuals, such as relatives, friends, or one's employees, should be set aside when determining what one should do. Some utilitarians have claimed, in fact, that if a stranger and your parent were both drowning and you could save only one of them, and if saving the stranger would produce more utility than saving your parent (perhaps the stranger is a brilliant surgeon who would save many lives), then you would have a moral obligation to save the stranger and let your parent drown. Such a conclusion, many people have argued, is perverse and mistaken. In such a situation, the special relationship of love and caring that you have with your parents gives you a special obligation to care for them in a way that overrides obligations you may have toward strangers.

Similarly, in the Malden Mills incident, Feuerstein had a special obligation to take care of his workers precisely because they were his workers and had built concrete relationships with him, helping him build his business and create the revolutionary new fabrics that gave Malden Mills its amazing competitive advantage in the textile industry. This obligation toward his own particular workers, who were to a large extent dependent on his company, it could be argued, overrode any obligations he may have had toward strangers in the Third World.

This view that we have an obligation to exercise special care toward those particular persons with whom we have valuable close relationships, particularly relations of dependency is a key concept in an "ethic of care," an approach to ethics that many feminist ethicists have recently advanced. We briefly discussed this approach to ethics in the first unit when we noted the new approach to moral decision-making developed by psychologist Carol Gilligan. A morality of care "rests on an understanding of relationships as response to another in their terms." According to this "care" view of ethics, the moral task is not to follow

universal and impartial moral principles, but instead to attend and respond to the good of particular concrete persons with whom we are in a valuable and close relationship. Compassion, concern, love, friendship, and kindness are all sentiments or virtues that normally manifest this dimension of morality. Thus, an ethic of care emphasises two moral demands:

- We each exist in a web of relationships and should preserve and nurture those concrete and valuable relationships we have with specific persons.
- We each should exercise special care for those with whom we are concretely related by attending to their particular needs, values; desires, and concrete well-being as seen from their own personal perspective, and by responding positively to these needs, values, desires, and concrete wellbeing, particularly of those who are vulnerable and dependent on our care.

For example, Feuerstein's decision to remain in the community of Lawrence and care for his workers by continuing to pay them after the fire was a response to the imperative of preserving the concrete relationships he had formed with his employees and of exercising special care for the specific needs of these particular individuals who were economically dependent on him. This requirement to take care of this specific group of individuals is more significant than any moral requirement to care for strangers in Third World countries.

It is important not to restrict the notion of a concrete relationship to relationships between two individuals or to relationships between an individual and a specific group. The examples of relationships that we have given so far have been of this kind. Many advocates of an ethic of care have noted that an ethic of care should also encompass the larger systems of relationships that make up concrete communities. An ethic of care, therefore, can be seen as encompassing the kinds of obligations that a so-called communitarian ethic advocates.

A communitarian ethic is an ethic that sees concrete communities and communal relationships as having a fundamental value that should be preserved and maintained. What is important in a communitarian ethic is not the isolated individual, but the community within which individuals discover who they are by seeing themselves as integral parts of a larger community with its traditions, culture, practices, and history. The broad web of concrete relationships that make up a particular community, then, should be preserved and nurtured just as much as the more limited interpersonal relationships that spring up between individual people.

What kind of argument can be given in support of an ethic of care? An ethic of care can be based on the claim that the identity of the self—who I am—is based on the relationships the self has with other selves. The individual cannot exist, cannot even be who he or she is, in isolation from caring relationships with others. I need others to feed and care for me when I am born; I need others to educate me and care for me as I grow; I need others as friends and lovers to care for me when I mature; and always I must live in a community on whose language, traditions, culture, and other benefits I depend and that come to define me. It is in these concrete relationships with others that I form my understanding of whom and what I am. Therefore, to whatever extent the self has value, to that same extent the relationships that are necessary for the self to exist and be what it is must also have value and so should be maintained and nurtured. The value of the self, then, is ultimately derivated from the value of the community.

It is also important in this context to distinguish three different forms of caring: caring about something, caring after someone, and caring for someone. The kind of caring demanded by an ethic of care is the kind expressed by the phrase "caring for someone." Ethicists have suggested that the paradigm example of caring for someone is the kind of caring that a mother extends toward her child. Such caring is focused on persons and their well-being, not on things; it does not seek to foster dependence, but nurtures the development of the person so that one becomes capable of making one's own choices and living one's own life. It is not detached, but is "engrossed" in the person and attempts to see the world through the eyes and values of the person.

In contrast, caring about something is the kind of concern and interest that one can have for things or ideas where there is no second person in whose subjective reality one becomes engrossed. Such caring for objects is not the kind of caring demanded by an ethics of care. One can also become busy taking care of people in a manner that looks after their needs but remain objective and distant from them as, for example, it happens in bureaucratic service institutions such as the post office or a social welfare office. Caring after people in this way, although often necessary, is not the kind of caring demanded by an ethic of care.

Two additional issues are important to note. First, not all relationships have value, and so not all would generate the duties of ~~Relationships~~ relationships in which one person attempts to dominate, oppress, or harm another; relationships that are characterised by hatred, violence, disrespect, and viciousness; and relationships that are characterised by injustice, exploitation, and harm to others lack the value that an ethic of care requires. An ethic of care does not obligate us to maintain ~~and~~ nurture such relationships. However, relationships that exhibit the

virtues of compassion, concern, love, friendship, and loyalty do have the kind of value that an ethic of care requires, and an ethic of care implies that such relationships should be maintained and nurtured.

Second, it is important to recognise that the demands of caring are sometimes in conflict with the demands of justice. Consider two examples: First, suppose that one of the employees whom a female manager supervises is a friend of hers. Suppose that one day she catches her friend stealing from the company. Should she turn in her friend, as company policy requires, or should she say nothing, to protect her friend? Second, suppose that a female manager is supervising several people, one of whom is a close friend of hers. Suppose that she must recommend one of these subordinates for promotion to a particularly desirable position. Should she recommend her friend simply because she is her friend, or should she be impartial and follow company policy by recommending the subordinate who is most qualified even if this means passing over her friend? Clearly, in each of these cases, justice would require that the manager not favour her friend. The demands of an ethic of care would seem to require that the manager favour her friend for the sake of their friendship. How should conflicts of this sort be resolved?

First, notice that there is no fixed rule that can resolve all such conflicts. One can imagine situations in which the manager's obligations of justice toward her company would clearly override the obligations she has toward her friend. (Imagine that her friend stole several million Naira and was prepared to steal several million more.) One can imagine situations in which the manager's obligations toward her friend override her obligations toward the company. (Imagine, for example, that what her friend stole was insignificant, that her friend desperately needed what she stole, and that the company would react by imposing an excessively harsh punishment on the friend.).

Although no fixed rule can resolve all conflicts between the demands of caring and the requirements of justice, nevertheless some guidelines can be helpful in resolving such conflicts. Consider that when the manager was hired, she voluntarily agreed to accept the position of manager along with the duties and privileges that would define her role as a manager. Among the duties she promised to carry out is the duty to protect the resources of the company and abide by company policy. Therefore, the manager betrays her relationships with the people to whom she made these promises if she now shows favouritism toward her friend in violation of the company policies she voluntarily agreed to uphold. The institutional obligations we voluntarily accept and to which we voluntarily commit ourselves, then, can require that we be impartial toward our friends and that we pay more attention to the demands of

impartial justice than to the demands of the ethics of care. What about situations in which there is a conflict between our institutional obligations and the demands of a relationship, and the relationship is so important to us that we feel we must favour the relationship over our institutional obligations? Then morality would seem to require that we relinquish the institutional role that we have voluntarily accepted. Thus, the manager who feels that she must favour her friend and that she cannot be impartial as she voluntarily agreed to be when she accepted her job must resign her job. Otherwise, the manager is in effect living a lie: By keeping her job while favouring her friend, she would imply that she was living up to her voluntary agreement of impartiality when in fact she was being partial toward her friend.

It was noted that the care approach to ethics has been developed by feminist ethicists. The care approach, in fact, originated in the claim of psychologist Carol Gilligan that women and men approach moral issues from two different perspectives: Men approach moral issues from an individualistic focus on rights and justice, whereas women approach moral issues from a non-individualistic focus on relationships and caring. Empirical research, however, has shown that this claim is, for the most part, mistaken, although there are some differences evident in the way that men and women respond to moral dilemmas. Most ethicists have abandoned the view that an ethic of care is for women only and have argued, instead, that just as women must recognise the demands of justice and impartiality, so men must recognise the demands of caring and partiality. Caring is not the task of women, but a moral imperative for both men and women.

### 3.1.2 Objections to Care

The care approach to ethics has been criticised on several grounds. First, it has been claimed that an ethic of care can degenerate into favoritism. Being partial, for example, to members of one's own ethnic group, to a sexist old-boy network, to members of one's own race, or to members of one's own nation can all be unjust forms of partiality. Proponents of an ethic of care, however, can respond that, although the demands of partiality can conflict with other demands of morality, this is true of all approaches to ethics.

Morality consists of a wide spectrum of moral considerations that can conflict with each other. Utilitarian considerations can conflict with considerations of justice, and these can conflict with moral rights. In the same way, the demands of partiality and caring can also conflict with the demands of utility, justice, and rights. What morality requires is not that we get rid of all moral conflicts, but that we learn to weigh moral considerations and balance their different demands in specific situations.

The fact that caring can sometimes conflict with justice, then, does not make an ethic of caring less adequate than any other approach to ethics, but simply points out the need to weigh and balance the relative importance of caring versus justice in specific situations. A second important criticism of an ethic of care is that its demands can lead to “burnout.” In demanding that people exercise caring for children, parents, siblings, spouses, lovers, friends, and other members of the community, an ethic of care seems to demand that people sacrifice their own needs and desires to care for the well-being of others. However, proponents of caring can respond that an adequate view of caring will balance caring for the caregiver with caring for others.

The advantage of an ethic of care is that it forces us to focus on the moral value of being partial toward those concrete persons with whom we have special and valuable relationships and the moral importance of responding to such persons as particular individuals with characteristics that demand a response to them that we do not extend to others. In these respects, an ethic of care provides an important correction to the other approaches to ethics that we have examined, which all emphasise impartiality and universality. An ethic of care, with its focus on partiality and particularity, is an important reminder of an aspect of morality that cannot be ignored.

### **3.2 Integrating Utility, Rights, Justice, and Caring**

The last three sections have described the four main kinds of moral standards that today lie at the basis of most of our moral judgments and that force us to bring distinctive kinds of considerations into our moral reasoning. Utilitarian standards must be used when we do not have the resources to attain everyone's objectives, so we are forced to consider the net social benefits and social costs consequent on the actions (or policies or institutions) by which we can attain these objectives. When these utilitarian considerations are employed, the person must bring into moral reasoning measurements, estimates, and comparisons of the relevant benefits and costs. Such measurements, estimates, and comparisons constitute the information on which the utilitarian moral judgment is based.

Our moral judgments are also partially based on standards that specify how individuals must be treated or respected. These sorts of standards must be employed when our actions and policies substantially affect the welfare and freedom of specifiable individuals. Moral reasoning of this type forces consideration of whether the behaviour respects the basic rights of the individuals involved and whether the behaviour is consistent with one's agreements and special duties. These sorts of considerations require information concerning how the behaviour affects

the basic needs of the humans involved; the freedom they have to choose; the information available to them; the extent to which force, coercion, manipulation, or deception are used on them; and the tacit and explicit understandings with which they entered various roles and agreements.

Third, our moral judgments are also in part based on standards of justice that indicate how benefits and burdens should be distributed among the members of a group. These sorts of standards must be employed when evaluating actions whose distributive effects differ in important ways. The moral reasoning on which such judgments are based will incorporate considerations concerning whether the behaviour distributes benefits and burdens equally or in accordance with the needs, abilities, contributions, and free choices of people as well as the extent of their wrongdoing. These sorts of considerations in turn rely on comparisons of the benefits and burdens going to different groups (or individuals) and comparisons of their relative needs, efforts, and so forth.

Fourth, our moral judgments are also based on standards of caring that indicate the kind of care that is owed to those with whom we have special concrete relationships. Standards of caring are essential when moral questions arise that involve persons embedded in a web of relationships, particularly persons with whom one has close relationships and particularly relationships of dependency. Moral reasoning that invokes standards of caring will incorporate considerations concerning the, particular characteristics and needs of those persons with whom one has a concrete relationship, the nature of one's relationships with those persons, and the forms of caring and partiality that are called for by those relationships and that are needed to 'sustain those relationships.

Our morality, therefore, contains four main kinds of basic moral considerations, each of which emphasises certain morally important aspects of our behaviour, but no one of which captures all the factors that must be taken into account in making moral judgments. Utilitarian standards consider only the aggregate social welfare but ignore the individual and how that welfare is distributed. Moral rights consider the individual but discount both aggregate well-being and distributive considerations. Standards of justice consider distributive issues but they ignore aggregate social welfare and the individual as such. Although standards of caring consider the partiality that must be shown to those close to us, they ignore the demands of impartiality. These four kinds of moral considerations do not seem to be reducible to each other, yet all seem to be necessary parts of our morality. That is, there are some moral problems for which utilitarian considerations are decisive, whereas for other problems the decisive considerations are the rights of individuals



or the justice of the distributions involved, and for others the most significant issue is how those close to us should be cared for. This suggests that moral reasoning should incorporate all four kinds of moral considerations, although only one or the other may turn out to be relevant or decisive in a particular situation. One simple strategy for ensuring that all four kinds of considerations are incorporated into one's moral reasoning is to inquire systematically into the utility, rights, justice, and caring involved in a given moral judgment. One might, for example, ask a series of questions about an action that one is considering:

- Does the action, as far as possible, maximise social benefits and minimise social injuries?
- Is the action consistent with the moral rights of those whom it will affect?
- Will the action lead to a just distribution of benefits and burdens?
- Does the action exhibit appropriate care for the well-being of those who are closely related to or dependent on oneself?

Bringing together different moral standards in this way, however, requires that one keeps in mind how they relate to each other. As we have seen, moral rights identify areas in which other people generally may not interfere even if they can show that they would derive greater benefits from such interference. Generally speaking, therefore, standards concerned with moral rights have greater weight than either utilitarian standards or standards of justice. Similarly, standards of justice are generally accorded greater weight than utilitarian considerations. Standards of caring seem to be given greater weight than principles of impartiality in situations that involve close relationships (such as family and friends) and privately owned resources.

But these relationships hold only in general. If a certain action (or policy or institution) promises to generate sufficiently large social benefits or prevent sufficiently large social harm, the enormity of these utilitarian consequences may justify limited infringements on the rights of some individuals. Sufficiently large social costs and benefits may also be significant enough to justify some departures from standards of justice.

The correction of large and widespread injustices may be ~~important~~ to justify limited infringements on some individual rights. When a large injustice or large violation of rights, or even large social costs, are at stake, the demands of caring may have to give way to ~~the~~ demands of impartiality.

At this time, we have no comprehensive moral theory capable of determining precisely when utilitarian considerations become sufficiently large to outweigh narrow infringements on a conflicting right, a standard of justice, or the demands of caring. Nor ~~can~~ ~~provide~~ a universal rule that will tell us when considerations of justice become important enough to outweigh infringements on conflicting rights or on the demands of caring.

Moral philosophers have been unable to agree on any absolute rules for making such judgments. However, there are a number of rough criteria that can guide us in these matters. Suppose, for example, that only by invading my employees' right to privacy (with hidden cameras and legal on-the-job phone taps) will I be able to stop the continuing theft of several life-saving drugs that some of them are clearly stealing. How can I determine whether the utilitarian benefits here are sufficiently large to justify infringing on their right?

First, I might ask whether the kinds of utilitarian values involved are clearly more important than the kinds of values protected by the right (or distributed by the standard of justice). The utilitarian benefits in ~~the~~ present example include the saving of human life, whereas the right to privacy protects (let us suppose) the values of freedom from shame and blackmail and of freedom to live one's life as one chooses. Considering this, I might decide that human life is clearly the more important kind of value because without life freedom has little value.

Second, I might then ask whether the more important kind of value also involves substantially more people. For example, because the recovered drugs will (we assume) save several hundred lives, whereas the invasion of privacy will affect only a dozen people, the utilitarian values ~~involve~~ involve substantially more people.

Third, I can ask whether the actual injuries sustained by the persons whose rights are violated (or to whom an injustice is done) will be minor. For example, suppose that I can ensure that my employees suffer no shame, blackmail, or restriction on their freedom as a result of my uncovering information about their private lives (I intend to destroy all such information).

Fourth, I can ask whether the potential breakdown in trusting relationships that surveillance risks is more or less important than the theft of life-saving resources. Let us suppose, for example, that the potential harm that surveillance will inflict on employee relationships of trust is not large. Then it would appear that my invasion of the privacy of employees is justified.

Hence, there are rough criteria that can guide our thinking when it appears that, in a certain situation, utilitarian considerations might be sufficiently important to override conflicting rights, standards of justice, or the demands of caring. Similar criteria can be used to determine whether, in a certain situation, considerations of justice should override an individual's rights, or when the demands of caring are more or less significant than the requirements of justice. But these criteria remain rough and intuitive. They lie at the edges of the light that ethics can shed on moral reasoning.

### **3.3 Virtue Ethics**

Ivan F. Boesky, born into a family of modest means, moved to New York City when, as a young lawyer, he was turned down for jobs by Detroit's top law firms. By the mid-1980s, the hard-working Boesky had accumulated a personal fortune estimated at over \$400 million and was CEO of a large financial services company. He was famous in financial circles for his extraordinary skills in arbitrage, the art of spotting differences in the prices at which financial securities are selling on different world markets and profiting by buying the securities where they are priced low and selling them where they are priced high. As a prominent member of New York society, Boesky enjoyed a reputation as a generous philanthropist.

However, on December 18, 1987, Boesky was sentenced to 3 years in prison and paid a penalty of \$100 million for illegally profiting from insider information. According to court records, Boesky paid David Levine, a friend who worked inside a firm that arranged mergers and acquisitions, to provide him with information about companies that were about to be purchased by another party (usually a corporation) for much more than the current price of their stock on the stock market. Relying on this insider's information and before it became public, Boesky would buy up the stock of the companies on the stock market—in effect buying the stock from stockholders who did not realise that their companies were about to be purchased for much more than the current stock market price. When the purchase of the company was announced, the stock price rose and Boesky would sell his stock at a handsome profit. Although buying and selling stock on the basis of insider information is legal in many countries (e.g., Italy, Switzerland, Hong Kong) and many

economists argue that the economic benefits of the practice (it tends to make the price of a company's stock reflect the true value of the company) outweigh its harms (it tends to discourage non-insiders from participating in the stock market), nevertheless, the practice is illegal in the United States.

What drove a man who already had hundreds of millions of dollars and everything else most people could ever want or need, to become obsessed with making money that he deliberately broke the law? Much of the answer, it has been claimed, lay in his character. A former friend is quoted as saying, "Maybe he's greedy beyond the wildest imaginings of mere mortals like you and me." Boesky once described his obsession to accumulate ever more money as "a sickness I have in the face of which I am helpless". Others said of him that: "He was driven by work, overzealousness, and subject to severe mood swings".

Intimates of Mr. Boesky say he vacillated between "being loud, and harsh and aggressive, to mellifluously soft-spoken, charming and courtly." He was also fiendish about his pursuit of information. "When somebody got an edge on something, he would go bananas." "When it came to money and business dealings, he was quite ruthless and pursued his goal with a single-minded purpose". Although his first love was money, he hankered for the genteel respectability and status that are generally denied the nouveau riche.

The story of the fall of Ivan Boesky is the story of a man brought down by greed. What stand out in this story are the descriptions of his moral character the character of a man driven by an obsessive love of money. Boesky is described as being "greedy," "sick," "aggressive," "fiendish," and "ruthless." Because what he said of himself did not match his secret dealings, some said he "lacked integrity" and others that he was "hypocritical" and "dishonest." All of these descriptions are judgments about the moral character of the man, not judgments about the morality of his actions. In fact, although it is clear that trading on insider information is illegal, the fact that the practice is legal in many countries and that many economists support it suggests that the practice is not inherently immoral.

As the story of Boesky makes clear, we evaluate the morality of people's character as well as their actions. The approaches to ethics that we have examined so far all focus on action as the key subject matter of ethics and ignore the character of the agent who carries out the action. Utilitarianism, for example, tells us that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness," and Kantian ethics tells us that "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." However, the central issue that

emerges in the case of Boesky, and in many similar stories of men and women in business, is not the wrongness of their actions, but the flawed nature of their character.

Many ethicists have criticised the assumption that actions are the fundamental subject matter of ethics. Ethics, they have argued, should look not only at the kinds of actions an agent ought to perform but should pay attention to the kind of person an agent ought to be. An "agent-based" focus on what one ought to be, in contrast to an "action-based" focus on how one ought to act, would look carefully at a person's moral character, including, in particular, whether a person's moral character exhibits virtue or vice. A more adequate approach to ethics, according to these ethicists, would take the virtues (such as honesty, courage, temperance, integrity, compassion, self-control) and the vices (such as dishonesty, ruthlessness, greed, lack of integrity, cowardliness) as the basic starting point for ethical reasoning.

Although virtue ethics looks at moral issues from a very different perspective than action-based ethics, it does not follow that the conclusions of virtue ethics will differ radically from the conclusions of an action-based ethic. As we see, there are virtues that are correlated with utilitarianism (e.g., the virtue of benevolence), virtues that are correlated with rights (e.g., the virtue of respect), and virtues that are correlated with justice and caring. The virtues, then, should not be seen as providing a fifth alternative to utility, rights, justice, and caring. Instead, the virtues can be seen as providing a perspective that surveys the same ground as the four approaches but from an entirely different perspective. What the principles of utility, rights, justice, and caring do from the perspective of action evaluations, an ethic of virtue does from the perspective of character evaluations.

### **3.3.1 The Nature of Virtue**

What exactly is a moral virtue? A moral virtue is an acquired disposition that is valued as part of the character of a morally good human being and that is exhibited in the person's habitual behaviour. A person has a moral virtue when the person is disposed to behave habitually in the way and with the reasons, feelings, and desires that are characteristic of a morally good person. Honesty, for example, is valued as a character trait of morally good people. A person possesses the virtue of honesty when the person is disposed to habitually tell the truth and does so because he believes telling the truth is right, feels good when he tells the truth and uncomfortable when he lies, and always wants to tell the truth out of respect for the truth and its importance in human communication. If a person told the truth on occasion, or did so for the wrong reasons or with the wrong desires, we would not say that the person is honest. We would

not say a person is honest, for example, if the person frequently lies, or if the person tells the truth only because he or she thought it was the way to get people's liking, or if the person told the truth out of fear and reluctantly. Moreover, a moral virtue must be acquired, and not merely a natural characteristic such as intelligence, or beauty, or strength. A moral virtue is praiseworthy in part because it is an achievement, its development requires effort.

### 3.3.2 The Moral Virtues

The most basic issue, from the perspective of virtue ethics, is the question: What are the traits of character that make a person a morally good human being? Which traits of character are moral virtues? On this issue, there have been numerous views. The most influential theory of virtue was proposed by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who argued that a moral virtue is a habit that enables a human being to live according to reason. A person lives according to reason, Aristotle argued, when the person knows and chooses the reasonable middle ground between going too far and not going far enough in his actions, emotions, and desires: "Moral virtue is a mean between two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency, and it aims at hitting the mean in feelings, [desires,] and actions."

With respect to the emotion of fear, for example, courage is the virtue of responding to fear with a reasonable amount of daring, whereas cowardliness is the vice of not being daring enough in response to fear, and recklessness is the vice of being too daring in response to fear. With respect to the desire for food, temperance is the virtue of being reasonable by indulging the desire neither too much nor too little, whereas gluttony is the vice of indulging to unreasonable excess, and austerity is the vice of unreasonably indulging too little. With respect to the action of giving people the external goods they deserve, justice is the virtue of giving people exactly what they deserve, whereas injustice is the vice of either giving them more or less than they deserve. Virtues, then, are habits of dealing with one's emotions, desires, and actions in a manner that seeks the reasonable middle ground and avoids unreasonable extremes, whereas vices are habits of going to the extreme of either excess or deficiency. How does one determine what is reasonable? Prudence, Aristotle held, is the virtue that enables one to know what is reasonable in a given situation.

St. Thomas Aquinas, a Christian philosopher of the middle Ages, followed Aristotle in holding that the moral virtues enable people to follow reason in dealing with their desires, emotions, and actions and in accepting that the four pivotal or cardinal moral virtues are courage, temperance, justice, and prudence. But as a Christian, and so unlike

Aristotle, Aquinas held that the purpose of a person is not merely the exercise of reason in this world, but union with God in the ~~There~~ Therefore, to Aristotle's list of the moral virtues, Aquinas added the "theological" or Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity as the virtues that enable a person to achieve union with God. Moreover, Aquinas expanded Aristotle's list of the moral virtues to include others that make sense within the life of a Christian but would have been foreign to the life of the Greek aristocratic citizen on whom Aristotle had focused. For example, Aquinas held that humility is a Christian virtue and that pride is a vice for the Christian, whereas Aristotle had argued that for the Greek aristocrat pride is a virtue and humility is a vice.

More recently, the American philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has claimed that a virtue is any human disposition that is praised because it enables a person to achieve the good at which human "practices" aim:

The virtues are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the good internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harm, dangers, temptations and situations which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good

Critics have argued, however, that MacIntyre's approach does not seem to get things quite right. When Ivan Boesky, for example, was criticised as "greedy," "dishonest," "ruthless," and so on, people were not faulting him for failing to have the virtues proper to the practices within which he was pursuing his vision of the good. The moral defects for which Boesky was criticised were his alleged failings as 'a human being, regardless of how well or poorly he did in the various human practices in which he was engaged. The moral virtues seem to be those dispositions that enable one to live a morally good human life in general and not merely those that enable one to engage successfully in some set of human practices.

Edmund L. Pincoffs, in particular, criticises MacIntyre for claiming that virtues include only those traits required by some set of social practices. Instead, Pincoffs suggests that virtues include all those dispositions to act, feel, and think in certain ways that we use as the basis for choosing between persons or between potential future selves. When deciding, for example, whom to choose as a friend, spouse, employee, or manager, we look to people's dispositions: Are they honest or dishonest, sincere or insincere, greedy or selfish, reliable or unreliable, trustworthy or untrustworthy, dependable or undependable? Similarly, when thinking about a moral decision, we often think not so much of what we are

obligated to do, but instead of the kind of person we would be by doing it: In carrying out the action, would I be honest or dishonest, sincere or insincere, selfish or unselfish?

However, what makes one disposition a moral virtue and another a moral vice? There is no simple answer to this question, Pincoffs claims. Some dispositions, he points out, provide specific grounds for preferring a person because they make a person good or bad at specific tasks such as painting houses. Such specific dispositions are not virtues. But other dispositions are generally desirable because they make a person good at dealing with the kinds of situations that frequently and typically arise in human life. The virtues consist of such “generally desirable dispositions” that it is desirable for people to have in view of the human situation, of conditions, that is, under which human beings must (given the nature of the physical world and of human nature and human association) live.”

Because the human situation often requires concerted effort, for example, it is desirable that we have persistence and courage. Because tempers often flare, we need tolerance and tact. Because goods must often be distributed by consistent criteria, we need fairness and non-discrimination. However, selfishness, deceptiveness, cruelty, and unfairness are vices: They are generally undesirable because they are destructive to human relationships. The moral virtues, then, are those dispositions that are generally desirable for people to have in the kinds of situations they typically encounter in living together. They are desirable because they are useful either “for everyone in general or for the possessor of the quality.”

Pincoff's theory of virtue seems more adequate than a theory. MacIntyre's, which confines virtue to traits connected with practices. For the virtues seem to be dispositions that enable us to deal well with all of the exigencies of human life and not merely the exigencies of practices. Both Aristotle and Aquinas, for example, felt that, in articulating the moral virtues, they were articulating those habits that enable a person to live a human life well and not merely to do well in social practices.

As we have seen, however, Aristotle and Aquinas had different views on exactly what human life required. This suggests that to some extent what counts as a moral virtue will depend on one's beliefs about the kinds of situations that humans will face. Nevertheless, as Pincoff suggests, “we share a good deal of well grounded agreement on the question of who is the right sort of person in general,” because people in all societies have to face similar problems in living together. Catholics, for example, can recognise when a Buddhist is not just a good Buddhist, but also a person



of good moral character: “Courage is not more a Catholic than it is a Buddhist virtue; honesty commends itself to Presbyterian and Coptic Christian alike.” The moral virtues, then, include that wide variety of dispositions that people in all societies recognise as desirable because they “serve as reasons for preference in the ordinary and not-so-ordinary exigencies of life.” The four classical virtues on which Aristotle and Aquinas agreed are courage, temperance, justice, and prudence fall in this class. However, the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity that Aquinas added because of their special importance for a Christian life, would not count as moral virtues because they are desirable only within a special kind of life devoted to the pursuit of special religious objectives. Similarly, pride, which was a quality admired in Greek society, would not count as a moral virtue because it, too, is desirable only within a specific kind of society.

### 3.3.3 Virtues, Actions and Institutions

So far, we have ignored a key aspect of virtue theory: How does it help us decide what we are to do? Can an ethic of virtue do more than tell us the kind of people we should be? Is an ethic of virtue able to provide us with little guidance about how we should live our lives, how we should behave? One of the major criticisms made against virtue theory, in fact, is that it fails to provide us with guidance on how we are to act. When a woman is trying to decide whether to have an abortion, for example, she may ask a friend, “What should I do?” In such situations, it does not help to be told what kind of character one should have. In situations, one needs advice about what kinds of actions are appropriate in one's situation, and virtue theory seems incapable of providing such advice.

The criticism—that virtue theory provides no guidance for action—is natural because virtue theory deliberately turns away from action and focuses on moral character as the fundamental moral category. Nevertheless, although virtue is the foundation of virtue theory, this does not mean that virtue theory can provide no guidance for action.

Virtue theory argues that the aim of the moral life is to develop those general dispositions we call the moral virtues and to exercise and exhibit them in the many situations that human life sets before us. Insofar as we exercise the virtues in our actions, insofar as our actions exhibit the virtues, or insofar as our actions make us virtuous, those actions are morally right actions. Yet, insofar as our actions are the exercise of vice or insofar as our actions develop a vicious character, to that extent the actions are morally wrong. The key action-guiding implication of virtue theory, then, can be summed up in the claim that an action is morally right if in carrying out the action the agent exercises, exhibits, or

develops a morally virtuous character, and it is morally wrong to the extent that by carrying out the action the agent exercises, exhibits, or develops a morally vicious character.

From this perspective, then, the wrongfulness of an action can be determined by examining the kind of character the action tends to produce or the kind of character that tends to produce the action. In either case, the ethics of the action depends on its relationship to the character of the agent. For example, it has been argued that the morality of abortion, adultery, or any other action should be evaluated by attending to the kind of character evidenced by people who engage in such actions.

If the decision to engage in such actions tends to develop a person's character by making them more responsible, caring, principled, honest, open, and self-sacrificing, then such actions are morally right. However, if the decision to engage in such actions tends to make people more self-centered, irresponsible, dishonest, careless, and selfish, then such actions are morally wrong. Actions are not only evaluated by the kind of character they develop; we also condemn certain actions precisely because they are the outcome of a morally vicious character. For example, we condemn cruel actions because they exhibit a vicious character, and we condemn lies because they are products of a dishonest character.

Virtue theory not only provides a criterion for evaluating actions, it also provides a useful criterion for evaluating our social institutions and practices. For example, it has been argued that some economic institutions make people greedy, large bureaucratic organisations make people less responsible, and the practice of providing government "handouts" to people makes them lazy and dependent. All such arguments, at bottom, evaluate institutions and practices on the basis of a theory of virtue. Although such arguments may be false, they all appeal to the idea that institutions are morally defective when they tend to form morally defective characters.

Perhaps, there is no simple way to classify all the virtues. We have suggested that moral virtues are dispositions that are generally desirable because they are required by the human situation with which all people everywhere must cope. Some dispositions are moral virtues, for example, because people everywhere are tempted by their emotions and desires not to do what they know they should do. Courage, temperance, and, in general, the virtues of self-control are of this sort. Some virtues are dispositions to willingly engage in specific kinds of moral action that are valued in all societies, such as honesty. Pincoffs suggests that some dispositions can be classified as "instrumental virtues" because they

enable people everywhere to pursue their goals effectively as individuals (persistence, carefulness, determination) or as part of a group (cooperativeness), whereas some are “no instrumental virtues” because they are desirable everywhere for their own sake (serenity, nobility, wittiness, gracefulness, tolerance, reasonableness, gentleness, warmth, modesty, civility).

Some virtues are cognitive and consist of understanding the requirements of morality toward ourselves and others, such as wisdom and prudence. Other virtues are dispositions that incline one to act according to general moral principles. The virtue of benevolence, for example, inclines one to maximise people's happiness, the virtue of respect for others inclines one to exercise consideration for the rights of individuals, the virtue of fairness inclines one to behave according to the principles of justice, and the virtue of caring inclines one to live up to the tenets of care.

### 3.3.4 Virtues and Principles

What is the relationship between a theory of virtue and the theories of ethics that we have considered (utilitarian theories, rights theories, justice theories, and care theories)? As a glance at the many kinds of dispositions that count as virtues suggests, there is no single, simple relationship between the virtues and a morality based on principles. Some virtues enable people to do what moral principles require. Courage, for example, enables us to stick to our moral principles even when fear of the consequences tempts us to do otherwise. Some virtues consist of a readiness to act on moral principles. Justice, for example, is the virtue of being disposed to follow principles of justice. Some virtues are dispositions that our moral principles require us to develop. Utilitarianism, for example, requires us to develop dispositions such as kindness and generosity that will lead us to enhance the happiness of people.

Hence, there is no conflict between theories of ethics that are based on principles and theories of ethics based on virtues. However, a theory of virtue differs from an ethic of principles in the perspective from which it approaches moral evaluations. A theory of virtue judges actions, for example, in terms of the dispositions that are associated with those actions, whereas an ethic of principles judges dispositions in terms of the actions associated with those dispositions. For an ethic of principles actions are primary, whereas for an ethic of virtue dispositions are primary. We may say, then, that both ethics of principles and ethics of virtue identify what the moral life is about. However, principles look at the moral life in terms of the actions that morality obligates us to perform, whereas the virtues look at the moral life in terms of the kind

of person morality obligates us to be. An ethic of virtue, then, covers much of the same ground as an ethic of principles, but from a different standpoint.

An ethic of virtue, then, is not a fifth kind of moral principle that should take its place alongside the principles of utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring. Instead, an ethics of virtue fills out and adds to utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring by looking not at the actions people are required to perform, but at the character they are required to have.

An adequate ethic of virtue, then, will look at the virtues that are associated with utilitarianism, the virtues associated with rights, those associated with justice, and those associated with caring. In addition, it will (and in this respect an ethic of virtue goes beyond an ethic of principles) look at the virtues people need to stick to their moral principles when their feelings, desires, and passions tempt them to do otherwise. It will look at the many other virtues that the principles of utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring require a person to cultivate. An ethic of virtue, then, addresses the same landscape of issues that an ethic of principles does, but in addition it also addresses issues related to motivation and feeling that are largely ignored by an ethic of principles.

### 3.4 Morality in International Contexts

We noted in the first two units that multinational corporations operate in foreign host countries whose laws or government decrees, common practices, levels of development, and cultural understandings are sometimes much different from those of their home countries. These differences, we argued, do not provide adequate justification for the theory of ethical relativism. How should the moral principles of utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring be applied in foreign countries that differ in so many ways from our own?

Common practices can also differ markedly among nations. Whereas all forms of bribery of government personnel are considered wrong in the United States; many forms of petty bribery of lower-level government personnel are not only openly engaged in Nigeria but are universally accepted there as, standard practices even if officially frowned upon. Nepotism and sexism, although condemned in public companies in the United States, are accepted as a matter of course in some Arab public business environments. Manufacturing wages of \$2 an hour without benefits are accepted as common practice in Jamaica, whereas manufacturing wages in the United States average close to \$12 an hour plus benefits.

Multinationals also often operate in countries at very different level of development. Some countries have very high levels of technological, social, and economic resources available, whereas the resources of other countries in these and other areas are quite undeveloped. Technological sophistication, unions, financial markets, unemployment insurance, social security, and public education are widespread in more developed nations but are virtually unknown in Third World countries.

Most strikingly, the cultural practices of nations may differ so radically that the same action may mean something very different in two different cultures. In the United States, for example, it would be considered a lie for a company to provide the government with income statements that would understate the company's actual earnings for tax purposes. In some periods of Italy's history, however, it was accepted as a matter of course that all businesses would understate their annual earnings by one third when they reported their tax liability to the government at the end of the year.

Knowing this, the government would automatically inflate each company's income statements by one-third and levy taxes on this more accurate estimate, which companies willingly paid. Thus, because of a cultural practice that was known to both the business community and the government, Italian companies did not actually lie to their government when they understated their income: What looked like a lie to an outsider was, in the cultural context, a clearly understood signal of a company's true income.

When confronted with a foreign context, in which laws and government decrees, prevailing practices, levels of development, and cultural understandings are very different from those of the manager's home country, what should the manager of a multinational do? For example, when operating in a foreign country, should the manager of the multinational adopt the practices of its home country or those prevalent in the host country?

Some have claimed that, when operating in less developed countries, multinationals from more developed home countries should always follow those practices prevalent in the more developed country, which set higher or more stringent standards. But this claim ignores the possibility that introducing practices that have evolved in a highly developed country into one that is less developed may produce more harm than good—a violation of utilitarian standards of ethics. For example, if an American company operating in Nigeria pays local workers U.S. wages, it may draw all the skilled workers away from local Nigerian companies that can not afford to pay the same high salaries. As a consequence, Nigeria's efforts to develop local companies may be crippled while havoc is wreaked in local labour markets.

Again, if American companies operating in Nigeria are required to operate in Nigeria according to the more costly wage, consumer, environmental, and safety standards prevalent in the United States, they will have no reason to invest in Nigeria and Nigeria's development will be retarded. Precisely because they need and want foreign investment and technology, the governments of many less developed nations, genuinely interested in advancing the interests of their people, insisted on less costly standards that can attract foreign investment. This is clear that local conditions, particularly developmental conditions, must at least be considered when determining whether to import practices from a developing country into a less developed one and that it 'is a mistake to accept the blanket claim that one must always adopt the "higher" practices of the more 'developed home country.

Some have gone to the opposite extreme and argued that multinationals should always follow local practices, whatever they might be, or that they should do whatever the local government wants, because it is the representative of the people. But it is often unethical to go along with local practices as government requires sometimes than it is to oppose them. The lower environmental standards of Nigeria for example, may be so low that they permit pollution levels that cripple the "health of or even kill those living near chemical plants, producing flagrant violations of these people's basic human rights". The then apartheid policies of the South African government may require levels of discrimination against South African' Blacks that are deep violations of justice. Again, the self-interest of government elites in Haiti may lead them to support policies that enrich them while harming the citizens they are supposed to represent. Therefore, the blanket claim that local practices should always be adopted is also mistaken.

It is clear, then, that although local laws or government decrees, prevalent practices, levels of development, and cultural understandings all must be taken into account when evaluating the ethics of business policies and actions in a foreign country, the local status quo cannot simply be adopted without question by the multinational manager but must still be subjected to ethical analysis. What factors should be considered when evaluating the ethics of an action or policy in a foreign context? The foregoing discussion suggests that the following questions should be asked about any corporate action or policy under consideration by a company operating in a foreign country.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What does the corporate policy or action really mean in the context of the local culture? When viewed in terms of its local cultural meaning, is the policy or action ethically acceptable, or does it violate the ethical standards of utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring to such an extent that it should not be undertaken? From the perspective of virtue, does the action or policy encourage the exercise or the development of morally good character?
2. Taking into account the nation's level of technological, social, and economic development and what its government is doing to promote this development, does the corporate policy or action produce consequences that are ethically acceptable from the point of view of utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring or from the point of view of moral character? Can the more stringent legal requirements or practices common in more developed nations be implemented without damage to the host country and its development, and in context would such implementation be more consistent with the ethical standards of utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring? Would such implementation encourage the exercise or the development of morally good character?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Moral virtue is an acquired disposition that is valued as part of the character of a morally good human being and that is exhibited in the person's habitual behaviour.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Ethics of care is an ethic that emphasises caring for the concrete well-being of those near to us while virtue theory is the theory that aims at the moral life and development of those general dispositions called moral virtues, and to exercise and exhibit them in the many situations that human life set before us.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. If the corporate action or policy involves a local common practice that is morally questionable by home country standards (such as sexual discrimination or bribery of government personnel), is it possible to conduct business in the host country without engaging in the practice? If not, then does the practice violate the principles of utilitarianism, rights, justice, and caring to a degree significant

enough to require withdrawal from that country? Is the practice as pernicious from the perspective of moral character as to require withdrawal from the country?

2. “An ethics of caring conflicts with morality because morality requires impartiality.” Discuss the criticism of an ethics of caring. Also “an ethics of virtue implies that moral relativism is correct, while an action-centered ethics does not.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 5 ETHICS THEORY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Views of Ethical Behaviours
  - 3.2 Utilitarianism: Weighing Social Costs and Benefits
    - 3.2.1 Traditional Utilitarianism
      - 3.2.2 Measurement Problems
      - 3.2.3 Utilitarian Replies to Measurement Objections
      - 3.2.4 Problems with Rights and Justice
    - 3.2.5 Utilitarian Replies to Objections on Rights and Justice
  - 3.3 Rights and Duties
    - 3.3.1 The Concept of a Right
    - 3.3.2 Negative and Positive Rights
  - 3.3.3 Contractual Rights and Duties
  - 3.3.4 A basis for Moral Rights: Kant
    - 3.3.5 The First Formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative
    - 3.3.6 The Second Formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative
    - 3.3.7 Kantian Rights
  - 3.3.8 Problems with Kant
  - 3.3.9 The Libertarian Objection: Nozick
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Ethics theory refers to the various kinds of approaches to moral evaluation that constitute some of the most important types of ethical standards studied by moral philosophers. Each approach to moral evaluation employs distinct moral concepts, and each emphasises aspects of moral behaviour that are neglected or at least not emphasised by the others. The purpose of this unit is to explain the kinds of concepts and information that each employs, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and explain how these approaches can be used to clarify the moral issues that confront people in business

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

When you complete this unit, you should be able to:

- explain how to apply the theory of ethics; and
- identify and discuss how the concepts of a “right” should be applied to business situations.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Views of Ethical Behaviours

We can distinguish between four views of ethical behaviours. They are:

- Utilitarian view: It is based on the notion that ethics should deliver the greatest number of people.
- Individualism view: This view seeks to advance the long term self interest of individuals.
- Moral right view: This emphasises respect for and protection of the fundamental right of people.
- Justices view: Ethical behaviour or decision should treat people impartially and fairly according to guiding rules and standards.

The attention of this course unit shall be on utilitarianism, that is, the utilitarian view.

### 3.2 Utilitarianism: Weighing Social Costs and Benefits

We begin by looking at that approach to moral decision making that the Caltex managers took when they claimed that they should remain in South Africa because that course of action would have the beneficial consequences. This approach is sometimes referred to as a consequentiality approach and sometimes as a utilitarian approach. To see more clearly what the approach involves, let us look at a situation where this approach was a basic consideration in a business decision that had a dramatic impact on the lives of many people.

During the last century, Ford lost its market share to Japanese companies making compact, fuel-efficient cars. Lee Iacocca, president of Ford at the time, determined to regain Ford's share by developing a new small car called the Pinto. The Pinto would weigh less than 2,000 pounds, cost less than \$2,000, and be brought to market in 2 years instead of the normal 4. Because the Pinto was a rush styling, considerations dictated engineering design to a greater degree than usual. In particular, the Pinto's styling required that the gas tank be placed behind the rear axle, where it was more vulnerable to being

punctured in case of a rear-end collision. When an early model of the Pinto was crash-tested, it was found that, when struck from the rear at 20 miles per hour or more, the gas tank would sometimes rupture and gas would spray out and into the passenger compartment. In a real accident, stray sparks might explosively ignite the spraying gasoline and possibly burn any trapped occupants.

Ford managers decided, nonetheless, to go ahead with production of the Pinto for several reasons. First, the design met all the applicable legal and government standards then in effect. At the time, government regulations required that a gas tank only remain intact in a rear-end collision of less than 20 miles per hour. Second, Ford managers felt that the car was comparable in safety to several other cars then being produced by other auto companies. Third, according to an internal cost-benefit study that Ford carried out, the costs of modifying the Pinto would not be balanced by the benefits. The study showed that modifying the gas tank of the 12.5 million autos that would eventually be built would cost about \$11 a unit for \$137 million.  $\text{Costs: } \$11 \times 12.5 \text{ million autos} = \$137 \text{ million}$

However, statistical data showed that the modification would prevent the loss of about 180 burn deaths, 180 serious burn injuries, and 2,100 burned vehicles. At the time (1970), the government officially valued a human life at \$200,000, insurance companies valued a serious burn injury at \$67,000, and the average residual value on subcompacts was \$700. So in monetary terms, the modification would have the benefit of preventing losses with a total value of only \$49.15 million:

**Benefits:  $(180 \text{ deaths} \times \$200,000) + (180 \text{ injuries} \times \$67,000) + (2,100 \text{ vehicles} \times \$700) = \$49.15 \text{ million}$**

Thus, a modification that would ultimately cost customers \$137 million (because the costs of the modification would be added to the price of the car) would result in the prevention of customer losses valued at only \$49.15 million. It was not right, the study argued, to spend \$137 million of society's money to provide a benefit society valued at only \$49.15 million. . .

Ford subsequently went ahead with the production of the unmodified Pinto. It is estimated that in the decade that followed at least 60 persons died in fiery accidents involving Pintos and that at least twice that number suffered severe burns over large areas of their bodies, many requiring years of painful skin grafts. Ford eventually phased out the Pinto model.

The kind of analysis that Ford managers used in their cost-benefit study

is a version of what has been traditionally called utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a general term for any view that holds that actions and policies should be evaluated on the basis of the benefits and costs they will impose on society. In any situation, the "right" action or policy is the one that will produce the greatest net benefits or the lowest net costs (when all alternatives have only net costs).

The Ford managers reduced costs and benefits primarily to economic costs and benefits (such as medical costs, loss of income, and damage to buildings) and these were measured in monetary terms. But the benefits of an action may include any desirable goods (pleasures, health, lives, satisfactions, knowledge, happiness) produced by the action, and costs may include any of its undesirable evils (pain, which the Ford study did take into account, sickness, death, dissatisfaction, ignorance, unhappiness). The inclusive term used to refer to the net benefits of any sort produced by an action is utility. Hence, the name utilitarianism is used for any theory that advocates selection of that action or policy that maximises benefits (or minimises costs).

Many business analysts hold that the best way to evaluate the ethical propriety of a business decision or any other decision is by relying on utilitarian cost-benefit analysis. The socially responsible course for a business to take is the one that will produce the greatest net benefits for society or impose the lowest net costs. Several government agencies, many legal theorists, numerous moralists, and a variety of business ethicists advocate utilitarianism. We begin our discussion of ethical principles by examining this popular approach.

### **3.2.1 Traditional Utilitarianism**

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) is generally considered the founder of traditional utilitarianism. J Bentham sought an objective basis for making value judgments that would provide a common and publicly acceptable norm for determining social policy and social legislation. The most promising way to reach such an objective ground of agreement, he believed, is by looking at the various policies a legislature could enact and comparing the beneficial and harmful consequences of each. The right course of action from an ethical point of view would be to choose the policy that would produce the greatest amount of utility. Summarised, the utilitarian principle holds that an action is right from an ethical point of view if and only if the sum total of utilities produced by that act is greater than the sum total of utilities produced by any other act the agent could have performed in its place.

The utilitarian principle assumes that we can somehow measure and add

the quantities of benefits' produced by an action and subtract from them the measured quantities of harm the action will have and thereby determine which action produces the greatest total benefits or the lowest total costs. That is, the principle assumes that all the benefits and costs of an action can be measured on a common numerical scale and then added or subtracted from each other. The satisfactions that an improved work environment imparts to workers, for example, might be equivalent to 500 positive units of utility, whereas the resulting bills that arrive the next month might be equivalent to 700 negative units of utility. Therefore, the total combined utility of this act (improving the work environment) would be 200 units of negative utility.

When the utilitarian principle says that the right action for a particular occasion is the one that produces more utility than any other possible action, it does not mean that the right action is the one that produces the most utility for the person performing the action. Rather, an action is right if it produces the most utility for all persons affected by the action (including the person performing the action). Nor does the utilitarian principle say that an action is right so long as its benefits outweigh its costs. Rather, utilitarianism holds that, in the final analysis, only one action is right: that one action whose net benefits are greatest by comparison to the net benefits of all other possible alternatives. A third misunderstanding is to think that the utilitarian principle requires us to consider only the direct and immediate consequences of our actions: Instead, both the immediate and all foreseeable future costs and benefits that each alternative will provide for each individual must be taken into account as well as any significant indirect effects.

Consequently, to determine how I should behave on a particular occasion, I must do three things. First, I must determine what alternative actions or policies are available to me on that occasion. The Ford managers, for example, were implicitly considering two alternatives: to redesign the Pinto by putting a rubber bladder around the gas tank or leave it as originally designed. Second, for each alternative action, I must estimate the direct and indirect benefits and costs that the action will probably produce for each and every person affected by the action in the foreseeable future. Ford's calculations of the costs and benefits that all affected parties would have to bear if the Pinto design were changed, and those that all parties would have to bear if it were not changed, are examples of such estimates. Third, the alternative that produces the greatest sum total of utility must be chosen as the ethically appropriate course of action. The Ford managers, for example, decided that the course of action that would impose the lowest costs and the greatest benefits would be to leave the Pinto design unchanged.

Utilitarianism is in many respects an attractive theory. For one thing, it

matches fairly nicely the views that we tend to advocate when discussing the choice of government policies and public goods. Most people agree, for example, that when the government is trying to determine on which public projects it should spend tax monies, the proper course of action would be for it to adopt those projects whose objective studies show will provide the greatest benefits for the members of society at the least cost. Of course, this is just another way of saying that the proper government policies are those that would have the greatest measurable utility for people-or, in the words of a famous slogan, those that will produce "the greatest good for the greatest."

Utilitarianism also seems to fit in rather neatly with the intuitive criteria that people employ when discussing moral conduct. For example, when people explain why they have a moral obligation to perform an action, they often proceed by pointing to the benefits or harms the action will impose on human beings. Utilitarianism also has the advantage of being able to explain why we hold that certain types of activities are generally morally wrong (lying, adultery, killing) while others are generally morally right (telling the truth, fidelity, keeping one's promises).

The utilitarian can say that lying is generally wrong because of the costly effects lying has on our human welfare. When people lie to each other, they are less apt to trust each other and cooperate with each other. The less trust and cooperation, the more our welfare declines. Telling the truth is generally right because it strengthens cooperation and trust and thereby improves everyone's well-being. In general, then, it is a good rule of thumb to tell the truth and to refrain from lying. Traditional utilitarian would deny, however, that any kinds of actions are always right or always wrong. They would deny, for example, that dishonesty or theft is necessarily always wrong.

Utilitarian views have also been highly influential in economics. A long line of economists, beginning from the 19th century, argued that economic behaviour could be explained by assuming that human beings always attempt to maximise their utility and that the utilities of commodities can be measured by the prices people are willing to pay for them. With these and a few other simplifying assumptions (such as the use of indifference curves), economists were able to derive the familiar supply and demand curves of sellers and buyers in markets and explain why prices in a perfectly competitive market gravitate toward an equilibrium. More important, economists were also able to demonstrate that a system of perfectly competitive markets would lead to a use of resources and price variations that would enable consumers to maximise their utility (defined in terms of Pareto optimality) through their

purchases. On utilitarian grounds, therefore, these economists concluded that such a system of markets is better than any other alternative.

Utilitarianism is also the basis of the techniques of economic cost-benefit analysis. This type of analysis is used to determine the desirability of investing in a project (such as a dam, factory, or public park) by figuring whether its present and future economic benefits outweigh its present and future economic costs. To calculate these costs and benefits, discounted monetary prices are estimated for all the effects the project will have on the present and future environment and on present and future populations. Carrying out these sorts of calculations is not always an easy matter, but various methods have been devised for determining the monetary prices of even such intangible benefits as the beauty of a forest (e.g., we might ask how much people pay to see the beauty of a similar privately owned park). In this form of utilitarianism, the concept of utility is restricted to monetarily measurable economic costs and benefits.

Finally, we can note that utilitarianism fits nicely with a value that many people prize: efficiency. Efficiency can mean different things to different people, but for many it means operating in such a way that one produces the most one can with the resources at hand. That is, an efficient operation is one that produces a desired output with the lowest resource input. Such efficiency is precisely what utilitarianism advocates because it holds that one should always adopt the course of action that will produce the greatest benefits at the lowest cost.

### 3.2.2 Measurement Problems

One major set of problems with utilitarianism is centered on the difficulties encountered when trying to measure utility. One problem is this: How can the utilities different actions have for different people be measured and compared as utilitarianism requires? Suppose you and I would both enjoy getting a certain job: How can we figure out whether the utility you would get out of having the job is more or less than the utility I would get out of not having it? Each of us may be sure that he or she would benefit most from the job, but because we cannot get into each other's skin, this judgment has no objective basis. Comparative measures of the values things have for different people cannot be made, the critics argue, thus there is no way of knowing whether utility would be maximised by giving me the job or giving you the job. If we cannot know which actions will produce the greatest amounts of utility, then we cannot apply the utilitarian principle.

A second problem is that some benefits and costs seem intractable to measurement. How, for example, can one measure the value of health or

life? Suppose that installing an expensive exhaust system in a workshop will eliminate a large portion of certain carcinogenic particles that workers might otherwise inhale. Suppose that as a result some of the workers probably will live 5 years longer. How one to calculate the value of those years of added life, and how is this quantitatively balanced against the costs of installing the exhaust system? The Ford managers, when considering the deaths that the Pinto design would cause, decided that a human life was worth \$200,000 (in 1970 dollars). But doesn't the price they assigned to a life seem arbitrary and doesn't the attempt to price life seem morally inappropriate?

A third problem is that, because many of the benefits and costs of an action cannot be reliably predicted, they also cannot be adequately measured. The beneficial or costly consequences of basic scientific knowledge, for example, are notoriously difficult to predict. Yet, suppose that one has to decide how much to invest in a research program that will probably uncover some highly theoretical, but not immediately usable, information about the universe. How is the future value of that information to be measured, and how can it be weighed against either the present costs of funding the research or the certain benefits that would result from putting the funds to an alternative use, such as adding a new wing to the local hospital or building housing for the poor?

Yet a fourth problem is that it is unclear exactly what is to count as a benefit and what is to count as a cost. This lack of clarity is especially problematic with respect to social issues that are given significantly different evaluations by different cultural groups. Suppose a bank must decide, for example, whether to extend a loan to the manager of a local pornographic theater or to the manager of a bar that caters to homosexuals. One group of people may see the increased enjoyment of pornography connoisseurs or the increased enjoyment of homosexuals as benefits accruing to society. Another group, however, may see these as harmful and hence as costs.

### 3.2.3 Utilitarian Replies to Measurement Objections

The defender of utilitarianism has an array of replies ready to counter the measurement objections enumerated.

First, the utilitarian may argue that, although utilitarianism ideally requires accurate quantifiable measurements of all costs and benefits, this requirement can be relaxed when such measurements are impossible. Utilitarianism merely insists that the consequences of any projected act be expressly stated with as much clarity and accuracy as is humanly possible and that all relevant information concerning these



consequences be presented in a form that will allow them to be systematically compared and impartially weighed against each other. Expressing this information in quantitative terms facilitates such comparisons and weighing. However, where quantitative data are unavailable, one may legitimately rely on shared and commonsense judgments of the comparative values things have for most people. For example, we know that, by and large, cancer is a greater injury than a cold no matter who has the cancer and who has the cold. Similarly, a plate of pounded-yam has a greater value as food than a groundnut no matter whose hunger is involved.

The utilitarian can also point to several commonsense criteria that can be used to determine the relative values that should be given to various categories of goods. One criterion, for example, depends on the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goods. Instrumental goods are things that are considered valuable only because they lead to other good things. A painful visit to the dentist, for example, is only an instrumental good (unless I happen to be a masochist): It is desired only as a means to health.

Intrinsic goods, however, are things that are desirable independent of any other benefits they may produce. Thus, health is an intrinsic good: It is desired for its own sake. (Many things, of course, have both intrinsic and instrumental value. I may use a skateboard, for example, not only because skateboarding is a means to health and rapid transportation but also because I enjoy skateboarding for itself). Now it is clear that intrinsic goods take priority over instrumental goods. Under most circumstances, for example, money, which is an instrumental good, must not take priority over life and health, which have intrinsic value.

A second common-sense criterion that can be used to weigh good turns is the distinction between needs and wants. To say that someone needs something is to say that without it that person will be harmed in some way. People's "basic" needs consist of their needs for things without which they will suffer some fundamental harm such as injury, illness, or death. Among a person's basic needs are the food, clothing, and housing required to stay alive; the medical care and hygienic environment required remaining healthy; and the security and safety required to remain free from injury. However, to say that a person wants something is to say that the person desires it: The person believes it will advance his or her interests in some way. A need, of course, may also be a want: If I know I need something, then I may also want it. Many wants, however, are not needs but simply desires for things without which the individual would not suffer any fundamental harm. I may want something simply because I enjoy it, even though it is a luxury I could

as well do without. Desires of this sort that are not also needs are called *mere wants*. In general, satisfying a person's basic needs is ~~valuable~~ *more valuable* than satisfying his or her mere wants. If people do not get something for which they have a basic need, they may be injured in a way that makes it impossible for them to enjoy the satisfaction of any number of mere wants. Because the satisfaction of a person's basic needs makes possible not only the intrinsic values of life and health but also the enjoyment of most other intrinsic values, satisfaction of the basic needs has a value that is greater than that of satisfying mere wants.

However, these commonsense methods of weighing goods are ~~intended~~ *intended* to aid us in situations where quantitative methods fail. In actual fact, the consequences of many decisions are relatively amenable to quantification, the convinced utilitarian will claim. This constitutes the utilitarian's second major reply to the measurement objections as previously outlined.

The most flexible method of providing a common quantitative measure for the benefits and costs associated with a decision, the utilitarian may hold, is in terms of their monetary equivalents. Basically, this implies that the value a thing has for a person can be measured by the price the person is willing to pay for it. In short, market prices can serve ~~to~~ *provide* a common quantitative measure of the various benefits and costs associated with a decision. In general, to determine the value of a thing, one need merely ask what it sells for on an open market. If the item does not sell on an open market, then one can ask what the selling price for similar items is.

The use of monetary values also has the advantage of allowing one to take into account the effects of the passage of time and the impact of uncertainty. If the known monetary costs or benefits lie in the future, then their present values can be determined by discounting them at the appropriate rate of interest. If the monetary costs or benefits are only probable and not certain, then their expected values can be computed by multiplying the monetary costs or benefits by the appropriate probability factor.

A standard objection against using monetary values to measure all costs and benefits is that some goods, in particular health and life, cannot be priced. The utilitarian may argue, however, that not only is it possible to put a price on health and life but that we do so almost daily. Anytime people place a limit on the amount of money they are willing to pay to reduce the risk that some event poses to their lives, they have set an implicit price on their own lives. For example, suppose that people are willing to pay NS for a piece of safety equipment that will reduce the probability of their being killed in an auto accident from .00005 to .

00004, but they are unwilling to pay any more than that. Then, in effect, they have implicitly decided that .00001 of a life is worth NS or, in other words that a life is worth N500, 000. Such pricing is inevitable and necessary, the utilitarian may hold, so long as we live in an environment in which risks to health and life can be lowered only by giving up (trading off) other things that we may want and on which we set a clear price.

Finally, the utilitarian may say, where market prices are incapable of providing quantitative data for comparing the costs and benefits of various decisions, other sorts of quantitative measures are available. Should people disagree, for example, as they often do, over the harmful or beneficial aspects of various sexual activities, then sociological surveys or political votes can be used to measure the intensity and extensiveness of people's attitudes. Economic experts can also provide informed judgments of the relative quantitative values of various costs and benefits. Thus, the utilitarian will grant that the problems of measurement encountered by utilitarianism are real enough.

### 3.2.4 Problems with Rights and Justice

The major difficulty with utilitarianism, according to some critics, is that it is unable to deal with two kinds of moral issues: that relating to rights and those relating to justice. That is, the utilitarian principle implies that certain actions are morally right when in fact they are unjust or violate people's rights. Some examples may serve to indicate the sort of difficult counter examples critics pose for utilitarianism.

First, suppose that your uncle has an incurable and painful disease, so that he is quite unhappy but does not choose to die. Although he is hospitalised and will die within a year, he continues to run his chemical plant. Because of his own misery, he deliberately makes life miserable for his workers and has insisted on not installing safety devices in his chemical plant, although he knows that as a result one life will certainly be lost over the next year. You, his only living relative, know that on your uncle's death you will inherit his business and not only will you be wealthy and immensely happy but you also intend to prevent any future loss of life by installing the needed safety devices. You are blinded and correctly judge that you could secretly murder your uncle without being caught and without your happiness being in any way affected by it afterward. If it is possible for you to murder your uncle without in any way diminishing anyone else's happiness, then according to utilitarianism you have a moral obligation to do so. By murdering your uncle, you are trading his life for the life of the worker, and you are gaining your happiness while doing away with his unhappiness and pain-the gain is obviously on the side of utility. However, the critics of

utilitarianism claim, it seems quite clear that the murder of your uncle would be a gross violation of his right to life. Utilitarianism has led us to approve an act of murder that is an obvious violation of an individual's most important right.

Second, utilitarianism can also go wrong, according to the critics, when it is applied to situations that involve social justice. For example, suppose that subsistence wages force a small group of migrant workers to continue doing the most undesirable agricultural jobs in an economy but produce immense amounts of satisfaction for the vast majority of society's members, because they enjoy cheap vegetables and savings that allow them to indulge other wants. Suppose also that the amount of satisfaction thereby produced, when balanced against the unhappiness and pain imposed on the small group of farm workers, results in a greater net utility than would exist if everyone had to share the burden of farm work. Then, according to the utilitarian criterion, it would be morally right to continue this system of subsistence wages for farm workers.

However, to the critics of utilitarianism, a social system that imposes such unequal sharing of burden is clearly immoral and offends against justice. The great benefits the system may have for the majority does not justify the extreme burden that it imposes on a small group. The shortcoming this counter example reveals is that utilitarianism allows benefits and burdens to be distributed among the members of society in any way whatsoever, so long as the total amount of benefit is maximised. In fact, some ways of distributing benefits and burdens (like the extremely unequal distributions involved in the counter example) are unjust regardless of how great the store of benefits such distributions produce. Utilitarianism looks only at how much utility is produced in a society and fails to take into account how that utility is distributed among members of society.

### 3.2.5 Utilitarian Replies to Objections on Rights and Justice

To deal with the sorts of counter examples that critics of traditional utilitarianism have offered, utilitarians have proposed an important and influential alternative version of utilitarianism called rule-utilitarianism. The basic strategy of the rule-utilitarian is to limit utilitarian analysis to the evaluations of moral rules. According to the rule utilitarian, when trying to determine whether a particular action is ethical, one is never supposed to ask whether that particular action will produce the greatest amount of utility. Instead, one is supposed to ask whether the action is required by the correct moral rules that everyone should follow. If the action is required by such rules, then one should carry out the action. But what are the "correct" moral rules? It is only this second question,

according to the rule-utilitarian, that is supposed to be answered by reference to maximising utility. The correct moral rules are those that would produce the greatest amount of utility if everyone were to follow them. An example may make this clear.

Suppose I am trying to decide whether it is ethical for me to fix prices with a competitor. Then, according to the rule-utilitarian, I should not ask whether this particular instance of price-fixing will produce more utility than anything else I can do. Instead, I should first ask myself: What are the correct moral rules with respect to price-fixing? Perhaps I might conclude, after some thought, that the following list of rules includes all the candidates:

- Managers are never to meet with competitors for the purpose of fixing prices
- Managers may always meet with competitors for the purpose of fixing prices.
- Managers may meet with competitors for the purpose of fixing prices when they are losing money.

Which of these three is the correct moral rule? According to the rule-utilitarian, the correct moral rule is the one that would produce the greatest amount of utility for everyone affected. Let us suppose that after analysing the economic effects of price fixing, I conclude that within our economic and social circumstances people would benefit much more if everyone followed Rule 1 than if everyone followed Rule 2 or 3. If this is so, then Rule 1 is the correct moral rule concerning price-fixing. Now that I know what the correct moral rule on price-fixing is, I can go on to ask a second question: Should I engage in this particular act of fixing prices? To answer this second question, I only have to ask: What is required by the correct moral rules? As we have already noted, the correct rule is to never fix prices. Consequently, even if on this particular occasion, fixing prices actually would produce more utility than not doing so, I am, nonetheless, ethically obligated to refrain from fixing prices because this is required by the rules from which everyone in my society would most benefit.

The theory of the rule-utilitarian then has two parts, which we can summarise in the following two principles:

- An action is right from an ethical point of view if and only if the action would be required by those moral rules that are correct.
- A moral rule is correct if and only if the sum total of utilities produced if everyone were to follow that rule is greater than the sum total of utilities produced by everyone were to follow some alternative rule.

Thus, according to the rule-utilitarian, the fact that a certain action would maximise utility on one particular occasion does not show that it is right from an ethical point of view.

For the rule-utilitarian, the flaw in the counter examples that the critics of traditional utilitarianism offer is that in each case the utilitarian is applied to particular actions and not to rules. Instead, the rule-utilitarian would urge that we must use the utilitarian criterion to find out what the correct moral rule is for each counterexample and then evaluate the particular actions involved in the counter example only in terms of this rule. Doing this allows utilitarianism to escape the counter examples undamaged.

### 3.3 Rights and Duties

The concept of a right plays a crucial role in many of the arguments and moral claims invoked in business discussions. Employees, for example, argue that they have a “right to equal pay for equal work”; managers assert that unions violate their “right to manage”; investors complain that taxation violates their “property rights”; and consumers claim that they have a “right to choose.” Moreover, public documents often employ the notion of a right. The United Nations adopted a “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” which claimed that “all human beings” are entitled, among other things,

- The right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- The right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment
- The right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for (the worker) and his family an existence worthy of human dignity.
- The right to form and to join trade unions.
- The right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

The concept of a right and the correlative notion of duty, then, lie at the heart of much of our moral discourse. This section is intended to provide an understanding of these concepts and of some of the major kinds of ethical principles and methods of analysis that underlie their use.

#### 3.3.1 The Concept of a Right

In general, a right is an individual’s entitlement to something. A person

has a right when that person is entitled to act in a certain way or is entitled to have others act in a certain way toward him or her. The entitlement may derive from a legal system that permits or empowers the person to act in a specified way or that requires others to act in certain ways toward that person; the entitlement is then called a legal right. Legal rights are limited, of course, to the particular jurisdiction within which the legal system is in force.

Entitlements can also derive from a system of moral standards independently of any particular legal system. The right to work, for example; many argue that this is a right that all human beings possess. Such rights, which are called moral rights or human rights, are based on moral norms and principles that specify that all human beings are permitted or empowered to do something or are entitled to have something done for them. Moral rights, unlike legal rights, are usually thought of as being universal insofar as they are rights that all human beings of every nationality possess to an equal extent simply by virtue of being human beings. Unlike legal rights, moral rights are not limited to a particular jurisdiction.

The most important moral rights-and those that will concern us in this unit are rights that impose prohibitions or requirements on others and that thereby enable individuals to choose freely whether to pursue certain interests or activities. These moral rights (we mean these kinds of rights when we use the term moral rights) identify those activities or interests that the individual is empowered to pursue, or must be left free to pursue, or must be helped to pursue, as the individual chooses; and they protect the individual's pursuit of those interests and activities within the boundaries specified by the rights. These kinds of moral rights have three important features that define these enabling and protective functions.

First, moral rights are tightly correlated with duties. This is because one person's moral right generally can be defined-at least partially-in terms of the moral duties other people have towards that person. To have a moral right necessarily implies that others have certain duties toward the bearer of that right. My moral right to worship as I choose, for example, can be defined in terms of the moral duties other people have to not interfere in my chosen form of worship. The moral right to a suitable standard of living can be defined in terms of the duty that governments (or some other agents of society) have to ensure a suitable standard of living for their citizens. Duties, then, are generally the other side of moral rights: If I have a moral right to do some thing, then other people have a moral duty not to interfere with me when I do it; if I have a moral right to have someone do something for me, then that other person (or group of persons) has a moral duty to do it for me. Thus, moral rights

impose correlative duties on others-either duties of non interference or duties of positive performance.

Second, moral rights provide individuals with autonomy and equality in the free pursuit of their interests. That is, a right identifies activities or interests that people must be left free to pursue or not pursue as they choose (or must be helped to pursue as they freely choose) and whose pursuit must not be subordinated to the interests of others except for special and exceptionally weighty reasons. If I have a right to worship as I choose, for example, then this implies that I am free to worship if and as I personally choose and that I am not dependent on anyone's permission to worship. It also implies that I cannot generally be forced to stop worshipping on the grounds that society will gain more benefits if I am kept from worshipping: The gains of others do not generally justify interference with a person's pursuit of an interest or an activity when that pursuit is protected by a moral right. To acknowledge a moral right, then, is to acknowledge that there is an area in which the person is not subject to my wishes and in which the person's interests are not subordinate to mine. There is an area, in short, within which we stand as autonomous equals.

Third, moral rights provide a basis for justifying one's actions and for invoking the protection or aid of others. If I have a moral right to do something, then I have a moral justification for doing it. Moreover, if I have a right to do something, then others have no justification for interfering with me. On the contrary, others are justified in restraining any persons who try to prevent me from exercising my right, or others may have a duty to aid me in exercising my right. When a stronger person helps a weaker one defend his or her rights, for example, we generally acknowledge that the act of the stronger person was justified.

Because moral rights have these three features, they provide bases for making moral judgments that differ substantially from utilitarian standards. First, moral rights express the requirements of morality from the point of view of the individual, whereas utilitarianism expresses the requirements of morality from the point of view of society as a whole. Second, rights limit the validity of appeal to social benefits and numbers. That is, if a person has a right to do something, then it is wrong for anyone to interfere, although a large number of people might gain much more utility from such interference. If I have a right to life, for example, then it is morally wrong for someone to kill me even if many others would gain much more from my death than I will ever gain from living.

Although rights generally override utilitarian standards, they are not immune from all utilitarian considerations: If the utilitarian benefits or losses imposed on society become great enough, they might be



sufficient to breach the protective walls the right sets up around a person's freedom to pursue individual interests. In times of war or major public emergencies, for example, it is generally acknowledged that civil rights may legitimately be restricted for the sake of the public welfare.

### **3.3.2 Negative and Positive Rights**

A large group of rights called negative rights is distinguished by the fact that its members can be defined wholly in terms of the duties others have not to interfere in certain activities of the person who holds a given right. For example, if I have a right to privacy, this means that every other person, including my employer, has the duty not to intervene in my private affairs.

In contrast, positive rights do more than impose negative duties. They also imply that some other agents have the positive duty of providing the holders of the right with whatever they need to freely pursue their interests. For example, if I have a right to an adequate standard of living, this does not merely mean that others must not interfere; it also means that if I am unable to provide myself with an adequate income, then I must be provided with such an income (perhaps by the government). Similarly, the right to work, the right to an education, the right to adequate health care, and the right to social security are all rights that go beyond non interference to also impose a positive duty of providing people with something when they are unable to provide it for themselves.

Positive rights were not emphasised until the 20th century. Negative rights were often employed in the 17th and 18th centuries by writers of manifestos, who were anxious to protect individuals against the encroachments of monarchical governments. Positive rights became important in the 20th century when society increasingly took it on itself to provide its members with the necessities of life that they were unable to provide for themselves. The United Nations declaration, for example, is influenced by this trend when it provides for the rights "to food, clothing, housing, and medical care." The change in the meaning of the phrase "the right to life" is another indication of the rising importance of positive rights. Whereas the 18th century interpreted the "right to life" as the negative right not to be killed, the 20th century has reinterpreted the phrase to refer to the positive right to be provided with the minimum necessities of life.

### **3.3.3 Contractual Rights and Duties**

Contractual rights and duties (sometimes called special rights and duties

or special obligations) are the limited rights and correlative duties that arise when one person enters an agreement with another person. For example, if I am contracted to do something for you, then you are entitled to my performance: You acquire a contractual right to whatever I promised; and I have a contractual duty to perform as I promised.

Contractual rights and duties are distinguished, first, by the fact that they attach to specific individuals and the correlative duties are imposed only on other specific individuals. Second, contractual rights arise out of a specific transaction between particular individuals. Unless I actually make a promise or enter some other, similar arrangement with you, you do not acquire any contractual rights over me.

Third, contractual rights and duties depend on a publicly ~~system of~~ ~~system of~~ rules that define the transactions that give rise to those rights and duties. Without the institution of contract and the rights and duties it can create, modern business societies could not operate. Virtually every business transaction at some point requires one of the parties to rely on the word of the other party to the effect that the other party will pay later, will deliver certain services later, or will transfer goods of a certain quality and quantity. The institution of contracts provides a way of assuring that individuals keep their word, and this in turn makes possible for business society to operate.

We should recall here that a person's institutional duties are not limited. In the first unit we noted that, as a "loyal agent," the manager's duties to care for the corporation are limited by the ethical principles that govern any person. Similarly, a doctor cannot murder other people to obtain vital organs for the patients for whom he or she has a duty to care.

What kind of ethical rules govern contracts? The system of rules that underlies contractual rights and duties has been traditionally interpreted as including several moral constraints:

- Both of the parties to a contract must have full knowledge of the nature of the agreement they are entering.
- Neither party to a contract must intentionally misrepresent the facts of the contractual situation to the other party.
- Neither party to the contract must be forced to enter the contract under duress or coercion.
- The contract must not bind the parties to an immoral act.

Contracts that violate one or more of these four conditions have traditionally been considered void. The basis of these sorts of conditions is discussed next.

### 3.3.4 A Basis for Moral Rights: Kant

How do we know that people have rights? This question can be answered in a fairly straightforward way when it is asked about legal rights: A person has certain legal rights because the person lives within a legal system that guarantees those rights. However, what is the basis of moral rights?

Utilitarians have suggested that utilitarian principles can provide a satisfactory basis for moral rights: People have moral rights because the possession of moral rights maximises utility. It is doubtful, however, that utilitarianism can serve as an adequate basis for moral rights. To say that someone has a moral right to do something is to say that person is entitled to do it regardless of the utilitarian benefits it provides for others. Utilitarianism cannot easily support such a non utilitarian concept.

A more satisfactory foundation for moral rights is provided by the ethical theory developed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant in fact attempts to show that there are certain moral rights and duties that all human beings possess regardless of any utilitarian benefits that the exercise of those rights and duties may provide for others.

Kant's theory is based on a moral principle that he called the categorical imperative and that requires that everyone should be treated as a free person equal to everyone else. That is, everyone has a moral right to such treatment, and everyone has the correlative duty to treat others in this way. Kant provides at least two ways of formulating this basic moral principle; each formulation serves as an explanation of the meaning of this basic moral right and correlative duty.

### 3.3.5 The First Formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative

Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative is as follows: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." A maxim for Kant is the reason a person in a certain situation has for doing what he or she plans to do. A maxim would "become a universal law" if every person in a similar situation chose to do the same thing for the same reason. Kant's first version of the categorical imperative, then, comes down to the following principle:

An action is morally right for a person in a certain situation if, and only if the person's reason for carrying out the action is a reason that he or she would be willing to have every person act on, in any similar

situation.

Unlike the principle of utilitarianism, Kant's categorical imperative focuses on a person's interior motivations and not on the consequences of external actions. Moral right and wrong, according to Kantian theory, are distinguished not by what a person accomplishes, but by the reasons the person has for the action. Kant argues that, to the extent that a person performs an action merely because it will advance the person's own future interests or merely because the person finds the action pleasurable, the action "has no moral worth." A person's action has moral worth only to the degree that it is also motivated by a sense of "duty," that is, a belief that it is the right way for all people to behave. Therefore, Kant claims, to be motivated by a sense of "duty" is to be motivated by reasons that I wish everyone would act on. Consequently, my action has "moral worth" (i.e., it is morally right) only to the extent that it is motivated by reason that I would be willing to have every person act on. Hence, the categorical imperative.

### 3.3.6 The Second Formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative

The second formulation Kant gives of the categorical imperative is this: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." Or never treat people only as means, but always also as ends.

What Kant means by "treating humanity as an end" is that everyone should treat each human being as a being whose existence as a free rational person should be promoted. For Kant, this means two things:

- a. Respect each person's freedom by treating people only as they have freely consented to be treated beforehand, and
- b. Develop each person's capacity to freely choose the aims to pursue. However, to treat a person only as a means is to use the person only as an instrument for advancing one's own interests and involves neither respect for nor development of the person's capacity to choose freely. Kant's second version of the categorical imperative can be expressed in the following principle: An action is morally right for a person if, and only if, in performing the action, the person does not use others merely as a means for advancing his or her own interests, but also respects and develops their capacity to choose freely for themselves.

Kant argues that making fraudulent contracts by deceiving others is wrong and that deliberately refraining from giving others help when they need it is also wrong. By deceiving a person into making a contract that that person would not otherwise freely choose to make, I fail to respect that person's freedom to choose and merely use the person to advance my own interests. By failing to lend needed and easily extended help to another person, I limit what that person is free to choose to do.

The second formulation of the categorical imperative, according to Kant, is really equivalent to the first. The first version says that what is morally right for me must be morally right for others: Everyone is of equal value. If this is so, then no person's freedom should be subordinated to that of others so that the person is used merely to advance the interests of others. Because I am of value, I cannot sacrifice myself to mere self-interest. This, of course, is what the second version of the categorical imperative requires. Both formulations come down to the same thing: People are to treat each other as free and equal in the pursuit of their interests.

### **3.3.7 Kantian Rights**

A large number of authors have held that the categorical imperative (in one or the other of its formulations) explains why people have moral rights. As we have seen, moral rights identify interests that individuals must be left free to pursue as they autonomously choose (or which we must help them pursue as they choose) and whose free pursuit must not be subordinated to our own interests. That is precisely what both formulations of Kant's categorical imperative require in holding that people must be respected as free and equal in the pursuit of their interests.

In short, moral rights identify the specific major areas in which persons must deal with each other as free equals, and Kant's categorical imperative implies that persons should deal with each other in precisely this way. The categorical imperative, however, cannot by itself tell us what particular moral rights human beings have. To know what particular rights human beings have, one first must know what interests humans have and whether there are good reasons for giving the free pursuit of one interest, rather than another, the protected status of a right (clearly, not all interests can be turned into rights, because interests can conflict with each other). For example, to establish that humans have a right to free speech, one has to show that freedom to say what one chooses is critically important to human beings and that it is more important than the free pursuit of other conflicting interests that humans may have (such as an interest in repressing ideas that we find distasteful, offensive, or disturbing). Insofar as free speech is critically important,

humans must leave each other equally free to speak as they choose: Everyone has a moral right to freedom of speech. However, insofar as free speech conflicts with another human interest that can be shown to be of equal or greater importance (such as our interest in not being libeled or defamed), the right to freedom of speech must be limited.

### 3.3.8 The Problems with Kant

Despite the attractiveness of Kant's theory, critics have argued that, like utilitarianism, it has its limitations and inadequacies. A first problem that critics have traditionally pointed out is that Kant's theory is not clear enough to always be useful. One difficulty lies in trying to determine whether one would (as the first formulation requires) "be willing to have everyone follow" a certain policy. Although the general thrust of this requirement is usually clear, it sometimes leads to problems. For example, suppose I am a murderer, would I then be willing to have everyone follow the policy that all murderers should be punished? In a sense I would be willing to because I would want to be protected from other murderers, but in another sense I would not be willing because I do not want to be punished myself. Which sense is correct?

It is also sometimes difficult to determine whether (as the second formulation states) one person is using another "merely as a means." Suppose, for example, that Ms. Jones, an employer, only pays minimum wages to her employees and refuses to install the safety equipment they want, yet she says she is "respecting their capacity to freely choose for themselves" because she is willing to let them work elsewhere if they choose. Is she then treating them merely as means or also as ends? Critics complain that they cannot answer such questions because Kant's theory is too vague. There are cases, then, where the requirements of Kant's theory are unclear.

Second, some critics claim that, although we might be able to agree on the kinds of interests that have the status of moral rights, substantial disagreement concerning what the limits of each of these rights are and concerning how each of these rights should be balanced against other conflicting rights. Kant's theory does not help us resolve these disagreements. For example, we all agree that everyone should have a right to associate with whomever they want, as well as a right not to be injured by others. However, how should these rights be balanced against each other when a certain association of people begins to injure others? For example, suppose the loud music of a group of trombone players disturbs others, or suppose a corporation (which is an association of people) pollutes the air and water on which the health of others depends. Kant's categorical imperative does not tell us how the conflicting rights of these persons should be adjusted to each other:

Which right should be limited in favour of the other?

A defender of Kant, however, can counter this second criticism by holding that Kant's categorical imperative is not intended to tell us how conflicting rights should be limited and adjusted to each other. To decide whether one right should be curtailed in favour of a second right, one has to examine the relative importance of the interests that each right protects. What arguments can be given to show, for example, that a corporation's interest in financial gains is more or less important than the health of its neighbours? The answer to this question determines whether a corporation's right to use its property for financial gains should be limited in favour of its neighbours' right not to have their health injured. All that Kant's categorical imperative is meant to tell us is that everyone must have equal moral rights and everyone must show as much respect for the protected interests of others as they want others to show for their own. It does not tell us what interests people have or what their relative importance is.

A third group of criticisms that have been made of Kant's theory is that there are counter examples which show that the theory sometimes goes wrong. Most counter examples to Kant's theory focus on the criteria of universalisability and reversibility. Suppose that an employer can get away with discriminating against women by paying them lower wages than men for the same work. Suppose also that he is so fanatical in his dislike of women that he is willing to accept the proposition that if his own sex were female, employers should also discriminate against him. Then, according to Kant's theory, the employer would be acting morally. According to the critics, this is wrong because discrimination is obviously immoral.

Defenders of a Kantian approach to ethics, of course, would reply that it is the critics, not Kant, who is mistaken. If the employer genuinely and conscientiously would be willing to universalise the principles on which he is acting, then the action is in fact morally right for him. For us, who would be unwilling to universalise the same principle, the action would be immoral. We may also find that it would be morally right for us to impose sanctions on the employer to make him stop discriminating. Insofar as the employer is trying to remain true to his own universal principles, he is acting conscientiously and, therefore, in a moral manner.

### **3.3.9 The Libertarian Objection: Nozick**

Some important views on rights that are different from the ones we have

sketched have been proposed recently by several libertarian philosophers. Libertarian philosophers go beyond the general presumption that freedom from human constraint is usually good; they claim that such freedom is necessarily good and that all constraints imposed by others are necessarily evil except when needed to prevent the imposition of greater human constraints. The American philosopher Robert Nozick, for example, claims that the only basic right that every individual possesses is the negative right to be free from the coercion of other human beings. This negative right to freedom from coercion, according to Nozick, must be recognised if individuals are to be treated as distinct persons with separate lives, each of whom has an equal moral weight that may not be sacrificed for the sake of others. The only circumstance under which coercion may be exerted on a person is when it is necessary to keep that person from coercing others.

According to Nozick, prohibiting people from coercing others constitutes a legitimate moral constraint that rests on "the underlying Kantian principle that individuals are ends and not merely means; they may not be sacrificed or used for achieving other ends without their consent." Thus, Nozick seems to hold that Kant's theory supports his own views on freedom.

Nozick and other libertarians, however, pass too quickly over the fact that the freedom of one person necessarily imposes constraints on other persons. Such constraints are inevitable because when one person is granted freedom, other persons must be constrained from interfering with that person on it and taking it from me. Even the "free system" that Nozick advocates depend from trespassing on an underlying system of coercion: I can sell something only if I first own it, and ownership depends essentially on an enforced (coercive) system of property laws. Consequently, because granting a freedom to one person necessarily imposes constraints on others, it follows that if constraints require justification, freedom will also always require justification.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What do you understand by utilitarianism?
2. What do you understand by rights and duties?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Utilitarianism is a general term for any view that holds that action and policies should be evaluated on the basis of the benefit and costs they will impose on society, while utility is the inclusive term used to refer to any net benefit produced by an action.



## 5.0 SUMMARY

There are some theories of ethics which have been propounded to explain the essence of incorporating ethical standards in business operations.

From analysis above, you should have observed that ethical standards presuppose considerations such as weighing social costs against benefits in any business operation in such a way that the interest of the society does not suffer at the alter of business' inordinate quest for profit maximisation.

Furthermore, in relation to the interest of the employees, they are entitled to some rights on the basis of the obligations they owe to the organisation vis-à-vis effective operations towards adequate returns to the stakeholders.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. A student incorrectly defined utilitarianism this way  
“Utilitarianism is the view that so long as an action provides me with more measurable economic benefits than costs, the action is morally right.” Identify all of the mistakes contained in this definition of utilitarianism.
2. In your view, does utilitarianism provide a more objective standard for determining right and wrong than moral rights do? Explain your answer fully. Does utilitarianism provide a more objective standard than the principle of justice?

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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## MODULE 2

Unit 1 Ethics, Justice and Business

Unit 2 The Business System  
Unit 3 Ethics in the Market Place  
Unit 4 The Ethics of Consumer Production and Marketing  
Unit 5 Ethics and Environmentalism

## **UNIT 1 ETHICS, JUSTICE AND BUSINESS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Justice and Fairness
  - 3.2 Distributive Justice
  - 3.3 Justice as Equality: Egalitarianism
  - 3.4 Justice Based on Contribution: Capitalist Justice.
  - 3.5 Justice Based on Needs and Abilities: Socialism
  - 3.6 Justice as Freedom: Libertarianism
  - 3.7 Justice as Fairness: Rawls
  - 3.8 Retributive Justice
  - 3.9 Compensatory Justice
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

It is not obvious that Kantian principles can support the libertarian views of Nozick. Kant holds, as we saw, that the dignity of each person should be respected and that each person's capacity to choose freely should be developed. Because we have these duties to each other, government coercion is legitimate whenever it is needed to ensure that the dignity of citizens is being respected or when it is needed to secure the full development of people's capacity to choose. This, as Kant argues, means that government may legitimately place limits on the use of property and on the making of contracts and impose market restrictions and compulsory taxes when these are needed to care for the welfare or development of persons "who are not able to support themselves." We have no reason to think that only negative rights exist. People can also have positive rights, and Kant's theory supports these as much as it supports negative rights.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

When you complete this unit, you should be able to:

- analyse justice and fairness
- explain egalitarianism
- analyse capitalist justice
- explain socialism
- explain libertarianism
- explain compensatory justice.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Justice and Fairness**

Disputes among individuals in business are often interlaced with references to justice or fairness. This is the case, for example, when one person accuses another of unjustly discriminating against him or her, showing unjust favoritism toward someone else, or not taking up a fair share of the burden involved in some cooperative venture. Resolving disputes like these requires that we compare and weigh the conflicting claims of each of the parties and strike a balance between them. Justice and fairness are essentially comparative. They are concerned with the comparative treatment given to the members of a group when benefits and burdens are distributed, when rules and laws are administered, when members of a group cooperate or compete with each other, and when people are punished for the wrongs they have done or compensated for the wrongs they have suffered. Although the terms justice and fairness are used almost interchangeably, we tend to reserve the word justice for matters that are especially serious, although some authors have held that the concept of fairness is more fundamental.

Standards of justice are generally taken to be more important than utilitarian considerations. If a society is unjust to some of its members, then we normally condemn that society, even if the injustices secure more utilitarian benefits for everyone. If we think that slavery is unjust, for example, then we condemn a society that uses slavery even if slavery makes that society more productive. Greater benefits for some cannot justify injustices for others. Nonetheless, we also seem to hold that if the social gains are sufficiently large, a certain level of injustice may legitimately be tolerated. In countries with extreme deprivation and poverty, for example, we seem to hold that some degree of equality may be traded off for major economic gains that leave everyone better off.

Standards of justice do not generally override the moral rights of individuals. Part of the reason for this is that, to some extent, justice is based on individual moral rights. The moral right to be treated as a free and equal person, for example, is part of what lies behind the idea that benefits and burdens should be distributed equally. More important,

however, is the fact that, as we saw, a moral right identifies interests people have, the free pursuit of which may not be subordinated to the interests of others except where there are special and weighty reasons. This means that, for the most part, the moral rights of some individuals cannot be sacrificed merely in order to secure a somewhat better distribution of benefits for others. However, correcting extreme injustices may justify restricting some individuals' rights. Property rights, for example, might be legitimately redistributed for the sake of justice. We discuss trade-offs of this sort more fully after we have a better idea of what justice means.

Issues involving questions of justice and fairness are usually divided into three categories. Distributive justice, the first and basic category, is concerned with the fair distribution of society's benefits and burdens. In the brown lung hearings, for example, Senator Thurmond pointed out that if federal law helped workers afflicted by black lung, then it was only "fair" that it also help workers afflicted by brown lung. Another example drawn from our immediate environment is the implementation of monetisation across both senior and junior categories of workers with the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Retributive justice, the second category, refers to the just imposition of punishments and penalties on those who do wrong: A just penalty is one that in some sense is deserved by the person who does wrong. Retributive justice would be at issue, for example, if we were to ask whether it would be fair to penalise cotton mills for causing brown lung disease among their workers. Compensatory justice, the third category, concerns the just way of compensating people for what they lost when they were wronged by others: A just compensation is one that in some sense is proportional to the loss suffered by the person being compensated (such as loss of livelihood).

### **3.2 Distributive Justice**

Questions of distributive justice arise when different people put forth conflicting claims on society's benefits and burdens and all the claims cannot be satisfied. The central cases are those where there is a scarcity of benefits-such as jobs, food, housing, medical care, income, and wealth-as compared with the numbers and desires of the people who want these goods. The other side of the coin is that there may be too many burdens-unpleasant work, drudgery, substandard housing, health injuries of various sorts-and not enough people willing to shoulder them. If there were enough goods to satisfy everyone's desires and enough people willing to share society's burdens, then conflicts between people would not arise and distributive justice would not be needed.

When people's desires and aversions exceed the adequacy of their resources, they are forced to develop principles for allocating scarce benefits and undesirable burdens in ways that are just and that resolve the conflicts in a fair way. The development of such principles is the concern of distributive justice.

The fundamental principle of distributive justice is that, equals should be treated equally and unequals treated unequally. More precisely, the fundamental principle of distributive justice may be expressed as follows:

Individuals who are similar in all respects relevant to the kind of treatment in question should be given similar benefits and burdens, even if they are dissimilar in other irrelevant respects; and individuals who are dissimilar in a relevant respect ought to be treated dissimilarly, in proportion to their dissimilarity:

### **3.3 Justice as Equality: Egalitarianism**

Egalitarians hold that there are no relevant differences among people that can justify unequal treatment. According to the egalitarian, all benefits and burdens should be distributed according to the following formula: Every person should be given exactly equal shares of a society's or a group's benefits and burdens.

Egalitarians base their view on the proposition that all human beings are equal in some fundamental respect and that, in virtue of this equality, each person has an equal claim to society's goods. According to the egalitarian, this implies that goods should be allocated to people in equal portions.

Equality has been proposed as a principle of justice not only for entire societies but also within smaller groups or organisations. Within a family, for example, it is often assumed that children should, over the course of their lives, receive equal share of the goods parents make available to them. In some companies and in some workgroups, particularly when the group has strong feelings of solidarity and is working at tasks that require cooperation, workers feel that all should receive equal compensation for the work they are doing. Interestingly, when workers in a group receive equal compensation, they tend to become more cooperative with each other and to feel greater solidarity with each other. Also interestingly, workers in countries such as Japan, which is characterised as having a more collectivist culture, prefer the principle of equality more than workers in countries such as the United States, which is characterised as having a more individualistic culture.

Equality has, of course, appeared to many as an attractive social idea and inequality as a defect, "All men are created equal," says the American Declaration of Independence, and the ideal of equality has been the driving force behind the emancipation of slaves; the prohibition of indentured servitude; the elimination of racial, sexual, and property requirements on voting and holding public office; and the institution of free public education. Americans have long prided themselves on the lack of overt status consciousness in their social relations.

Despite their popularity, however, egalitarian views have been subjected to heavy criticisms. One line of attack has focused on the egalitarian claim that all human beings are equal in some fundamental respects. Critics claim that there is no quality that all human beings possess in precisely the same degree: Human beings differ in their abilities, intelligence, virtues, needs, desires, and all other physical and mental characteristics. If this is so, then human beings are unequal in all respects.

A second set of criticisms argues that the egalitarian ignores some characteristics that should be taken into account in distributing goods both in society and in smaller groups: need, ability, and effort. If everyone is given exactly the same things, critics point out, then the lazy person will get as much as the industrious one, although the lazy one does not deserve as much. If everyone is given exactly the same, then the sick person will get only as much as healthy ones, although the sick person needs more. If everyone is given exactly the same, the handicapped person will have to do as much as more able people, although the handicapped person has less ability. If everyone is given exactly the same, then individuals will have no incentives to make greater efforts in their work. As a result, society's productivity and efficiency will decline. Because the egalitarian formula ignores all these facts, and because it is clear that they should be taken into account, egalitarianism must be a mistake.

Some egalitarians have tried to strengthen their position by distinguishing two different kinds of equality: political equality and economic equality. Political equality refers to an equal participation in, and treatment by, the means of controlling and directing the political system. This includes equal rights to participate in the legislative process, equal civil liberties, and equal rights to due process. Economic equality refers to equality of income and wealth and equality of opportunity. The criticisms leveled against equality, according to some egalitarians, only apply to economic equality and not to political equality. Although everyone will concede that differences of need, ability, and effort may justify some inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth, everyone will also agree that political rights and

liberties should not be unequally distributed. Thus, the egalitarian position may be correct with respect to political equality even if it is mistaken with respect to economic equality.

Other egalitarians have claimed that even economic equality is defensible if it is suitably limited. Thus, they have argued that every person has a right to a minimum standard of living and that income and wealth should be distributed equally until this standard is achieved for everyone. The economic surplus that remains after everyone has achieved the minimum standard of living can then be distributed unequally according to need, effort, and so on. A major difficulty that this limited type of economic egalitarianism must face, however, is specifying what it means by minimum standard of living. Different societies and cultures have different views as to what constitutes the necessary minimum to live on. A relatively primitive economy will place the minimum at a lower point than a relatively affluent one. Nonetheless, most people would agree that justice requires that affluent societies satisfy at least the basic needs of their members and not let them die of starvation, exposure, or disease.

### **3.4 Justice Based on Contribution: Capitalist Justice**

Some writers have argued that a society's benefits should be distributed in proportion to what each individual contributes to a society and/or to a group. The more a person contributes to a society's pool of economic goods, for example, the more that person is entitled to take from that pool; the less an individual contributes, the less that individual should get. The more a worker contributes to a project, the more that worker should be paid. According to this capitalist view of justice, when people engage in economic exchanges with each other, what a person gets out of the exchange should be at least equal in value to what the person contributed. Justice requires, then, that the benefits people receive should be proportional to the value of their contribution..

Benefits should be distributed according to the value of the contribution the individual makes to a society, a task, a group, or an exchange. The principle of contribution is perhaps the principle of fairness most widely used to establish salaries and wages. In workgroups, particularly when relationships among the members of the group are impersonal and the product of each worker is independent of the efforts of the others, workers tend to feel that they should be paid in proportion to the work they have contributed. Salespeople out on the road, for example, or workers at individual sewing machines sewing individual garments or doing other piecework tend to feel that they should be paid in proportion to the quantity of goods they have individually sold or made. Interestingly, when workers are paid in accordance with the principle of

contribution, this tends to promote among them an uncooperative and even competitive atmosphere in which resources and information are less willingly shared and in which status differences emerge. Workers in countries that are characterised as having a more individualistic culture, such as the United States, prefer the principle of contribution more than workers in countries that are characterised as having a more collectivist culture, such as Japan.

The main question raised by the contributive principle of distributive justice is how the “value of the contribution” of each individual is to be measured. One long lived tradition has held that contributions should be measured in terms of work effort. The more effort people put forth in their work, the greater the share of benefits to which they are entitled. The harder one works, the more one deserves. This is the assumption behind the Puritan ethic, which held that individuals had a religious obligation to work hard at their calling (the career to which God summons each individual) and that God justly rewards hard work with wealth and success, while He justly punishes laziness with poverty and failure. In the United States, this Puritan ethic has evolved into a secularised work ethic, which places a high value on individual effort and which assumes that, whereas hard work does, and should lead to success, loafing is and should be punished.

However, there are many problems with using effort as the basis of distribution. First, to reward a person’s efforts without any reference to whether the person produces anything worthwhile through these efforts is to reward incompetence and inefficiency. Second, if we reward people solely for their efforts and ignore their abilities and relative productivity, then talented and highly productive people will be given little incentive to invest their talent and productivity in producing goods for society. As a result, society’s welfare will decline.

A second important tradition has held that contributions should be measured in terms of productivity: The greater the quantity of a person’s contributed product, the more that person should receive. (Product here should be interpreted broadly to include services rendered, capital invested, commodities manufactured, and any type of literary, scientific, or aesthetic works produced.) A major problem with this second proposal is that it ignores people’s needs. Handicapped, ill, untrained, and immature persons may be unable to produce anything worthwhile; if people are rewarded on the basis of their productivity, the needs of these disadvantaged groups will not be met. The main problem with this second proposal is that it is difficult to place any objective measure on the value of a person’s product, especially in fields such as the sciences, the arts, entertainment, athletics, education, theology, and health care. Who would want to have their products priced on the basis of someone



else's subjective estimates?

To deal with the last difficulty mentioned, some authors have suggested a third and highly influential version of the principle of contribution: They have argued that the value of a person's product should be determined by the market forces of supply and demand. The value of a product would then depend not on its intrinsic value, but on the extent to which it is both relatively scarce and is viewed by buyers as desirable. In other words, the value of a person's contribution is equal to whatever that contribution would sell for in a competitive market. People then deserve to receive in exchange with others whatever the market value of their product is worth.

Unfortunately, this method of measuring the value of a person's product still ignores people's needs. Moreover, to many people, market prices are an unjust method of evaluating the value of a person's product precisely because markets ignore the intrinsic values of things. Markets, for example, reward entertainers more than doctors. Also, markets often reward a person who, through pure chance, has ended with something (e.g., an inheritance) that is scarce and that people happen to want. This, to many, seems the height of injustice.

### **3.5 Justice Based on Needs and Abilities: Socialism**

Because there are probably as many kinds of socialism as there are socialists, it is somewhat inaccurate to speak of "the" socialist position on distributive justice. Nonetheless, the dictum proposed first by Louis Blanc (1811-1882) and then by Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Nikolai Lenin (1870-1924) is traditionally taken to represent the socialist view on distribution: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." The socialist principle, then, can be paraphrased as follows: Work burdens should be distributed according to people's abilities, and benefits should be distributed according to people's needs.

This socialist principle is based first on the idea that people realise their human potential by exercising their abilities in productive work. Because the realisation of one's full potentiality is a value, work should be distributed in such a way that a person can be as productive as possible, and this implies distributing work according to ability. Second, the benefits produced through work should be used to promote human happiness and well-being. This means distributing them so that people's basic biological and health needs are met and then using what is left over to meet people's other, non basic needs. Perhaps most fundamental to the socialist view is the notion that societies should be communities in which benefits and burdens are distributed on the model of a family. Just as able family members willingly support the family, and just as needy

family members are willingly supported by the family, so also the able members of a society should contribute their abilities to society taking up its burdens while the needy should be allowed to share in its benefits.

As the example of the family suggests, the principle of distributing according to need and ability is used within small groups as well as within larger society. In athletics, for example, the members of a team will distribute burdens according to each athlete's ability and will tend to stand together and help each other according to each one's need. The principle of need and ability, however, is the principle that tends to be least acknowledged in business. Managers sometimes invoke the principle when they pass out the more difficult jobs among the members of a workgroup to those who are stronger and more able, but they often retreat when these workers complain that they are being given larger burdens without higher compensation. Managers also sometimes invoke the principle when they make special allowances for workers who seem to have special needs. However, they rarely do so and are often criticised for showing favoritism when they do this.

Nevertheless, there is something to be said for the socialist principle: Needs and abilities certainly should be taken into account when determining how benefits and burdens should be distributed among the members of a group or society. Most people would agree, for example, that we should make a greater contribution to the lives of cotton mill workers with brown lung disease who have greater needs than to the lives of healthy persons who have all they need. Most people would also agree that individuals should be employed in occupations for which they are fitted, and that this means matching each person's abilities to a job as far as possible. Vocational tests in junior secondary school for example, are supposed to help students find careers that match their abilities.

However, the socialist principle has also had its critics. First, opponents have pointed out that, under the socialist principle, there would be no relation between the amount of effort a worker puts forth and the amount of remuneration the worker receives (because remuneration would depend on need, not on effort). Consequently, opponents conclude, workers would have no incentive to put forth any work efforts at all knowing that they will receive the same regardless of whether they work hard. The result, it is claimed, will be a stagnating economy with a declining productivity (a claim, however, that does not seem to be borne out by the facts). Underlying this criticism is a deeper objection-namely, that it is unrealistic to think that entire societies could be modeled on familial relationships. Human nature is essentially self-interested and competitive, the critics of socialism hold, and so outside the family

people cannot be motivated by the fraternal willingness to share and help that is characteristic of families.

Socialists have usually replied to this charge by arguing that human beings are trained to acquire the vices of selfishness and competitiveness by modern social and economic institutions that inculcate and encourage competitive and self-interested behavior, but that people do not have these vices by nature. By nature, humans are born into families where they instinctively value helping each other. If these instinctive and “natural” attitudes continued to be nurtured, instead of being eradicated, humans would continue to value helping others even outside the family and would acquire the virtues of being cooperative, helpful, and selfless. The debate on what kinds of motivations human nature is subject to is still largely unsettled.

A second objection that opponents of the socialist principle have urged is that, if the socialist principle were enforced, it would obliterate individual freedom. Under the socialist principle, the occupation each person entered would be determined by the person's abilities and not by free choice. If a person has the ability to be a university teacher but wants to be a ditch digger, the person will have to become a teacher. Similarly, under the socialist principle, the goods a person gets will be determined by the person's needs and not by free choice. If a person needs a loaf of bread but wants a bottle of beer, the person will have to take the loaf of bread.

The sacrifice of freedom is even greater, the critics claim, when one considers that in a socialist society some central government agency has to decide what tasks should be matched to each person's abilities and what goods should be allotted to each person's needs. The decisions of this central agency will then have to be imposed on other persons at the expense of their freedom to choose for themselves. The socialist principle substitutes paternalism for freedom.

### **3.6 Justice as Freedom: Libertarianism**

The last section discussed libertarian views on moral rights; libertarians also have some clear and related views on the nature of justice. The libertarian holds that no particular way of distributing goods can be said to be just or unjust apart from the free choices individuals make. Any distribution of benefits and burdens is just if it is the result of individuals freely choosing to exchange with each other the goods each person already owns. Robert Nozick, a leading libertarian, suggests this principle as the basic principle of distributive justice.

From each according to what he chooses to do, to each according to

what he makes for himself (perhaps with the contracted aid of others) and what others choose to do for him and choose to give him of what they've been given previously (under this maxim) and haven't expended or transferred.

Quite simply, "From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen." For example, if I choose to write a novel or carve a statue out of a piece of driftwood, then I should be allowed to keep the novel or statue if I choose to keep it. If I choose, I should be allowed to give them away to someone else or exchange them for other objects with whomever I choose. In general, people should be allowed to keep everything they make and everything they are freely given. Obviously, this means it would be wrong to tax one person (i.e., take the person's money) to provide welfare benefits for someone else's needs.

Nozick's principle is based on the claim (which we have already discussed) that every person has a right to freedom from coercion that takes priority over all other rights and values. The only distribution that is just, according to Nozick, is one that results from free individual choices. Any distribution that results from an attempt to impose a certain pattern on society (e.g., imposing equality on everyone or taking from the haves and giving to the have nots) will therefore be unjust. .

We have already noted some of the problems associated with the libertarian position. The major difficulty is that the libertarian enshrines a certain value-freedom from the coercion of others-and sacrifices all other rights and values to it without giving any persuasive reasons why this should be done. Opponents of the libertarian view argue that other forms of freedom must also be secured, such as freedom from ignorance and freedom from hunger. In many cases, these other forms of freedom override freedom from coercion. If a man is starving, for example, his right to be free from the constraints imposed by hunger is more important than the right of a satisfied man to be free of the constraint of being forced to share his surplus food. To secure these more important rights, society may impose a certain pattern of distribution even if this means that, in some cases, some people will have to be coerced into conforming to the distribution. Those with surplus money, for example, may have to be taxed to provide for those who are starving.

A second related criticism of libertarianism claims that the libertarian principle of distributive justice will generate unjust treatment of the disadvantaged. Under the libertarian principle, a person's share of goods will depend wholly on what can be produced through personal efforts or what others choose to give the person out of charity (or some other motive). Both of these sources may be unavailable to a person through no fault of the person's. A person may be ill, handicapped, unable to

obtain the tools or land needed to produce goods, too old or too young to work, or otherwise incapable of producing anything through personal efforts. Other people (perhaps out of greed) may refuse to provide that person with what is needed. According to the libertarian principle, such a person should get nothing. But this, say the critics of libertarianism, is surely mistaken. If people through no fault of their own happen to be unable to care for themselves, their survival should not depend on the outside chance that others will provide them with what they need. Each person's life is of value, and consequently each person should be cared for, even if this means coercing others into distributing some of their surplus to the person.

### **3.7 Justice as Fairness: Rawls**

These discussions have suggested several different considerations that should be taken into account in the distribution of society's benefits and burdens: political and economic equality, a minimum standard of living, needs, ability, effort, and freedom. What is needed, however, is a comprehensive theory capable of drawing these considerations together and fitting them together into a logical whole. John Rawls provides one approach to distributive justice that at least approximates this ideal of a comprehensive theory.

John Rawls's theory is based on the assumption that conflicts involving justice should be settled by first devising a fair method for choosing the principles by which the conflicts are resolved. Once a fair method of choosing principles is devised, the principles we choose by using that method should serve us as our own principles of distributive justice. Rawls proposes two basic principles that, he argues, we would select if we were to use a fair method of choosing principles to resolve our social conflicts. The principles of distributive justice that Rawls proposes can be paraphrased by saying that the distribution of benefits and burdens in a society is just if and only if:

1. each person has an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar liberties for all, and
2. social and economic inequalities are arranged so that they are both
  - to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged persons, and
  - attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

Rawls tells us that Principle 1 is supposed to take priority over Principle 2 should the two of them ever come into conflict, and within Principle 2, Part b is supposed to take priority over Part a.

Principle 1 is called the principle of equal liberty. Essentially, it says that each citizen's liberties must be protected from invasion by others and must be equal to those of others. These basic liberties include the right to vote, freedom of speech and conscience and the other liberties, freedom to hold personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. If the principle of equal liberty is correct, then it implies that it is unjust for business institutions to invade the privacy of employees, managers to vote in certain ways, exert undue influence on political processes by the use of bribes, or otherwise violate the equal political liberties of society's members.

According to Rawls, moreover, because our freedom to make contracts would diminish if we were afraid of being defrauded or were afraid that contracts would not be honoured, the principle of equal liberty prohibits the use of force, fraud, or deception in contractual transactions and requires that just contracts should be honoured. If this is true, then contractual transactions with customers (including advertising) should morally be free of fraud and employees have a moral obligation to render the services they have justly contracted to their employer.

Part a of Principle 2 is called the difference principle. It assumes that a productive society will incorporate inequalities, but it then asserts that steps must be taken to improve the position of the most needy members of society, such as the sick and the disabled, unless such improvements would so burden society that they make everyone, including the needy, worse off than before.

Rawls claims that the more productive a society is, the more benefits it will be able to provide for its least advantaged members. Because the difference principle obliges us to maximise benefits for the least advantaged, this means that business institutions should be as efficient in their use of resources as possible. If we assume that a market system such as ours is most efficient when it is most competitive, then the difference principle will in effect imply that markets should be competitive and that anticompetitive practices such as price-fixing and monopolies are unjust. In addition, because pollution and other environmentally damaging external effects consume resources inefficiently, the difference principle also implies that it is wrong for firms to pollute the environment.

Part b of Principle 2 is called the principle of fair equality of **opportunity**. It says that everyone should be given an equal opportunity to qualify for the more privileged positions in society's institutions. This means not only that job qualifications should be related to the requirements of the job (thereby prohibiting sexual discrimination) but

that each person must have access to the training and education needed to qualify for the desirable jobs. A person's efforts, abilities, and contribution would then determine remuneration.

The principles that Rawls proposes are quite comprehensive and bring together the main considerations stressed by the other approaches to justice that we have examined. However, Rawls not only provides us with a set of principles of justice, he also proposes a general method for evaluating in a fair way the adequacy of any moral principles. The method he proposes consists of determining what principles a group of rational, self-interested persons would choose to live by if they knew they would live in a society governed by those principles but they did not yet know what each of them would turn out to be like in that society.

Thus, Rawls claims that a principle is a morally justified principle of justice if, and only if, the principle would be acceptable to a group of rational self-interested persons who know they will live in a society governed by the principles they accept but who do not know what sex, abilities, religion, interests, social position, income, or other particular characteristics each of them will possess in that future society.

Rawls refers to the situation of such an imaginary group of rational persons as the original position, and he refers to their ignorance of any particulars about themselves as the veil of ignorance. The purpose and effect of decreeing that the parties to the original position do not know what particular characteristics each of them will possess is to ensure that none of them can protect his or her own special interests. Because they are ignorant of their particular qualities, the parties to the original position are forced to be fair and impartial and to show no favoritism toward any special group: They must look after the good of all.

According to Rawls, the principles that the imaginary parties to the original position accept will ipso facto turn out to be morally justified. They will be morally justified because the original position incorporates the Kantian moral ideas of reversibility (the parties choose principles that will apply to themselves), universalisability (the principles must apply equally to everyone), and treating people as ends (each party has an equal say in the choice of principles). The principles are further justified, according to Rawls, because they are consistent with our deepest considered intuitions about justice. The principles chosen by the parties to the original position match most of the moral convictions we already have; where they do not, according to Rawls, we would be willing to change them to fit Rawls's principles once we reflect on his arguments.

### **3.8 Retributive Justice**

Retributive justice concerns the justice of blaming or punishing persons for doing wrong. Philosophers have long debated the justification of blame and punishment, but we need not enter these debates here. More relevant to our purposes is the question of the conditions under which it is just to punish a person for doing wrong.

The first unit discussed some major conditions under which ~~people~~ could not be held morally responsible for what they did: ignorance and inability. These conditions are also relevant to determining the justice of punishing or blaming someone for doing wrong: If people do not know or freely choose what they are doing, they cannot justly be punished or blamed for it.

A second kind of condition of just punishments is certitude that ~~the~~ person being punished actually did wrong. For example, many firms use more or less complex systems of due process that are intended to ascertain whether the conduct of employees was really such as to merit dismissal or some other penalty. Penalising an employee on the basis of flimsy or incomplete evidence is rightly considered an injustice.

A third kind of condition of just punishments is that they ~~consist~~ be consistent and proportioned to the wrong. Punishment is consistent only when everyone is given the same penalty for the same ~~infraction~~ infraction. Punishment is proportioned to the wrong when the penalty is no greater in magnitude than the harm that the wrongdoer inflicted. It is unjust, for example, for a manager to impose harsh penalties for minor infractions of rules or to be lenient toward favourites but harsh toward all others. If the purpose of a punishment is to deter others from committing the same wrong or to prevent the wrongdoer from repeating the wrong, ~~then~~ punishment should not be greater than what is consistently necessary to achieve these aims.

### 3.9 Compensatory Justice

Compensatory justice concerns the justice of restoring to a person what the person lost when wronged by someone else. We generally hold that when one person wrongfully harms the interests of another person, the wrong doer has a moral duty to provide some form of restitution to the person wronged. For example, if I destroy someone's property or injure him bodily, I will be held morally responsible for paying him damages.

There are no hard and fast rules for determining how much compensation a wrong doer owes the victim. Justice seems to require that the wrong doer as far as possible should restore whatever was taken, and this would usually mean that the amount of restitution should be equal to the loss the wrong doer knowingly inflicted on the victim.



However, some losses are impossible to measure. If I maliciously injure someone's reputation, for example, how much restitution should I make? Some losses, moreover, cannot be restored at all: How can the loss of life or the loss of sight be compensated? In situations such as the Ford Pinto case, where the injury is such that full restoration of the loss, is not possible, we seem to hold that the wrong doer should at least pay for the material damages the loss inflicts on the injured person and the immediate family.

Traditional moralists have argued that a person has a moral obligation to compensate an injured party only if three conditions are present:

- The action that inflicted the injury was wrong or negligent. For example, if by efficiently managing my firm I undersell my competitor and run her out of business, I am not morally bound to compensate her since such competition is neither wrongful nor negligent; but if I steal from my employer, then I owe compensation, or if I fail to exercise due care in my driving, then I owe compensation to those whom I injure.
- The person's action was the real cause of the injury. For example, if a banker loans person money and the borrower then uses it to cheat others, the banker is not morally obligated to compensate the victims; but if the banker defrauds a customer, the customer must be compensated.
- The person inflicted the injury voluntarily. For example, if I injure someone's property accidentally and without negligence, I am not morally obligated to compensate the person. (I may, however, be legally bound to do so depending on how the law chooses to distribute the social costs of injury.)

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What do you understand by "distributive justice"?
2. "Justice Based on Contribution" what do you understand by this statement.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The most controversial forms of compensation undoubtedly are preferential treatment programmes that attempt to remedy past injustices against groups. For example, if a racial group has been discriminated against for an extended period of time in the past and its members consequently now hold the lowest economic and social positions in society, does justice require that members of that group be compensated by being given special preference in hiring, training, and promotion procedures? Would such special treatment be a violation of justice by violating the principle of equal treatment?

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Does justice legitimise quotas even if this requires turning down more highly qualified non minorities? These are complex and involved questions that we are not able to answer at this point. We will return to them in a later unit.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Define the following concepts: Distributive justice, the fundamental (or formal) principle of distributive justice, material principle of justice, egalitarian justice, capitalist justice, socialist justice, libertarian justice, justice as fairness, principle of equal liberty, difference principle, principle of fair equality of opportunity, the “original position,” retributive justice, compensatory justice, caring, ethic of caring, concrete relationship, virtue, ethics of virtue.
2. “Every principle of distributive justice, whether that of the egalitarian, or the capitalist, or the socialist, or the libertarian, or of Rawls, in the end is illegitimately advocating some type of equality.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

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## **UNIT 2 THE BUSINESS SYSTEM**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Economic Systems
  - 3.2 Free Markets and Rights: John Locke
    - 3.2.1 Criticism of Lockean Rights
  - 3.3 Free Markets and Utility: Adam Smith
    - 3.3.1 Criticisms of Adam Smith
    - 3.3.2 The Keynesian Criticism
    - 3.3.3 The Utility of Survival of the Fittest: Social Darwinism
  - 3.4 Free Trade and Utility: David Ricardo
    - 3.4.1 Criticisms of Ricardo
  - 3.5 Marx and Justice: Criticising Markets and Free Trade
    - 3.5.1 Alienation
    - 3.5.2 The Real Purpose of Government
    - 3.5.3 Immiseration of Workers
    - 3.5.4 The Replies
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The controversy over globalisation and free trade is but a single episode in a great and centuries-long debate: Should government regulate business activities business firms be left free to pursue their own interests within free markets and trade freely with members of other nations? One side argues that free markets and free trade are defective because they cannot deal with problems such as unfair competition, pollution, unfair labour practices, poverty, and discrimination. The other side argues that government regulation is defective because it violates the right to freedom, leads to an unfair allocation of goods, and leaves us all worse off. This unit examines these arguments for and against free markets and free trade.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

When you complete this unit, you should be able to:

- explain why government must leave people free to exchange their property
- explain why Adam Smith believes that free market produces results and should be consistent with the public good
- identify benefits David Ricardo attributed to free trade
- explain the injustices that are inherent in free market capitalism as discussed by Karl Marx.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Economic Systems

Arguments about free markets and free trade are arguments about economic systems. An economic system is the system a society uses to provide the goods and services it needs to survive and flourish. This system must accomplish two basic economic tasks: First is the task of actually producing goods and services, which requires determining what will be produced, how it will be produced, and who will produce it. The second is the task of distributing these goods and services among its members, which requires determining who will get what and how much each will get. To accomplish these two tasks, economic systems rely on three kinds of social devices: traditions, commands, and markets. Each of these three provides a way to organise people's activities, a way to motivate them, and a way to decide who owns or controls the society's productive resources.

The so-called primitive societies used economic systems based primarily on tradition. Tradition-based societies are small and rely on traditional communal roles and customs to carry out the two basic economic tasks. Individuals are motivated by the community's expressions of approval or disapproval, and the community's productive resources, such as its herds are often owned in common. A small nomadic tribe, for example, that survives by hunting and herding might rely on the traditional roles of husband, wife, mother, father, son, and daughter to decide who does what and who gets what and may hold its herd in common. Societies that are almost completely tradition-based exist even today among Bushmen, the Inuit, Kalahari hunters, and Bedouin tribes.

Large modern societies carry out the two main economic tasks primarily through two very distinctive ways of organising themselves: commands and markets.; In an economic system based primarily on commands, a government authority (a person or a group) makes the economic

decisions about what is to be produced, who will produce it, and who will get it. Productive resources such as land and factories are owned or controlled by government and are considered to belong to the public or to “the people.” Individuals are motivated to put forth the required effort by the rewards and punishments government doles out and by its exhortations to serve society. China, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, the former Soviet Union, and several other nations have run their economies primarily on the basis of commands.

By contrast, in a system based primarily on markets, private individuals make the main decisions about what they will produce and who will get it. Productive resources like land and factories are owned and managed by private individuals and are consequently considered “private property.” People are motivated to work primarily by the desire to get paid for voluntarily supplying the things others are willing to pay for. England in the 19th century is often cited as a prime example of an economy that was based primarily on a market system.

Economies today contain elements of all three of these devices: traditions, commands, and markets. The United States, for example, is highly “market-oriented,” yet some Americans still consider some jobs to be “men's work,” or “women's work,” so for them “tradition” determines who does those jobs, and the U.S. government not only issues “commands” that regulate business, labour, and international trade but also owns several important businesses, including the Export-Import Bank, the Postal Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and several others.

In fact, it would be undesirable to run an economy completely on the basis of traditions, commands, or markets. If an economy was a pure market system, for example, with no economic interventions by government, there would be no constraints whatsoever on the property one could own or what one could do with it. Slavery would be entirely legal, as would prostitution and all drugs including hard drugs. Today, the governments of even the most market-oriented economies decree that there are some things that may not be owned (such as slaves), some things that may not be done with one's own property (such as pollution), some exchanges that are illegal (children's labor), and some exchanges that are imposed (through taxation). Such limitations on markets are intrusions of a command system: Government concern for the public welfare leads it to issue commands concerning which goods may or may not be produced or exchanged. Similarly, even under the almost all-encompassing command system of the former Soviet Union's harsh Stalinist regime, local markets-many of them so called “black markets”-existed where workers could trade their wages for the goods they wanted.

Since the 18th century, debates have raged over whether economies should be based more on commands or on markets. Should we have more government commands in the form of more economic regulations and more government control of business enterprises, or should government stand back and trust the economy more to the workings of the “market” and the decisions of private owners of companies? Sometimes these debates have been expressed in terms of whether economic activities should be more or less “free” of government “intrusions” and then the discussion is over “free markets” (“free,” that is, of government) and “free trade.” Sometimes the debate is over “laissez-faire” policies, which, literally, in French is for policies that “let us act” free of government controls.

Today these debates continue on two levels:

- Arguments for and against “free markets” within a nation,.
- Arguments for and against “free trade” between nations. The reader should not confuse the two different levels of these debates, although the two levels are related. The debate at the first level asks whether a nation's government should regulate business exchanges between its citizens or, instead, allow its citizens to freely exchange goods with each other. The debate at the second level asks whether a nation's government should allow its citizens to freely trade goods with the citizens of other nations or, instead, impose tariffs or quotas on the goods foreign citizens want to trade with them. We can call the first debate the debate over free markets and the second the debate over free trade. In this unit, we will examine the arguments on both sides of these debates, which are, in the end, debates over the proper role of commands and of markets both nationally and internationally.

In analysing these arguments on free markets and free trade, on commands and markets, we in effect analyse what sociologists refer to as ideologies. An ideology is a system of normative beliefs shared by members of some social group. The ideology expresses the answers to questions about human nature (e.g., Are human beings only motivated by economic incentives?), the basic purpose of our social institutions (e.g., what is the purpose of government; of business, of the market?); how societies actually function (e.g., are markets really free? Does big business control government?), and the values society should try to protect (e.g., freedom, productivity, equality etc). A business ideology, then, is a normative system of beliefs on these matters, but specifically one that is held by business groups such as managers.

The importance of analysing business ideologies is obvious: A

businessperson's ideology often determines the business decisions made; through these decisions, the ideology influences the person's behaviour. The businessperson's ideology, for example, will colour the person's perceptions of the groups with whom the person has to deal (employees, government officials, the poor, competitors, consumers); it will encourage the person to give in to certain pressures from these groups (perhaps even to support them) and oppose others; it will make the person look on some actions as justified and legitimate and other actions (both those of the person and those of other groups) as unjustified and illegitimate. If a person's ideology is never examined, it will nonetheless have a deep and pervasive influence on the person's decision-making, an influence that may go largely unnoticed and that may derive from what is actually a false and ethically objectionable ideology.

The ideologies that Americans hold today incorporate ideas drawn from the thinking of Adam Smith, John Locke, David Ricardo, and other influential thinkers whose normative views we examine and evaluate in this unit. We discuss these ideas not only because of the significant influence they have on our ideologies but because many people today argue that these ideologies must be adjusted if they are to meet the contemporary needs of business and society. It would be a valuable exercise for the reader to identify the ideology he or she holds and to examine and criticise its elements when reading this unit.

### **3.2 Free Markets and Rights: John Locke**

One of the strongest cases for an unregulated market derives from the idea that human beings have certain "natural rights" that only a free market system can preserve. The two natural rights that free markets are supposed to protect are the right to freedom and the right to private property. Free markets are supposed to preserve the right to freedom insofar as they enable each individual to voluntarily exchange goods with others free from the coercive power of government. They are supposed to preserve the right to private property insofar as each individual is free to decide what will be done with what he or she owns without interference from government.

John Locke (1632-1704), an English political philosopher, is generally credited with developing the idea that human beings have a "natural right" to liberty and a "natural right" to private property. Locke argued that if there were no governments, human beings would find themselves in a state of nature. In this state of nature, each individual would be the political equal of all others and would be perfectly free of any constraints other than the law of nature—that is, the moral principles that God gave to humanity and that each individual can discover by the use of God-given reason. As he puts it, "in a state of nature, everyone would

be in a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man. A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another without subordination or subjection to another. But the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions”.

Although Locke never explicitly used his theory of natural rights to argue for free markets, several 20th-century authors have employed his theory for this purpose. Friedrich A. Hayek, Murray Rothbard, Gottfried Dietze, Eric Mack, and many others have claimed that each person has the right to liberty and property that Locke credited to every human being and that, consequently, government must leave individuals free to exchange their labour and their property as they voluntarily choose. Only a free private enterprise exchange economy, in which government stays out of the market and in which government protects the property rights of private individuals, allows for such voluntary exchanges. The existence of the Lockean rights to liberty and property, then, implies that societies should incorporate private property institutions and free markets.

Government does not grant or create private property rights. Instead, it must respect and protect the property rights that are naturally generated through labour and trade. It is only relatively recently, in the late 19th and 20th centuries, that this Lockean view began to give way in the United States to the more "socialist" view that government may limit an individual's private property rights for the good of society.

Even today in the United States there is a strong presumption that government does not create property rights, but must respect and enforce the property rights that individuals create through their own efforts. It is important to see that this American and Lockean view of property is not universal. In some countries, such as Japan, resources are not seen as things over which individuals have an absolute property right. Instead, in Japan, as in other Asian societies, resources are seen as functioning primarily to serve the needs of society as a whole, and so the property rights of individuals should give way to the needs of society when there is a conflict between the two.

Locke's view that, when a person expends labor and effort to create or improve a thing, that person acquires property rights over that thing. If a person writes a book or software program, for example, then that book



or software program is the property of the person who "mixed" labour into it. A person may, of course, agree to "sell" labour to an employer, and thereby agree that the employer will gain ownership of whatever the person creates. However, even such employee agreements assume that the employee has the right to "sell" labour, and this means that the employee must have been the original owner of the labour used to create the object. Software developers, for example, are the rightful owners of the software programmes they develop not only because they have invested a great deal of time and energy into developing these programs but also because they have paid the software engineers who "sold" them their labour to produce these programmes. We should notice that these views on property all assume, of course, that a private property right is really a bundle of rights. To say that X is my private property is to say that I have a right to use it, consume it, sell it, give it away, loan it, rent it, keep anything of value it produces, change it, destroy it, and, most important, exclude others from doing any of these things without my consent.

### 3.2.1 Criticisms of Lockean Rights

Criticisms of the Lockean defense of free markets have focused on four of its major weaknesses: (a) the assumption that individuals have the "natural rights" Locke claimed they have, (b) the conflict between these negative rights and positive rights, (c) the conflict between these Lockean rights and the principles of justice, and (d) the individualistic assumptions Locke makes and their conflict with the demands of caring.

First, the Lockean defense of free markets rests on the unproven assumption that people have rights to liberty and property that take precedence over all other rights. If humans do not have the overriding rights to liberty and property, then the fact that free markets would preserve the rights does not mean a great deal. Neither Locke nor his 20th-Century followers, however, have provided the arguments needed to establish that human beings have such "natural" rights. Locke merely asserted that, "reason . . . teaches all mankind, who will but consult it" that these rights exist. Instead of arguing for these rights, therefore, Locke had to fall back on the bare assertion that the existence of these rights is "self-evident": All rational human beings are supposed to be able to intuit that the alleged rights to liberty and to property exist. Unfortunately, many rational human beings have tried and failed to have this intuition.

The problem emerges most clearly if we look more closely at Locke's views on the natural right to property. Locke claims that when a person "mixes" labour into some object that is unclaimed, the object becomes that person's property. For example, if I find a piece of driftwood on

seashore and whittle it into a pretty statue, the statue becomes my property because I have taken something of mine—my labour—and “mixed” it into the wood so as to make it more valuable. Investing effort and work into making something more valuable makes that thing mine. But why should this be? As the philosopher Robert Nozick has asked, if I “mix” my labour into something that is not yet mine, then why isn't this just a way of losing my labour?

Suppose that I own a cup of water and I throw my cup of water into the ocean so that I mix my water with the unknown water of the ocean. Does the ocean become “mine”? Clearly, in this case at least, mixing something of mine into something that is not mine is merely a way of losing what was mine, not a way of acquiring something that was not mine. Why is it that when I invest my work in improving or changing some object so as to make it more valuable, that object becomes my “property”? Locke provides no answer to this question, apparently thinking that it is “self-evident.”

Second, even if human beings have a natural right to liberty and property, it does not follow that this right must override all other rights. The right to liberty and property is a “negative” right; negative rights can conflict with people's positive rights. For example, the negative right to liberty may conflict with someone else's positive right to medical care, housing, or clean air. Why must we believe that in such cases the negative right has greater priority than the positive right? Critics argue, in fact, that we have no reason to believe that the rights to liberty and property are overriding. Consequently, we also have no reason to be persuaded by the argument that free markets must be preserved because they protect this alleged right.

The third major criticism of the Lockean defence of free markets is based on the idea that free markets create unjust inequalities. In a free market economy, a person's productive power is proportioned to the amount of labor or property already possessed. Those individuals who have accumulated a great deal of wealth and who have access to education and training will be able to accumulate even more wealth by purchasing more productive assets. Individuals who own no property, who are unable to work, or who are unskilled (such as the handicapped, infirm, poor, aged) will be unable to buy any goods at all without help from the government. As a result, without government intervention, the gap between the richest and poorest will widen until large disparities of wealth emerge. Unless government intervenes to adjust the distribution of property that results from free markets, large groups of citizens will remain at a subsistence level while others grow ever wealthier. To prove their point, critics cite the high poverty levels and large inequalities evident in “capitalist” nations such as the United States.

Finally, critics have argued, Locke's argument assumes human beings are atomistic individuals with personal rights to liberty and property that flow from their personal nature independently of their relations to the larger community. Because these rights are assumed to be prior to and independent of the community, the community can make no claims on the property or freedom of the individual. However, critics claim that these individualistic assumptions are completely false: They ignore the key role of caring relationships in human societies and the demands of caring that arise from these relationships.

Critics of Locke point out that humans are born dependent on the care of others; as they grow, they remain dependent on the care of others to acquire what they need to become able adults. Even when they become adults, they depend on the caring cooperation of others in their communities for virtually everything they do or produce. The degree of liberty a person has depends on what the person can do: The less a person can do, the less he is free to do. But a person's abilities depend on what he learns from those who care for him as well as on what others care to help him to do or allow him to do.

Similarly, the "property" that a person produces through labour depends ultimately on the skills acquired from those who cared for him and on the cooperative work of others in the community such as employees. Even one's identity---one's sense of who one is as a member of the various communities and groups to which one belongs depends on one's relationships with others in the community. In short, the individualistic assumptions built into Locke's view of human beings ignores the concrete caring relationships from which a person's identity and the possibility of individual rights arise.

Humans are not atomistic individuals with rights that are independent of others; instead, they are persons embedded in caring relationships that make those rights possible and that make the person who and what he or she is. Moreover, critics continue, persons are morally required to sustain these relationships and to care for others as others have cared for them. The community can legitimately make claims on the property of individuals and can restrict the freedom of individuals precisely because the community and the caring it has provided are the ultimate source of that property and freedom.

### **3.3 Free Markets and Utility: Adam Smith**

The second major defense of unregulated markets rests on the utilitarian argument that unregulated markets and private property will produce greater benefits than any amount of regulation could. In a system with free markets and private property, buyers will seek to purchase what they want for themselves at the lowest prices they can find. Therefore, it will pay private businesses to produce and sell what consumers want and it will do this at the lowest possible prices. To keep their prices down, private businesses will try to cut back on the costly resources they consume. Thus, the free market, coupled with private property, ensures that the economy is producing what consumers want, that prices are at the lowest levels possible, and that resources are efficiently used. The economic utility of society's members is thereby maximised.

Adam Smith (1723-1790), the "father of modern economics," is the originator of this utilitarian argument for the free market. According to Smith, when private individuals are left free to seek their own interests in free markets, they will inevitably be led to further the public welfare by an invisible hand. The "invisible hand," of course, is competition. Every producer seeks to make a living by using private resources to produce and sell those goods that the producer perceives people want to buy. In a competitive market, a multiplicity of private businesses must all compete with each other for the same buyers.

To attract customers, therefore, each seller is forced not only to supply what consumers want but to drop the price of goods as close as possible to "what it really costs the person who brings it to market." To increase one's profits, each producer must pare costs, thereby reducing the resources consumed. The competition produced by a multiplicity of self-interested private sellers serves to lower prices, conserve resources, and make producers respond to consumer desires. Motivated only by self-interest, private businesses are led to serve society. As Smith put the matter in a famous passage.

- It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the baker, and the brewer that we expect our dinner, but from their regard for their own self-interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.

Smith also argued that a system of competitive markets allocates resources efficiently among the various industries of a society. When the supply of a certain commodity is not enough to meet the demand, buyers bid the price of the commodity upward until it rises above what Smith called the natural price (i.e., the price that just covers the cost of producing the commodity, including the going rate of profit obtainable

in other markets). Producers of that commodity then reap profits higher than those available to producers of other commodities. The higher profits induce producers of those other products to switch their resources into the production of the more profitable commodity. As a result, the shortage of that commodity disappears and its price sinks back to its natural level. Conversely, when the supply of a commodity is greater than the quantity demanded, its price falls, inducing its producers to switch their resources into the production of other, more profitable commodities. The fluctuating prices of commodities in a system of competitive markets then forces producers to allocate their resources to those industries where they are most in demand and to withdraw resources from industries where there is a relative. The market, in short, allocates resources so as to most efficiently meet consumer demand, thereby promoting social utility.

The best policy of a government that hopes to advance the public welfare, therefore, is to do nothing: to let each individual pursue self-interest in “natural liberty. Any interventions in the market by government can only serve to interrupt the self-regulating effect of competition and reduce its many beneficial consequences.

Finally, it is important to note that, although Adam Smith did not discuss the notion of private property at great length, it is a ~~key~~ <sup>key</sup> assumption of his views. Before individuals can come together in markets to sell things to each other, they must have some agreement about what each individual “owns” and what each individual has the right to “sell” to others.

Unless a society has a system of private property that allocates its resources to individuals, that society cannot have a free market system. For this reason, Adam Smith assumed that a society with free markets would have a private property system, although he gave no explicit utilitarian arguments showing that a system of private property was better than, say, a system where all productive resources were “owned” in common by everyone. Earlier philosophers, however, had provided utilitarian arguments in support of a private property system. In the 13th Century, for example, philosopher Thomas Aquinas argued that society should not use a system in which all things were owned by everyone “in common.” Instead, society would prosper only if its resources were owned by individuals who would then take an interest in improving and caring for those resources.

### 3.3.1 Criticisms of Adam Smith

Critics of Smith's classic utilitarian argument in defense of free markets and private property have attacked it on a variety of fronts. The most common criticism is that the argument rests on unrealistic assumptions. Smith's arguments assume, first, that the impersonal forces of supply and demand will force prices down to their lowest levels because the sellers of products are so numerous and each enterprise is so small that no one seller can control the price of a product. This assumption was perhaps true enough in Smith's day, when the largest firms employed only a few dozen men and a multitude of small shops and merchants competed for the consumer's attention.

However, today many industries and markets are completely or partially monopolised, and the small firm is no longer the rule. In these monopolised industries, where one or a few large enterprises are able to set their own prices, it is no longer true that prices necessarily move to their lowest levels. The monopoly power of the industrial giants enables them to keep prices at artificially high levels and production at artificially low levels.

Second, critics claim, Smith's arguments assume that all the resources used to produce a product will be paid for by the manufacturer and that the manufacturer will try to reduce these costs to maximise profits. As a result, there is a tendency toward a more efficient utilisation of society's resources. This assumption is also proved false when manufacturers of a product consume resources for which they do not have to pay and on which they, therefore, do not try to economise. For example, when manufacturers use up clean air by polluting it, or when they impose health costs by dumping harmful chemicals into rivers, lakes, and seas, they are using resources of society for which they do not pay.

Consequently, there is no reason for them to attempt to minimise these costs, and social waste is the result. Such waste is a particular instance of a more general problem that Smith's analysis ignored. Smith failed to take into account the external effects that business activities often have on their surrounding environment. Pollution is one example of such effects, but there are others, such as the effects on society of introducing advanced technology, the psychological effects increased mechanisation has had on labourers, the harmful effects that handling products has on the health of workers, and the economic shocks that result when natural resources are depleted for short-term gains. Smith ignored these external effects of the firm and assumed that the firm is a self-contained agent whose activities affect only itself and its buyers.

Third, critics claim, Smith's analysis wrongly assumes that every human

being is motivated only by a “natural” and self-interested desire for profit. Smith, at least in *The Wealth of Nations*, assumes that in all dealings a person “intends only his own gain.” Human nature follows the rule of “economic rationality”: Give away as little as you can in return for as much as you can get. Because a human being “intends only his own gain” anyway, the best economic arrangement is one that recognizes this “natural” motivation and allows it free play in competitive markets that force self-interest to serve the public interest. However, this theory of human nature, critics have claimed, is clearly false.

First, human beings regularly show a concern for the good of others and constrain their self-interest for the sake of the rights of others. Even when buying and selling in markets, the constraints of honesty and fairness affect our conduct.

Second, the critics claim, it is not necessarily “rational” to follow the rule “give away as little as you can for as much as you can get.” In numerous situations, everyone is better off when everyone shows concern for others, and it is then rational to show such concern.

Third, critics have argued, if human beings often behave like “rational economic men,” this is not because such behaviour is natural, but because the widespread adoption of competitive market relations forces humans to relate to each other as “rational economic men.” The market system of a society makes humans selfish, and this widespread selfishness then makes us think the profit motive is “natural.” It is the institutions of capitalism that engender selfishness, materialism, and competitiveness. In actual fact, human beings are born with a natural tendency to show concern for other members of their species (e.g., in their families). A major moral defect of a society built around competitive markets, in fact, is that within such societies this natural benevolent tendency toward virtue is gradually replaced by self-interested tendencies toward vice. In short, such societies are morally defective because they encourage morally bad character.

As for the argument of von Mises and Hayek—that human planners cannot allocate resources efficiently—the examples of the French, Dutch, and Swedes have demonstrated that planning within some sectors of the economy is not quite as impossible as von Mises and Hayek imagined. Moreover, the argument of von Mises and Hayek was answered on theoretical grounds by the socialist economist Oskar Lange, who demonstrated that a “central planning board” could efficiently allocate goods in an economy without having to know everything about consumers and producers and without engaging in impossibly elaborate calculations. All that is necessary is for the central planners to receive

reports on the sizes of the inventories of producer's and price their commodities accordingly. Surplus inventories would indicate that lowering of prices was necessary, whereas inventory shortages would indicate that prices should be raised. By setting the prices of all commodities in this way, the central planning board could create an efficient flow of resources throughout the economy. It must be acknowledged, however, that the kind of large-scale planning that has been attempted in some communist nations-particularly the former Soviet Union-has resulted in large-scale failure. Planning is possible so long as it remains but one component within an economy in which exchanges are for the most part based on market forces.

### 3.3.2 The Keynesian Criticism

The most influential criticism of Adam Smith's classical assumptions came from John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), an English economist. Smith assumed that without any help from the government, the automatic play of market forces would ensure full employment of all economic resources including labour. If some resources are not being used, then their costs drop and entrepreneurs are induced to expand their output by using these cheapened resources.

The purchase of these resources in turn creates the incomes that enable people to buy the products made from them. Thus, all resources are used and demand always expands to absorb the supply of commodities made from them (a relationship that is now called Say's Law). Since Keynes, however, economists have argued that, without government intervention, the demand goods may not be high enough to absorb the supply. The result is unemployment and a slide into economic depression.

Keynes argued that the total demand for goods and services is the sum of the demand of three sectors of the economy: households, businesses, and government. The aggregate demand of these three sectors may be less than the aggregate mounts of goods and services supplied by the economy at the full employment level, [his mismatch between aggregate demand and aggregate supply will occur when households prefer to save some of their income in liquid securities instead of spending t on goods and services.

When, as a consequence, aggregate demand is less than aggregate supply the result is a contraction of supply. Businesses realise they are not selling all their goods, so they cut back on production and thereby cut back on employment. As production falls, the incomes of households also fall, but the amounts households are willing to save fall even faster. Eventually, the economy reaches a stable point of equilibrium at which



demand once again equals supply, but at which there is widespread unemployment of labour and other resources.

Government, according to Keynes, can influence the propensity to save, which lowers aggregate demand and creates unemployment. Government can prevent excess savings through its influence on interest rates, and it can influence interest rates by regulating the money supply: The higher the supply of money, the lower the rates at which it is lent. Second, government can directly affect the amount of money households have available to them by raising or lowering taxes. Third, government spending can close any gap between aggregate demand and aggregate supply by taking up the slack in demand from households and businesses (and, incidentally, creating inflation).

Thus, contrary to Smith's claims, government intervention in the economy is a necessary instrument for maximising society's utility. Free markets alone are not necessarily the most efficient means for coordinating the use of society's resources. Government spending and fiscal policies can serve to create the demand needed to stave off unemployment. These views were the kernels of Keynesian economics.

Keynes's views, however, have fallen on hard times. During the 1970s, the United States (and other Western economies) was confronted with the simultaneous occurrence of inflation and unemployment, termed stagflation. The standard Keynesian analysis would have led us to believe that these two should not have occurred together: Increased government spending, although inflationary, should have enlarged demand and thereby alleviated unemployment. However, during the 1970s, the standard Keynesian remedy for unemployment (increased government spending) had the expected effect of creating increasing inflation but did not cure unemployment.

Various diagnoses have been offered for the apparent failure of Keynesian economics to deal with the twin problems of inflation and stubborn unemployment particularly during the 1970s. Notable among these are the new Keynesian approaches being pioneered by the so-called post-Keynesian school. John Hicks, a long-time Keynesian enthusiast and a "post-Keynesian," has suggested, for example, that in many industries today prices and wages are no longer determined by competitive market forces as Keynes assumed. Instead, they are set by conventional agreements among producers and unions.

The ultimate effect of these price-setting conventions is continuing inflation in the face of continued unemployment. Regardless of whether Hicks's analysis is correct, a flourishing post-Keynesian school has lately been developing new approaches to Keynes that can more

adequately account for the problems of stagflation. Post-Keynesian theories, like those of Hicks, retain the key claim of Keynes that employment can be cured by increasing aggregate demand (the “principle of effective demand”) through government expenditures. Unlike Keynes, however, Hicks and other post-Keynesians take more seriously the oligopolistic nature of most modern industries and unionised labour markets, as well as the role that social conventions and agreements play in these oligopolistic markets as large unions and large companies struggle over income shares. The role for government, then, is even larger than that envisioned by Keynes. Not only must government boost aggregate demand through increased spending, it must also curb the power of large oligopolistic groups.

### **3.3.3 The Utility of Survival of the Fittest: Social Darwinism**

Nineteenth-century social Darwinists added a new twist to utilitarian justifications of free markets by arguing that free markets have beneficial consequences over and above those that Adam Smith identified. They argued that economic competition produces human progress.

The doctrines of social Darwinism were named after Charles Darwin (1809-1882), who argued that the various species of living things were evolving as the result of the action of an environment that favoured the survival of some things while destroying others: “This preservation of favourable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called natural selection or the survival of the fittest.” The environmental factors that resulted in the survival of the fittest were the competitive pressures of the animal world. As a result of this competitive “struggle for existence,” Darwin held, species gradually change because only the “fittest” survive to pass their favorable characteristics on to their progeny.

Even before Darwin published his theories, philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and other thinkers had already begun to suggest that the evolutionary processes that Darwin described were also operative in human societies. Spencer claimed that just as competition in the animal world ensures that only the fittest survive, so free competition in the economic world ensures that only the most capable individuals survive and rise to the top.

The implication is that Inconvenience, suffering, and death are the penalties attached by nature to ignorance as well as to incompetence and are also the means of remedying these. Partly by weeding out those of lowest development, and partly by subjecting those who remain to the never-ceasing discipline of experience, nature secures the growth of a

race who shall both understand the conditions of existence, and be able to act up to them.

Those individuals whose aggressive business dealings enable them to succeed in the competitive world of business are the "fittest" and therefore the best. Just as survival of the fittest ensures the continuing progress and improvement of an animal species, so the free competition that enriches some individuals and reduces others to poverty result in the gradual improvement of the human race. Government must not be allowed to interfere with this stern competition because this would only impede progress. In particular, government must not lend economic aid to those who fall behind in the competition for survival. If these economic misfits survive, they will pass on their inferior qualities and the human race will decline.

It was easy enough for later thinkers to revise Spencer's views so as to rid them of their apparent callousness. Modern versions of Spencerism hold that Competition is good not because it destroys the weak individual but because it weeds out the weak firm. Economic competition ensures that the "best" business firms survive and, as a result, the economic system gradually improves. The lesson of modern social Darwinism is the same: Government must stay out of the market because competition is beneficial.

The shortcomings of Spencer's views were obvious even to his contemporaries. Critics were quick to point out that the skills and traits that help individuals and firms advance and "survive" in the business world are not necessarily those that help humanity survive on the planet. Advancement in the business world might be achieved through a ruthless disregard for other human beings. The survival of humanity, however, may well depend on the development of cooperative attitudes and the mutual willingness of people to help each other.

The basic problem underlying the views of the social Darwinist, however, is the fundamental normative assumption that survival of the fittest means survival of the best. That is, whatever results from the workings of nature is necessarily good. The fallacy, which modern authors call the naturalistic fallacy, implies, of course, that whatever happens naturally is always for the best. It is a basic failure of logic, however, to infer that what is should be or that what nature creates is necessarily for the best.

### **3.4 Free Trade and Utility: David Ricardo**

We have so far focused on the utilitarian arguments for and against free markets. But utilitarian arguments have also been advanced in favour of free trade between nations. Adam Smith's major work, *The Wealth of Nations*, in fact, was primarily aimed at showing the benefits of free trade. There he wrote:

It is the maxim of every prudent master of a family, never to attempt to make at home what it will cost him more to make than to buy. The tailor does not make his own shoes but buys them from the shoemaker. What is prudence in the conduct of every family can scarce be folly in that of a great kingdom. If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better buy it of them with some part of the produce of our own industry, employed in a way in which we have some advantage.

Adam Smith's point here is simple. Like individuals, countries differ in their ability to produce goods. One country can produce a good more cheaply than another and it is then said to have an "absolute advantage" in producing that good. But what if one country can produce everything more cheaply than another country?

David Ricardo (1772-1823), a British economist, is usually credited with showing that even if one country has an absolute advantage producing everything, it is still better for it to specialise and trade. In his major work *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, Ricardo used the example of England and Portugal to show that even if England is better than Portugal at producing both cloth and wine, it is still better for England and Portugal to specialise and trade: England may be circumscribed that to produce the cloth may require the labour of 100 men for one year; and if she attempted to make the wine, it might require the labour of 120 men for the same time. England would therefore find it in her interest to import wine, and to purchase it by the exportation of cloth.

To produce the wine in Portugal might require only the labour of 80 men for one year, and to produce the cloth in the same country might require the labour of 90 men for the same time. It would therefore be advantageous for her to export wine in exchange for cloth. This exchange might even take place, notwithstanding that the commodity imported by Portugal could be produced there with less labour than in England. Though she could make the cloth with the labor of 90 men, she would import it from a country where it required the labour of 100 men to produce it, because it would be advantageous to her rather to employ her capital in the production of wine, for which she would obtain more cloth from England, than she could produce by diverting a portion of her capital from the cultivation of vines to the manufacture of cloth.

### 3.4.1 Criticisms of Ricardo

Although Ricardo's basic argument is accepted as correct in theory by most economists, many question whether his utilitarian argument applies in practice to today's real world.

Of course, Ricardo makes a number of simplifying assumptions that clearly do not hold in the real world—such as that there are only two countries making only two products with only a fixed number of workers. But these are merely simplifying assumptions Ricardo made to get his point across more easily, and Ricardo's conclusion could still be proved without these assumptions.

There are other assumptions, however, that are not so easy to get around. First, Ricardo assumes that the resources used to produce goods (labour, equipment, factories, etc.) do not move from one country to another. Yet today multinational companies can, and easily do, move their productive capital from one country to another. Second, Ricardo assumes that each country's production costs are constant and do not decline as countries expand their production (i.e., there are no "economies of scale") or as they acquire new technology. But we know that the costs of producing goods always decline as companies expand production and develop ever better production technologies.

Thirdly, Ricardo assumes that workers can easily and costlessly move from one industry to another (from making wine, for example, to making cloth). Yet when a company in a country closes down because it cannot compete with imports from another country that has a comparative advantage in those goods, the company's workers are laid off, suffer heavy costs, need retraining, and often cannot find comparable jobs. This is why many Americans today reject globalisation and free trade.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Ricardo ignores international rule setters. International trade inevitably leads to disagreements and conflicts, and so countries must agree to abide by some set of rules and rule setters. Today, the main organisations that set the rules that govern globalization and trade are the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Critics claim that these organisations impose requirements that harm poor developing countries while benefiting the wealthy developed nations.

It is difficult to say how telling these criticisms are. Many people today continue to be enthusiastic supporters of free trade, repeating Ricardo's "comparative advantage" argument. Many others have become harsh critics of globalisation. Indeed, there have been violent demonstrations against globalisation on the streets of cities around the world.

### **3.5 Marx and Justice: Criticising and Free Trade**

Karl Marx (1818-1883) is undoubtedly the harshest and most influential critic of the inequalities that private property institutions, free markets, and free trade are accused of creating. Writing at the height of the Industrial Revolution, Marx was an eyewitness to the wrenching and exploitative effects that industrialisation had on the labouring peasant classes of England, Europe, and the rest of the world. In his writings, he detailed the suffering and misery that capitalism was imposing on its workers: exploitative working hours, pulmonary diseases and premature deaths caused by unsanitary factory conditions, 7-year-olds working 12 to 15 hours a day; 30 seamstresses working 30 hours without a break in a room made for 10 people.

Marx claimed, however, that these instances of worker exploitation were merely symptoms of the underlying extremes of inequality that capitalism necessarily produces. According to Marx, capitalist systems offer only two sources of income: sale of one's own labour and ownership of the means of production (buildings, machinery, land, raw materials).

Because workers cannot produce anything without access to the means of production, they are forced to sell their labour to the owner in return for a wage. The owner, however, does not pay workers the full value of their labor, only what they need to subsist. The difference ("surplus") between the value of their labour and the subsistence wages they receive is retained by the owner and is the source of the owner's profits. Thus, the owner is able to exploit workers by appropriating from them the surplus they produce, using as leverage the ownership of the means of production. As a result, those who own the means of production gradually become wealthier, and workers become relatively poorer. Capitalism promotes injustice and undermines communal relationships.

### 3.5.1 Alienation

The living conditions that capitalism imposed on the lower working classes contrasted sharply with Marx's view of how human beings should live. Marx held that human beings should be enabled to realise their human nature by freely developing their potential for self-expression and satisfying their real human needs. To develop their capacity for expressing themselves in what they make and in what they do, people should be able to engage in activities that develop their productive potential and should have control over what they produce. To satisfy their needs, they must know what their real human needs are and be able to form satisfying social relationships.

In Marx's view, capitalism and its private property system "alienates"

the lower working classes by not allowing them to develop their productive potential, nor to satisfy their real human needs, nor to form satisfying human relationships. According to Marx, capitalist economies alienate workers in four ways. First, in capitalist societies the products that workers produce by their labour are taken away by the capitalist employer and used for purposes that are antagonistic to the workers' own interests. As Marx wrote, capitalism "replaces human labour with machines, but it casts some of the workers back into a barbarous kind of work and turns others into machines.

Second, capitalism forces people into work that they find dissatisfying and unfulfilling and that is controlled by someone else. The worker, Marx notes, "does not fulfill himself in his work, but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than wellbeing, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased, its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like a plague.

Third, capitalism alienates people from themselves by instilling in them false views of what their real human needs and desires are. Marx describes this alienation as "the renunciation of life and of human needs." And fourth, capitalist societies alienate human beings from each other by separating them into antagonistic and unequal social classes that break down community and caring relationships. According to Marx, capitalism divides humanity into a "proletariat" labouring class and a "bourgeois" class of owners and employers: "Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Capitalist ownership and unregulated markets, then, necessarily produce inequalities of wealth and power: a "bourgeois" class of owners who own the means of production and accumulate ever greater amounts of capital, and a "proletariat" class of workers who must sell their labor to subsist and are alienated from what they produce, from their own work, from their own human needs, and from the fellow human beings with whom they should constitute a caring community. Although private property and free markets may secure the "freedom" of the wealthy owner class, they do so by creating an alienated laboring class in which caring relationships break down. Such alienation is unjust and in conflict with the demands of caring.

### **3.5.2 The Real Purpose of Government**

The actual function that governments have historically served, according to Marx, is that of protecting the interests of the ruling economic class. It may be a popular belief that government exists to protect freedom and equality and that it rules by consent (as Locke insisted), but in fact such beliefs are ideological myths that hide the reality of the control the wealthy class exercises over the political process. To back up his claim, Marx offered a breathtakingly comprehensive analysis of society, which we can only sketch here.

According to Marx, every society can be analysed in terms of its two main components: its economic substructure and its social superstructure. The economic substructure of a society consists of the materials and social controls that society uses to produce its economic goods. Marx refers to the materials (land, labour, natural resources, machinery, energy, technology) used in production as the forces of production. Societies during the middle Ages, for example, were based on agricultural economies in which the forces of production were primitive farming methods, manual labour, and hand tools. Modern societies are based on an industrial economy that uses assembly, line manufacturing techniques, electricity, and factory machinery.

Marx called the social controls used in producing goods (i.e., the social controls by which society organises and controls its workers) the relations of production. There are, Marx suggests, two main types of relations of production: (a) control based on ownership of the materials used to produce goods, and (b) control based on authority to command. In modern industrial society, capitalist owners control their factory labourers because (a) the capitalists own the machinery and (b) labourers must work if they are to survive, and (b) labourers must enter a wage contract by which they give the owner (or manager) the legal authority to command.

According to Marx, a society's relations of production define the main classes that exist in that society. In medieval society, for example, the relations of production created the ruling class of lords and the exploited serf class, whereas in industrial society, the relations of production created the capitalist class of owners (whom Marx called the bourgeoisie) and the exploited working class of wage earners (whom Marx called the proletariat).

Marx also claims that the kinds of production relations a society adopts depends on the kinds of forces of production that society has. That is, the methods a society uses to produce goods determine the way that society organizes its workers. For example, the fact that medieval society had to depend on manual farming methods to survive forced it to



adopt a social system in which a small class of lords organised and directed the large class of serfs who provided the manual labor society needed on its farms. Similarly, the fact that modern society depends on mass production methods has forced us to adopt a social system in which a small class of owners accumulates the capital needed to build large factories and in which a large class of workers provides the labour these mechanised factory assembly lines require. In short, a society's production forces determine its relations of production, and these relations of production then determine its social classes.

So much for the economic substructure. What is the "social superstructure" of a society and how is it determined? A society's superstructure consists of its government and its popular ideologies. Marx claims that the ruling class created by the economic substructure inevitably controls this superstructure. That is, the members of the ruling class will control the government and use it to protect their position and property, and they will popularise ideologies that justify their position of privilege.

In modern societies, Marx suggests, the class of owners is instrumental in the selection of government officials and the government then enforces the private property system on which the wealth of this class depends. Moreover, the ownership class inculcates the ideologies of free enterprise and of respect for private property, both of which support their privileged positions. Modern government, then, is not created by consent, as Locke had claimed, but by a kind of economic determination.

According to Marx, a society's government and its ideologies are designed to protect the interests of its ruling economic classes. These classes, in turn, are created by the society's underlying relations of production, and these relations of production in their turn are determined by the underlying forces of production. In fact, Marx claimed, all major historical changes are ultimately produced by changes in society's forces of production.

Economic or "material" forces determine the course of history because they determine the functions of government. As new material forces of production are found or invented (such as the steam engine or assembly line), the old forces are pushed out of the way (such as water power and hand crafts), and society reorganises itself around the newly fashioned economic methods of production. New legal structures and social classes are created (such as the corporation and the managerial class), and the old legal structures and social classes are demolished (such as the medieval manor and its aristocracy). Great ideological battles took place for people's minds during these periods of transformation, but the

new ideas always triumph: History always follows the lead of the most advanced forces of production. This Marxist view of history as determined by changes in the economic methods by which humanity produces the material on which it must live is now generally referred to as historical materialism.

### 3.5.3 Immiseration of Workers

Marx also claims that so long as production in modern economies is not planned but is left to depend on private ownership and unrestrained free markets, the result could only be a series of related disasters that would harm the working class.

First, modern capitalist systems will exhibit an increasing concentration of industrial power in a relatively few hands. As self-interested private owners struggle to increase the assets they control, little businesses will gradually be taken over by larger firms that will keep expanding in size.

Second, capitalist societies will experience repeated cycles of economic downturns or crises. Because workers are organised into mass assembly lines, the firm of each owner can produce large amounts of surplus. Because owners are self-interested and competitive, they each try to produce as much as they can in their firms without coordinating their production with that of other owners. As a result, firms periodically produce an oversupply of goods. These will flood the market, and a depression or recession will result as the economy slows down to absorb the surplus.

Third, Marx argues, the position of the worker in capitalist societies will gradually worsen. This gradual decline will result from the self-interested desire of capitalist owners to increase their assets at the expense of their workers. This self-interest will lead owners to replace workers with machines, thereby creating a rising level of unemployment, which society will be unable to curb. Self-interest will also keep owners from increasing their workers' wages in proportion to the increase in productivity that mechanisation makes possible. The combined effects of increased concentration, cyclic crises, rising unemployment, and declining relative compensation are what Marx refers to as the immiseration of the worker. The solution to all these problems, according to Marx, is collective ownership of society's productive assets and the use of central planning to replace unregulated markets.

The most telling criticism of Marx is that the immiseration of workers that he predicted did not in fact occur. Workers in capitalist countries are much better off now than their fathers were a century ago. Nonetheless,

contemporary Marxists point out that many workers today find their work dehumanising, meaningless, and lacking in personal satisfaction. Unemployment, recessions, and other “crises” continue to plague our economy. Advertisements attempt to instill in us desires for things that we do not really need. Inequality persists. In fact, on an international scale, as capitalist free trade has expanded through globalisation, the gulf between the haves and the have-nots around the world appears to have grown greater.

### 3.5.4 The Replies

Proponents of the free market have traditionally answered the Marxist criticisms that free markets generate injustices by arguing that the criticisms wrongly assume that justice means either equality or distribution according to need. This assumption is un-provable, they claim. There are too many difficulties in the way of establishing acceptable principles of justice. Should distributive justice be determined in terms of effort, ability, and need? These questions cannot be answered in any objective way, they claim, so any attempt to replace free markets with some distributive principle will, in the final analysis, be an imposition of someone's subjective preferences on the other members of society. This, of course, will violate the (negative) right every individual has to be free of the coercion of others.

Other defenders of free markets argue that justice can be given a clear meaning but one that supports free markets. Justice really means distribution according to contribution. When markets are free and functioning competitively, some have argued, they will pay each worker the value of the worker's contribution because each person's wage will be determined by what the person adds to the output of the economy. Consequently, they argue, justice requires free markets. A third kind of reply that free market proponents have made to the criticism that markets generate unjust inequalities is that, although inequalities may be endemic to private ownership and free markets, the benefits that private ownership and free markets make possible are more important. The free market enables resources to be allocated efficiently without coercion, and this is a greater benefit than equality.

Free market proponents also have replied to the criticism that free market structures break down communities. Free markets, they have argued, are based on the idea that the preferences of those in government should not determine the relationships of citizens. Government may not, for example, favour one kind of religious community or church relationships over another, nor may it favour one community's values or forms of relationships over those of others. In societies characterised by

such freedom, people are able to join together in associations in which they can pursue whatever values-religious or nonreligious-they choose. In such free associations supported by the right to freedom of association-true community and communal relationships can flourish. The freedom that underlies free markets, in short, provides the opportunity to freely form plural communities. Such communities are not possible in societies, such as the former Soviet Union, in which government decide which associations are allowed and which are prohibited. Thus, the persuasiveness of the argument that unregulated markets should be supported because they are efficient and protect the right to liberty and property depends, in the end, on the importance attributed to several ethical factors.

How important are the rights to liberty and to property as compared with a just distribution of income and wealth? How important are the negative rights of liberty and property as compared with the positive rights of needy workers and of those who own no property? How important is efficiency as compared with the claims of justice? How important are the goods of community and of caring as compared with the rights of individuals?

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Explain the justification of free trade and utility according to David Ricardo.
2. What do you understand by the “utility of survival of the fittest”?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The debate for and against free markets, free trade, and private property still rages on. In fact, the debate has been spurred on by recent world events, particularly the collapse of several communist regimes, such as the former Soviet Union, and the emergence of strong competitors in several Asian nations, such as China, Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan. Some people have claimed that the collapse of communist regimes around the world has shown that capitalism, with its emphasis on free markets, is the clear winner.

Other observers, however, have held that the emergence of strong economies in nations that emphasise government intervention and collectivist property rights, such as Japan and Singapore, shows that free markets alone are not the key to prosperity. It is inevitable, perhaps, that the controversy has led many economists to advocate retention of market systems and private ownership but modification of their workings through government regulation so as to rid them of their most obvious defects. The resulting amalgam of government regulations,

partially free markets, and limited property rights is appropriately referred to as the mixed economy.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Basically, a mixed economy retains a market and private property system but relies heavily on government policies to remedy their deficiencies. Government transfers (of private income) are used to get rid of the worst aspects of inequality by drawing money from the wealthy in the form of income taxes and distributing it to the disadvantaged in the form of welfare. Minimum wage laws, safety laws, union laws, and other forms of labour legislation are used to protect workers from exploitation. Monopolies are regulated, nationalised, or outlawed. Government monetary and fiscal policies attempt to ensure full employment. Government regulatory agencies police firms to ensure they do not engage in socially harmful behaviour.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Explain the justification of free market according to the proponents of free market economy.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

Manuel G. Velasquez: Business Ethics Concepts and Cases

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## **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Ethics in the Marketplace
  - 3.2 Perfect Competition
    - 3.2.1 Equilibrium in Perfectly Competitive Markets
    - 3.2.2 Ethics and Perfectly Competitive Markets
  - 3.3 Monopoly Competition
    - 3.3.1 Monopoly Competition: Justice, Utility, and Rights
  - 3.4 Oligopolistic Competition
    - 3.4.1 Explicit Agreements
      - 3.4.1.1 Price Fixing
      - 3.4.1.2 Manipulation of Supply
      - 3.4.1.3 Exclusive Dealing Arrangements
      - 3.4.1.4 Tying Arrangements
      - 3.4.1.5 Retail Price Maintenance Agreements
      - 3.4.1.6 Price Discrimination
    - 3.4.2 Tacit Agreements
    - 3.4.3 Bribery
  - 3.5 Oligopolies and Public Policy
    - 3.5.1 The Do-Nothing View
    - 3.5.2 The Antitrust View
    - 3.5.3 The Regulation View
  - 3.5 Social and Ethical Issues in Marketing Communications
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Before studying the ethics of anti competitive practices, it is essential that we have before us a clear understanding of the meaning of market competition. Of course, we all have an intuitive understanding of competition: It is a rivalry between two or more parties trying to obtain something that only one of them can possess. Competition exists in political elections, in football games, on the battlefield, and in courses in which grades are distributed on the curve. Market competition, however, involves more than mere rivalry between two or more firms. To get a clearer idea of the nature of market competition, we will examine three models describing three degrees of competition in a market: perfect competition, pure monopoly, and oligopoly. We will also examine the ethical issues raised by each type of competition.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

When you complete this unit, you should be able to:

- identify what conditions must be in place for a perfect competitive market to exist
- define the term, Monopoly Market and explain why such markets are ethically questionable
- analyse when oligopoly companies act like a monopoly
- explain what can be done about monopolies and oligopolies.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Ethics in the Marketplace**

This unit is all about the various types of competitions that exist in the market place and their related ethical issues. Such competitions are perfect, monopoly and oligopolistic competition.

### **3.2 The Perfect Competition**

A market is any forum in which people come together for the purpose of exchanging ownership of goods or money. Markets can be small and very temporary (two friends trading clothes can constitute a tiny transient market) or quite large and relatively permanent (the oil market spans several continents and has been operating for decades).

A perfectly competitive free market is one in which no buyer or seller has the power to significantly affect the prices at which goods are being exchanged. Perfectly competitive free markets are characterised by the following seven features:

- There are numerous buyers and sellers, none of whom has a substantial share of the market.
- All buyers and sellers can freely and immediately enter or leave the market.
- Every buyer and seller has full and perfect knowledge of what every other buyer and seller is doing, including knowledge of the prices, quantities, and quality of all goods being bought and sold.
- The goods being sold in the market are so similar to each other that no one cares from whom each buys or sells.
- The costs and benefits of producing or using the goods being exchanged are borne entirely by those buying or selling the goods and not by any other external parties.

- All buyers and sellers are utility maximisers: Each tries to get as much as possible for as little as possible.
- No external parties (such as the government) regulate the price, quantity or quality of any of the goods being bought and sold in the market.

The first two features are the basic characteristics of a "competitive" market because they ensure that buyers and sellers are roughly equal in power and none can force the others to accept its terms. The seventh feature is what makes a market qualify as a "free" market: It is one that is free of any externally imposed regulations on price, quantity, or quality. (So-called free markets, however, are not necessarily free of all constraints, as we see later.) Note that the term free enterprise is sometimes used to refer to perfectly competitive free markets.

In addition to these seven characteristics, free competitive markets also need an enforceable private property system (otherwise, buyers and sellers would not have any ownership rights to exchange), an underlying system of contracts (which allows buyers and sellers to forge agreements that transfer ownership), and an underlying system of production (that generates goods or services whose ownership can be exchanged).

In a perfectly competitive free market, the price buyers are willing to pay for goods rises when fewer goods are available, and these rising prices induce sellers to provide greater quantities of goods. Thus, as more goods are made available, prices tend to fall, and these falling prices lead sellers to decrease the quantities of goods they produce. These fluctuations produce a striking outcome: In a perfectly competitive market, prices and quantities always move toward what is called the equilibrium point. The equilibrium point is the point at which the amount of goods buyers want to buy exactly equals the amount of goods sellers want to sell and at which the highest price buyers are willing to pay exactly equals the lowest price sellers are willing to take. At the equilibrium point, every seller finds a willing buyer and every buyer finds a willing seller.

Moreover, this surprising result of perfectly competitive free markets has an even more astonishing outcome: It satisfies three of the moral criteria—justice, utility, and rights. That is, perfectly competitive free markets achieve a certain kind of justice, they satisfy a certain version of utilitarianism, and they respect certain kinds of moral rights.

Why do perfectly competitive markets achieve these three surprising moral outcomes? The well-known supply and demand curves can be used to explain the phenomenon. Our explanation proceeds in two



stages. First, we see why perfectly competitive free markets always move toward the equilibrium point. Then we see why markets that move toward equilibrium in this way achieve these three moral outcomes.

### 3.2.1 Equilibrium in Perfectly Competitive Markets

A demand curve is a line on a graph indicating the most that consumers (or buyers) would be willing to pay for a unit of some product when they buy different quantities of those products. As we mentioned, the fewer the units of a certain product consumers buy, the more they are willing to pay for those units, so the demand curve slopes down to the right.

Notice that the demand curve slopes downward to the right, indicating that consumers are willing to pay less for each unit of a good as they buy more of those units; the value of a potato falls for consumers as they buy up more potatoes. Why is this? This phenomenon is explained by a principle we assume human nature always follows—the so-called principle of diminishing marginal utility. This principle states that each additional item a person consumes is less satisfying than each of the earlier items the person consumed.

Now let us look at the other side of the market: the supply side. A supply curve is a line on a graph indicating the prices producers must charge to cover the average costs of supplying a given amount of a commodity. Beyond a certain point (which we explain shortly), the more units producers make, the higher the average costs of making each unit, so the curve slopes upward to the right.



**Figure 1: Equilibrium in the perfectly competitive market**

At first sight, it may seem odd that producers or sellers must charge higher prices when they are producing large volumes than when producing smaller quantities. We are accustomed to thinking that it costs

less to produce goods in large quantities than in small quantities. However, the increasing costs of production are explained by a principle that we call the principle of increasing marginal costs.

This principle states that, after a certain point, each additional item the seller produces costs more to produce than earlier items. Why? Because of an unfortunate feature of our physical world: Its productive resources are limited. A producer will use the best and most productive resources to make the first few goods and at this point costs will indeed decline as production expands. A potato grower farming in a valley, for example, will begin by planting the level fertile acres in the floor of the valley where the more acreage planted the more the costs per unit decline. But as the farm continues to expand, the farmer eventually runs out of these highly productive resources and must turn to using less productive land.

As the acreage on the floor of the valley is used up, the farmer is forced to start planting the sloping and less fertile land at the edges of the valley, which may be rocky and may require more expensive irrigation. If production continues to increase, the farmer will eventually have to start planting the land on the mountainsides and costs will rise even higher. Eventually, the farmer reaches a situation where the more that is produced the more it costs to produce each unit because the farmer is forced to use increasingly unproductive materials.

The predicament of the potato farmer illustrates the principle of increasing marginal costs: After a certain point, added production always entails increasing costs per unit. That is the situation illustrated by the supply curve. The supply curve rises upward to the right because it pictures the point at which sellers must begin to charge more per unit to cover the costs of supplying additional goods.

Sellers and buyers, of course, trade in the same markets, so the respective supply and demand curves can be superimposed on the same graph. Typically when this is done, the supply and demand curves will meet and cross at some point. The point at which they meet is the point at which the price buyers are willing to pay for a certain amount of goods exactly matches the price sellers must take to cover the costs of producing that same amount (i.e., the “equilibrium price”). This point of intersection, as indicated in Figure 1 where the point E at which the supply and demand curve meet, is the so-called point of equilibrium or equilibrium price. It is at N2 on the graph.

We mentioned that in a perfectly competitive free market, prices, the amounts supplied, and the amounts demanded all tend to move toward the point of equilibrium. Why does this happen? Notice in Figure 1 that if the prices of potatoes rise above the point of equilibrium, say to N4

per basket, producers will supply more goods (500 million tons) than at the equilibrium price level (300 million tons). But at that high price, consumers will purchase fewer goods (only 100 million tons) than at the equilibrium price. The result will be a surplus of unsold goods ( $500 - 100 = 400$  million tons of unsold potatoes). To get rid of their unsold surplus, sellers will be forced to lower their prices and decrease production. Eventually, equilibrium prices and amounts will be reached.

In contrast, if the price drops below the point of equilibrium in Figure 1, say to N1 per basket, then producers will start losing money and so will supply less than consumers want at that price. The result will be an excessive demand and shortages will appear. The shortages will lead buyers to bid up the price. Subsequently, prices will rise and the rising prices will attract more producers into the market, thereby raising supplies. Eventually, again, equilibrium will reassert itself.

### 3.2.2 Ethics and Perfect Competitive Markets

As we have seen, perfectly competitive free markets incorporate forces that inevitably drive buyers and sellers toward the so-called utility of buyers and sellers by leading them to allocate, use, and distribute point of equilibrium. In doing so, they achieve three major moral values:

- They lead buyers and sellers to exchange their goods in a way that is just (in a certain sense of just);
- They maximise their goods with perfect efficiency; and
- They bring about these achievements in a way that respects buyers' and sellers' right of free consent. As we examine each of these moral achievements, it is important to keep in mind that they are characteristics only of the perfectly competitive free market—that is, of markets that have the seven features we listed. Markets that fail to have one or the other of these features do not necessarily achieve these three moral values.

To understand why perfectly competitive free markets lead buyers and sellers to make exchanges that are just, we begin by recalling the capitalist meaning of justice described in Unit 5. According to the capitalist criterion of justice, benefits and burdens are distributed justly when individuals receive in return at least the value of the contribution they made to an enterprise: Fairness is getting paid fully in return for what one contributes. It is this form of justice (and only this form) that is achieved in perfectly competitive free markets.

Perfectly competitive free markets embody capitalist justice because such markets necessarily converge on the equilibrium point, and the equilibrium point is the one (and only) point at which buyers and sellers on average receive the value of what they contribute. Why is this true?

Consider the matter, first, from the seller's point of view. The supply curve indicates the price producers must receive to cover what it costs them to produce given quantities of a good. Consequently, if prices (and quantities) fall below the seller's supply curve, consumers are unfairly shortchanging the seller because they are paying less than the seller contributed to produce those goods in those quantities.

If prices rise above the seller's supply curve, the average seller is unfairly overcharging consumers because they are being charged more than what the seller knows those goods are worth in terms of what it costs to produce them. Thus, from the standpoint of the seller's contribution, the price is fair (i.e., the price equals the costs of the seller's contribution) only if it falls somewhere on the seller's supply curve.

Next, consider the matter from the standpoint of the average buyer. The demand curve indicates the highest price consumers are willing to pay for given quantities of goods. So if the prices (and quantities) of goods were to rise above the consumer's demand curve, the average consumer would be contributing more for those goods than what the goods (in those quantities) are worth. If prices (and quantities) fall below the consumer's demand curve, the average consumer unfairly contributes less to sellers than the value (to the consumer) of the goods being received. Thus, from the standpoint of the value the average consumer places on different quantities of goods, the contribution is fair (i.e., the price the consumer pays is equal to what the goods are worth) only if it falls somewhere on the consumer's demand curve.

Obviously, there is only a single point at which the price and quantity of a commodity lies both on the buyer's demand curve (and is thus fair from the standpoint of the value the average buyer places on the goods) and on the seller's supply curve (and is thus fair from the standpoint of what it costs the average seller to bring those goods to market): the equilibrium point. Thus, the equilibrium point is the one and only point at which prices on average are just both from the buyer's and seller's points of view. When prices or quantities deviate from the equilibrium point, either the average buyer or the average seller is unjustly being shortchanged: One or the other has to contribute more than what being is received.

The perfectly competitive market thus continually, almost magically, reestablishes capitalist justice for its participants by continually leading them to buy and sell goods at the one quantity and the one price at which each receives the value of what is contributed, whether this value is calculated from the average buyer's or the average seller's point of view.

In addition to establishing a form of justice, competitive markets also maximise the utility of buyers and sellers by leading them to allocate, use, and distribute their goods with perfect efficiency. To understand this aspect of perfectly competitive markets, we must consider what happens not in a single isolated market, but in an economy that consists of a system of many markets. A market system is perfectly efficient when all goods in all markets are allocated, used, and distributed in a way that produces the highest level of satisfaction possible from these goods. A system of perfectly competitive markets achieves such efficiency in three main ways.

First, a perfectly competitive market system motivates firms to invest resources in those industries where consumer demand is high and to move resources away from industries where consumer demand is low. Resources will be attracted into markets where high consumer demand creates shortages that raise prices above equilibrium, and they will flee markets where low consumer demand leads to surpluses that lower prices below equilibrium. The perfectly competitive market system allocates resources efficiently in accordance with consumer demands and needs; the consumer is “sovereign” over the market.

Second, perfectly competitive markets encourage firms to minimise the amount of resources consumed in producing a commodity and use the most efficient technology available. Firms are motivated to use resources sparingly because they want to lower their costs and thereby increase their profit margin. Moreover, to not lose buyers to other firms, each firm will reduce its profits to the lowest levels consistent with the survival of the firm. The perfectly competitive market encourages an efficient use of the seller's resources as well.

Third, perfectly competitive markets distribute commodities among buyers in such a way that all buyers receive the most satisfying bundle of commodities they can purchase, given the commodities available to them and the money they can spend on these commodities. When faced by a system of perfectly competitive markets, each buyer will buy up those proportions of each commodity that correspond with the buyer's desire for the commodity when weighed against the buyer's desires for other commodities. When buyers have completed their buying, they will know that they cannot improve on their purchases by trading their goods with other consumers because all consumers can buy the same goods at the same prices. Thus, perfectly competitive markets enable consumers to attain a level of satisfaction on which they cannot improve given the constraints of their budgets and the range of available goods. An efficient distribution of commodities is thereby achieved.

Finally, perfectly competitive markets establish capitalist justice and maximise utility in a way that respects buyers' and sellers' negative rights.

First, in a perfectly competitive market, buyers and sellers are free (by definition) to enter or leave the market as they choose. That is, individuals are neither forced into nor prevented from engaging in a certain business, provided they have the expertise and the financial resources required. Perfectly competitive markets thus embody the negative right of freedom of opportunity.

Second, in the perfectly competitive free market, all exchanges are fully voluntary. That is, participants are not forced to buy or sell anything other than what they freely and knowingly consent to buy or sell. In a competitive free market, all participants have full and complete knowledge of what they are buying or selling, and no external agency (such as the government) forces them to buy or sell goods they do not want at prices they do not choose in quantities they do not desire. Moreover, buyers and sellers in a perfectly competitive free market are not forced to pay for goods that others enjoy. In a perfectly competitive free market, by definition, the costs and benefits of producing or using goods are borne entirely by those buying or selling the goods and not by any other external parties. Free competitive markets thus embody the negative right of freedom of consent.

Third, no single seller or buyer will so dominate the perfectly competitive free market that others are forced to accept the terms or go without. In a perfectly competitive market, industrial power is decentralised among numerous firms so that prices and quantities are not dependent on the whim of one or a few businesses. In short, perfectly competitive free markets embody the negative right of freedom from coercion.

Thus, perfectly competitive free markets are perfectly moral in three important respects:

- Each continuously establishes a capitalist form of justice;
- Together they maximise utility in the form of market efficiency; and
- Each respects certain important negative rights of buyers and sellers.

### 3.3 Monopoly Competition

What happens when a free market (i.e., one without government intervention) ceases to be perfectly competitive? We begin to answer this question in this section by examining the opposite extreme of a

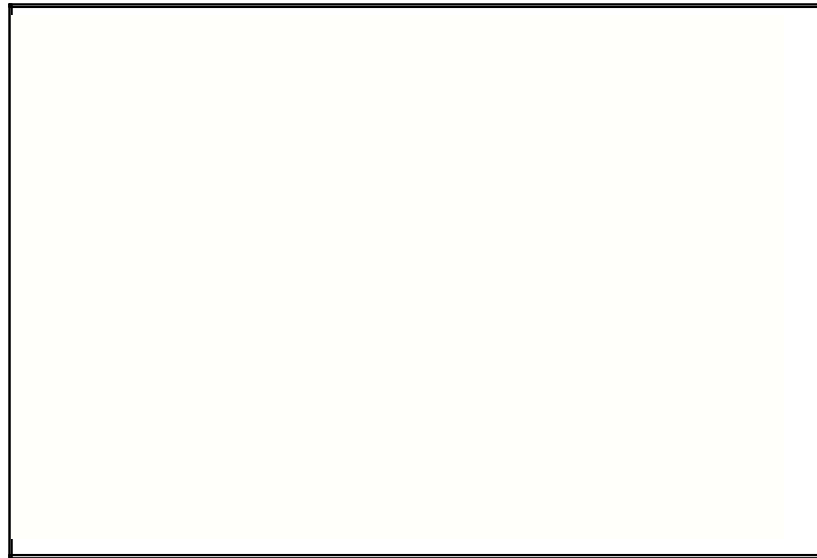
perfectly competitive market: the free (unregulated) monopoly market. We then examine some less extreme varieties of non-competition.

We noted earlier that a perfectly competitive market is characterised by seven conditions. In a monopoly, two of these conditions are not present. First, instead of “numerous sellers, none of whom has a substantial share of the market,” the monopoly market has only one seller, and that single seller has a substantial (100 percent) share of the market. Second, instead of being a market that other sellers “can freely and immediately enter or leave,” the monopoly market is one that other sellers cannot enter. Instead, there are “barriers to entry” such as patent laws, which give only one seller the right to produce a commodity, or high entry costs, which make it too expensive for a new seller to start a business in that industry.

Monopolies can also be created through mergers. At the end of the 19th Century, for example, the leading oil refineries merged into a “holding company” (then called Standard Oil, now named Exxon), which acquired monopoly control over oil refining. The monopoly was broken into 34 separate companies when the Supreme Court charged the company with monopolisation in 1911. A policy of forced mergers during the closing decades of the 19th century enabled the American Tobacco Company to absorb all the major cigarette manufacturing companies in the United States so that by the turn of the century, the combine controlled the American cigarette market. In 1911, the company was ordered to break up into several smaller firms.

Monopoly markets, then, are those in which a single firm is the only seller in the market and which new sellers are barred from entering. A seller in a monopoly market, therefore, can control the prices of the available goods. Figure 2 illustrates the situation in a monopoly market: The monopoly firm is able to fix its output at a quantity that is less than equilibrium and at which demand is so high that it allows the firm to reap an excess monopoly profit by charging prices that are far above the supply curve and above the equilibrium price. A monopoly seller, for example, can set prices above their equilibrium level—at, say,  $N_3$ . By limiting supply to only those amounts buyers will purchase at the monopolist's high prices (300 units), the monopoly firm can ensure that it sells all its products and reaps substantial profits from its business. The monopoly firm will, of course, calculate the price-amount ratios that will secure the highest total profits (i.e., the profit-per-unit multiplied by the number of units), and it can then fix its prices and production at those levels. At the turn of the century, for example, the American Tobacco Company, which earlier had managed to acquire a monopoly in the sale of cigarettes, was making profits equal to about 56 percent of its sales.

Conclusively, pure monopoly is a situation whereby one firm provides a certain product or service in a particular country or area e.g., Power Holding Company of Nigeria. Note that an unregulated monopolist might charge a high price, do little or no advertising, and offer minimal service. If partial substitutes are available and there is some danger of competition, the monopolist might invest in more service and technology. A regulated monopolist is required to charge a lower price and provide more service as a matter of public interest.



**Figure 2: Illustrating monopolistic competition**

### 3.3.1 Monopoly Competition: Justice, Utility, and Rights

How well does a free monopoly market succeed in achieving the moral values that characterise perfectly competitive free markets? Not well. Unregulated monopoly markets can fall short of the three values of capitalist justice, economic efficiency, and respect for negative rights that perfect competition achieves.

The most obvious failure of monopoly markets lies in the high prices they enable the monopolist to charge and the high profits they enable the monopolist to reap—a failure that violates capitalist justice. Why do the high prices and profits of the monopolist violate capitalist justice? Capitalist justice says that what each person receives should equal the value of the contribution made. As we saw, the equilibrium point is the one (and only) point at which buyers and sellers each receive in return the exact value of what each contributes to the other, whether this value is determined from the average buyer's or the average seller's point of view. In a monopoly market, however, prices for goods are set above the equilibrium level, and quantities are set at less than the equilibrium



amount. As a result, the seller charges the buyer far more than the goods are worth (from the average seller's point of view) because charges are far more than the costs of making those goods. Thus, the high prices the seller forces the buyer to pay are unjust, and these unjustly high prices are the source of the seller's excess profits.

A monopoly market also results in a decline in the efficiency with which it allocates and distributes goods. First, the monopoly market allows resources to be used in ways that will produce shortages of those things buyers want and cause them to be sold at higher prices than necessary. The high profits in a monopoly market indicate a shortage of goods. However, because other firms are blocked from entering the market, their resources cannot be used to make up the shortages indicated by the high profits. This means that the resources of these other firms are deflected into other non-monopoly markets that already have an adequate supply of goods. Shortages, therefore, continue to exist.

Moreover, the monopoly market allows the monopoly firm to set its prices well above costs instead of forcing the firm to lower its prices to cost levels. The result is an inflated price for the consumer—a price that the consumer is forced to accept because the absence of other sellers has limited the choices. These excess profits absorbed by the monopolist are resources that are not needed to supply the amounts of goods the consumer is getting.

Second, monopoly markets do not encourage suppliers to use resources in ways that will minimise the resources consumed to produce a certain amount of a commodity. A monopoly firm is not encouraged to reduce its costs and is therefore not motivated to find less costly methods of production. Because profits are high anyway, there is little incentive for it to develop new technology that might reduce costs or that might give it a competitive edge over other firms, for there are no other competing firms.

Third, a monopoly market allows the seller to introduce price differentials that block consumers from putting together the most satisfying bundle of commodities they can purchase given the commodities available and the money they can spend. Because everyone must buy from the monopoly firm, the firm can set its prices so that some buyers are forced to pay a higher price for the same goods than others. For example, the monopoly firm can adjust its prices so that those consumers who have a greater desire for its goods must pay a higher price for the same goods than those consumers who have a lesser desire for them. As a consequence, those who have the greater desire now buy less and those who have the lesser desire now buy more than either would buy at an equal price. The result is that some consumers are

no longer able to purchase the most satisfying bundle of goods they could buy.

Monopoly markets also embody restrictions on the negative rights that perfectly free markets respect. First, monopoly markets by definition are markets that other sellers are not free to enter. Second, monopoly markets enable the monopoly firm to force on its buyers goods that they may not want in quantities they may not desire. The monopoly firm, for example, can force consumers to purchase product X only if they also purchase product Y from the firm. Third, monopoly markets are dominated by a single seller whose decisions determine the prices and quantities of a commodity offered for sale. The monopoly firm's power over the market is absolute.

A monopoly market, then, is one that deviates from the ideals of capitalist justice, economic utility, and negative rights. Instead of continually establishing a just equilibrium, the monopoly market imposes unjustly high prices on the buyer and generates unjustly high profits for the seller. Instead of maximising efficiency, monopoly markets provide incentives for waste, misallocation of resources, and profit-gouging. Instead of respecting negative rights of freedom, monopoly markets create an inequality of power that allows the monopoly firm to dictate terms to the consumer. The producer then replaces the consumer as "sovereign" of the market.

### 3.4 Oligopolistic Competition

Few industries are monopolies. Most major industrial markets are not dominated by a single firm, but more usually by as many as four firms or more. Such markets lie somewhere on the spectrum between the two extremes of the perfectly competitive market with innumerable sellers and the pure monopoly market with only one seller. Market structures of this "impure" type are referred to collectively as imperfectly competitive markets, of which the most important kind is the oligopoly.

In an oligopoly, two of the seven conditions that characterise the purely competitive market are once again not present. First, instead of many sellers, there are only a few significant sellers. That is, most of the market is shared by a relatively small number of large firms that together can exercise some influence on prices. The share each firm holds may be somewhere between 25 percent and 90 percent of the market, and the firms controlling this share may range from 2 to 50 depending on the industry. Second, other sellers are not able to freely enter the market. Although more than one seller is present in an oligopoly market, new sellers find it difficult to break into the industry. This may be because of the prohibitively high costs of starting a

business in that industry, it may be as a result of long-term contracts that have tied all the buyers to the firms already in the industry, or it may be because of enduring loyalties created by brand-name advertising.

Oligopoly markets, which are dominated by a few (e.g., three to eight) large firms, are said to be highly concentrated. Examples of such oligopoly markets are not hard to find because they include many of the largest manufacturing industries.

Although oligopolies can form in a variety of ways, the most common causes of an oligopolistic market structure are horizontal mergers. A horizontal merger is simply the unification of two or more companies that were formerly competing in the same line of business. If enough companies in a competitive industry merge, the industry can become an oligopoly composed of a few very large firms.

During the 1950s, for example the 108 competing banks in Philadelphia began to merge until, by 1963, the number of bank firms had been reduced to a smaller number. The Philadelphia National Bank emerged as the second-largest bank (as a result of nine mergers), and the Girard Bank emerged as the third-largest (as a result of six mergers). In the early 1960s, the Philadelphia National Bank and the Girard Bank proposed to merge into a single firm. If the merger had been approved (the government stopped it), the two banks together would have controlled well over one-third of the banking activities of metropolitan Philadelphia.

How do oligopoly industries affect the market? Because a highly concentrated oligopoly has a relatively small number of firms, it is relatively easy for the managers of these firms to join forces and act as a unit. By explicitly or tacitly agreeing to set their prices at the same levels and to restrict their output accordingly, the oligopolists can function much like a single giant firm. This uniting of forces, together with the barriers to entry that are characteristic of oligopoly industries, can result in the same high prices and low supply levels characteristic of monopoly markets. As a consequence, oligopoly markets, like monopolies, can fail to exhibit just profit levels, can generate a decline in social utility, and can fail to respect basic economic freedoms. It has been shown, for example, that generally the more highly concentrated an oligopoly industry is, the higher the profits it is able to extract. Studies also have estimated that the overall decline in consumer utility as a result of inefficient allocation of resources by highly concentrated oligopoly industries ranges between 0.5 percent and 4.0 percent of the nation's gross national product.

### **3.4.1 Explicit Agreements**

Prices in an oligopoly can be set at profitable levels through explicit agreements that restrain competition. The managers of the few firms operating in an oligopoly can meet and jointly agree to fix prices at a level much higher than what each would be forced to take in a perfectly competitive market. The greater the degree of market concentration in an industry, the fewer the managers that have to be brought into such a price-fixing agreement, and the easier it is for them to come to an agreement. Such agreements, of course, reproduce the effects of a monopoly and consequently curtail market justice, market efficiency, and market rights as defined in the first section of this unit.

If the justice, freedom, and social utility that competitive markets are important values for society, then it is crucial that the managers of oligopoly firms refrain from engaging in practices that restrict competition. Only if markets function competitively will they exhibit the justice, freedom, and utility that justify their existence. These beneficial aspects of a free market are reaped by society only as long as monopoly firms refrain from engaging in collusive arrangements that do away with competition and reproduce the effects of monopoly markets. In particular, the following sorts of market practices have been identified as unethical.

### **3.4.1.1 Price-Fixing**

When firms operate in an oligopoly market, it is easy enough for their managers to meet secretly and agree to set their prices at artificially high levels. This is straightforward price-fixing. In 2002, for example, the managers of six companies, Hoffmann-La Roche Inc., BASF Corp., Aventis Animal Nutrition S.A, Takeda Chemical Industries Ltd., Eisai Co. Ltd, and Daiichi Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd.-that then controlled over 80 per cent of the world's vitamin market, paid \$225 million to settle a suit alleging they had fixed worldwide prices for vitamins. New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said, "The companies met in secret, in locations around the world, to carry out illegal agreements that imposed a hidden 'vitamin tax' on shoppers that drove up weekly grocery bills and cost consumers and businesses hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade".

### **3.4.1.2 Manipulation of Supply**

Firms in an oligopoly industry might agree to limit their production so that prices rise to levels higher than those that would result from free competition. When hardwood manufacturers met periodically in trade

associations early in this century, they would often agree on output policies that would secure high profits. The American Column and Lumber Company were eventually prosecuted under the Sherman Antitrust law to force it to desist from this practice. Such “manipulation of supply” would also result in market shortages.

### **3.4.1.3 Exclusive Dealing Arrangements**

A firm institutes an exclusive dealing arrangement when it sells to a retailer on condition that the retailer will not purchase any products from other companies and/or will not sell outside of a certain geographical area. During the 1940s, for instance, American Can Company would lease its can-closing machines (at very low prices) only to those customers who agreed not to purchase any cans from Continental Can Company, its major competitor.

Exclusive dealing arrangements tend to remove competition between retailers who are all selling the same company's products, and to this extent they conflict with the values of free competition. However, an exclusive dealing arrangement can also motivate those retailers who are selling the products of a single company to become more aggressive in selling the products of that company. In this way, an exclusive dealing arrangement can actually increase competition between retailers selling the products of different companies. For this reason, exclusive dealing arrangements must be examined carefully to determine whether their overall effect is to dampen or promote competition. In Nigeria, such exclusive arrangement is prominent in the beverage and soft drinks industry, where retailers are provided with kiosks of either that of Coca-cola (market leader) or those of Pepsi, the major competitor and these retailers are expected to sell only the company's products.

### **3.4.1.4 Tying Arrangements**

A firm enters into a tying arrangement when it sells a buyer a certain good only on condition that the buyer agrees to purchase certain other goods from the firm. Chicken Delight, for example, franchises home delivery and pick-up food stores whose major product is chicken cooked in a special mix. In 1970, Chicken Delight would sell a franchise license to a person only if the person also agreed to purchase a certain number of cookers, fryers, and other supplies. The firm was subsequently forced to stop the practice through legal action.

### **3.4.1.5 Retail Price Maintenance Agreements**

If a manufacturer sells to retailers only on condition that they agree to charge the same set retail prices for its goods, it is engaging in “retail price maintenance.” Eastman Kodak Company, for example, until

stopped by the Federal Trade Commission, used to establish the prices at which retailers had to sell its Kodachrome and Magazine Cine-Kodak Film and would not sell to retailers unless they agreed to abide by these prices. A manufacturer may publish suggested retail prices and ~~may~~ refuse to sell to retailers who regularly sell their goods at lower prices. It is illegal, however, for retailers to enter an agreement to abide by the manufacturer's prices and illegal for manufacturers to ~~forbid~~ retailers to enter such an agreement. Retail price maintenance dampens competition between retailers and removes from the manufacturer the competitive pressure to lower prices and cut costs.

### **3.4.1.6 Price Discrimination**

To charge different prices to different buyers for identical goods or services is to engage in price discrimination. Price discrimination was used by Continental Pie Company during the 1960s in an attempt to undersell Utah Pie Company, which had managed to take away much of the Salt Lake City business of Continental Baking Company. For several years, Continental sold its pies to Salt Lake City customers at prices substantially lower than those it charged for the same goods sold to customers in other areas. The Supreme Court found such pricing practices "predatory." Price differences are legitimate only when based on volume differences or other differences related to the true costs of manufacturing, packaging, marketing transporting, or servicing goods.

I think we are particularly vulnerable where we have a salesman with two kids, plenty of financial demands, and a concern over the security of his job. There is a certain amount of looseness to a new set of rules. He may accept questionable practices feeling that he may just not know the system. There are no specific procedures for him to follow other than what other salesmen tell him. At the same time, he is in an industry where the acceptance for his product and the level of profitability are clearly dropping. Finally, we add to his pressures by letting him know who will take his job from him if he doesn't get good price and volume levels. I guess this will bring a lot of soul-searching out of an individual.

### **3.4.2 Tacit Agreements**

Although most of the forms of explicit market agreements enumerated are illegal, the more common types of price-setting in oligopolies are accomplished through some unspoken form of cooperation against which it is difficult to legislate. How does this take place? The managers of the major firms in an oligopoly can learn by hard experience that competition is not in their personal financial interests. Price-cutting competition, they find, will only lead to minimal profits. The firms in an oligopoly, therefore, may each come to the conclusion that cooperation

is in the best interests of all. Each firm may then reach the independent conclusion that they will all benefit if, when one major firm raises its prices, all other firms set their prices at the same high levels.

Through this process of “price-setting,” all the major firms will retain their share of the market and they will all gain by the higher price. Since the 1930s, for example, the major tobacco companies have charged identical list prices for cigarettes. When one company decides it has a reason to raise or lower its cigarette prices, the other companies will always follow suit within a short period of time. The officials of these companies, however, have made no explicit agreement to act in concert. without ever having talked the matter over among themselves, each realises that all will benefit so long as they continue to act in a unified fashion. In 1945, incidentally, the U.S. Supreme Court found the dominant cigarette companies guilty of tacit collusion, but the companies reverted to identical pricing after the case was settled. In Nigeria, anytime Coca-Cola increases its unit price per bottle, Pepsi will also increase theirs.

To co-ordinate their prices, some oligopoly industries will recognise one firm as the industry's “price leader.” Each firm will tacitly agree to set its prices at the levels announced by the price leader, knowing that all other firms will also follow its price leadership. Because each oligopolist knows it will not have to compete with another firm's lower prices, it is not forced to reduce its margin of profit to the levels to which open competition would reduce them. There need be no overt collusion involved in this form of price-setting, only an unspoken understanding that all firms will follow the price leadership of the dominant firm and will not engage in the price-lowering tactics of competition.

Whether prices in an oligopoly market are set by explicit agreements or implicit understandings, it is clear that social utility declines to the extent that prices are artificially raised above the levels that would be set by a perfectly competitive market. Consumers must pay the unjust prices of the oligopolists, resources are no longer efficiently allocated and used, and the freedom of both consumers and potential competitors diminishes.

### **3.4.3 Bribery**

When used to secure the sale of a product, political bribery can also introduce diseconomies into the operations of markets. This is a form of

market defect that received a great deal of public attention during the late 1970s, when it was discovered that a sizable group of companies had attempted to land contracts with overseas governments by paying bribes to various government officials. Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, for example, paid several million dollars to government officials in Saudi Arabia, Japan, Italy, and Holland to influence aircraft sales in those countries.

When bribes are used to secure the purchase of a commodity, the net effect is a decline in market competition. The product of the briber no longer competes equally with the product of other sellers on the basis of its price or merits. Instead, the bribe serves as a barrier to prevent other sellers from entering the briber's government market. Because of the bribe, the government involved buys only from the firm who supplies the bribe and the briber becomes in effect a monopoly seller.

If a briber succeeds in preventing other sellers from receiving ~~equal~~ <sup>entry</sup> into a government market, it becomes possible for the briber to engage in the inefficiencies characteristic of monopolies. The bribing firm can impose higher prices, engage in waste, and neglect quality and cost controls because the monopoly secured by the bribe will secure a sizeable profit without the need to make the price or quality of its products competitive with those of other sellers.

Bribes used to secure the sale of products by shutting out other sellers differ, of course, from bribes used for other purposes. An official may insist on being paid to perform legal duties on behalf of a petitioner, as when, for example, a customs officer asks for a "tip" to expedite the processing of an import permit. A government official may offer to lower a costly tariff in return for an under-the-table payment. The previous analysis would not apply to bribes of this sort, which are being used for a purpose other than to erect market barriers.

In determining the ethical nature of payments used for purposes other than to shut out other competitors from a market, the following considerations are relevant.

- Is the offer of a payment initiated by the payer (the one who pays the money), or does the payee (the one who receives the money) demand the payment by threatening injury to the payer's interests? In the latter case, the payment is not a bribe but a form of extortion. If the threatened injury is large enough, the payer may not be ~~responsible~~ <sup>morally</sup> responsible for the act, or the moral responsibility may at least be diminished.



- Is the payment made to induce the payee to act in a manner that violates the official sworn duty to act in the best interests of the public? Or is the payment made to induce the payee to perform what is already an official duty? If the payee is being induced to violate official duty, then the payer is cooperating in an immoral act because the payee has entered an agreement to fulfill these duties.
- Are the nature and purpose of the payment considered ethically unobjectionable in the local culture? If a form of payment is a locally accepted public custom and there is a proportionately serious reason for making the payment (it is not intended to erect a market barrier nor to induce an official to violate public duties), then it would appear to be ethically permissible on utilitarian grounds. (It might, however, constitute a legal violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977.).

### 3.5 Oligopolies and Public Policy

Oligopolies are not a modern phenomenon. Toward the end of the 19th century, companies that had previously competed with each other began uniting into gigantic "trusts" that would then monopolise their markets, raising prices for consumers, cutting prices for suppliers such as farmers, and terrorising their remaining competitors with predatory pricing. Trusts were created in the sugar, salt, whiskey, tobacco, and cottonseed oil industries. Earlier, competing railroads had been consolidated into huge enterprises by the so-called Robber Barons- Andrew Carnegie, Jay Gould, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller. These gigantic trusts elicited the public's fear, suspicion, and hatred. Newspaper editorials and politicians railed against the unscrupulous ruthlessness with which the trusts ground down their competitors, monopolised crucial industries, and bullied the farmers who supplied them with raw materials. Intellectuals argued that the concentrated power of the trusts was dangerous and would be abused to achieve political dominance.

The rise of the trusts coincided with the Progressive Movement, a political reform movement directed against big business abuses of power with the avowed aim of "busting" up the trusts. Responding to this movement, particularly the lobbying of struggling small farmers, Congress in 1887 passed the Interstate Commerce Act to regulate the large railroad companies. Then in 1890 Congress passed what was to become the most important single piece of antitrust legislation, the Sherman Antitrust Act. The two key sections of the act read.

- Section 1: Every contract, combination..., or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations, is hereby declared illegal.
- Section 2: Every person who shall monopolize, or attempt to monopolize, or combine or conspire with any other person or persons to monopolize any part of the trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations, shall be deemed guilty of a felony.

In the two decades following passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act, little was done to enforce it. But in 1908, the Federal Government filed suit against the Tobacco Trust, claiming that its ruthless tactics against competitors had violated the Sherman Act. In a May 1911 decision, the Supreme Court agreed and ordered the Tobacco Trust to be broken up into 15 separate companies. Encouraged by the victory, the “trust busters” in government went on to successfully prosecute Standard Oil, DuPont, and other large trusts.

Since that time, Section 1 of the Sherman Antitrust Act has been interpreted as prohibiting competing companies from making agreements to fix prices, to divide up territories or customers, or to restrict the quantity of goods they bring to market. Section 2 has been interpreted as prohibiting a company that already holds a monopoly from using its monopoly power to maintain its monopoly or to extend its monopoly into other markets. Thus, the Sherman Antitrust Act does not prohibit a company from acquiring a monopoly through legitimate business dealings (like having a better product, a shrewd strategy, or sheer luck). However, if a company that acquires a monopoly then tries to use its monopoly power to acquire a new monopoly, or to maintain its current monopoly, it is “guilty of a felony.” In 1911, the Supreme Court ruled that although an agreement between competitors could be “reasonable” and legal if it “promotes competition,” nevertheless certain agreements (including agreements to fix prices or quantities) were so inherently (“per se”) anti competitive that they were always illegal. The antitrust laws were expanded in 1914 by the Clayton Act, which prohibits price discrimination, exclusive dealing contracts, tying arrangements, and mergers between companies “where the effect may be to substantially lessen competition.” This latter section of the Clayton Act gives the Federal Government the power to prohibit two companies from merging if the government believes that their merger will “substantially lessen competition.”

But although the United States has a long history of antitrust legislation, there is still a great deal of debate concerning what government should do about the power of oligopolies or monopolies. Some have argued that

the economic power held by oligopoly corporations is actually quite small and insufficient to affect society, whereas others have claimed that it dominates modern economies, and still others have argued that several social factors inhibit the use of this power. These differences have given rise to three main views on oligopoly power.

### **3.5.1 The Do-Nothing View**

Some economists hold that nothing should be done about the economic power held by oligopoly corporations because the power of large oligopoly corporations is actually not as large as it may first appear. Several arguments have been given to support this claim. First, it is argued that although competition within industries has declined, it has been replaced by competition between industries with substitutable products. The steel industry, for example, is now in competition with the aluminum and cement industries. Consequently, although there may be a high degree of market concentration in a single industry like steel, a high level of competition is still maintained by its relation to other competing industries.

Second, as John Kenneth Galbraith once argued, the economic power of any large corporation may be balanced and restrained by the “countervailing power” of other large corporate groups in society. Government and unions, for example, both restrain the power of big businesses. Although a business corporation may have a large share of an industrial market, it is faced by buyers that are equally large and equally powerful. A large steel company, for example, must sell to equally large automobile companies. This balance of power between large corporate groups, Galbraith claims, effectively reduces the economic power any single corporate giant can exert.

Other economists have very different reasons for urging that we should not worry about the economic power of large oligopoly corporations. The so-called Chicago School of antitrust has argued that markets are economically efficient even when there are as few as three significant rivals in a market. Although government should prohibit outright price-fixing and mergers that create a single-company monopoly, it should not become involved in trying to break down oligopolies that are providing consumers with products they freely choose to buy and that are, therefore, efficiently using economic resources to improve consumer welfare.

Finally, yet others have argued that big is good particularly in light of the globalisation of business that has taken place during recent decades. If American companies are to compete with large foreign companies, they must be able to achieve the same economies of scale that are

achievable by large foreign companies. Economies of scale are reductions in the cost of producing goods that result when large quantities of goods are produced using the same fixed resources, such as the same machines, marketing programs, group of managers, or employees.

If a company can make and sell larger quantities of products, it can spread these “fixed costs” over more units, thus reducing the cost of each unit and allowing it to sell its goods at lower prices. Thus, by expanding, companies are able to reduce their prices and thus compete more effectively against similarly large foreign companies. Although research suggests that in most industries expansion beyond a point will not lower costs but will instead increase costs, nevertheless many people continue to urge the big as good argument.

### 3.4.2 The Antitrust View

The oldest view about the economic power oligopolies and monopolies possess is the view that lay behind the actions of the “trust busters” at the end of the 19th century. Like the trust busters, many contemporary economists and antitrust lawyers are suspicious of the economic power exerted by oligopoly corporations. They argue that prices and profits in concentrated industries are higher than they should be and that monopolists and oligopolists use unfair tactics against their competitors and suppliers. The solution, they argue, is to reinstate competitive perspectives by forcing the large companies to divest themselves of their holdings, thereby breaking them up into smaller firms

Clearly, the antitrust view is based on a number of assumptions. J. Fred Weston has summarised the basic propositions on which this traditional view is based:

- If an industry is not atomistic with many small competitors, there is likely to be administrative discretion over prices.
- Concentration results in recognised interdependence among companies with no price competition in concentrated industries.
- Concentration is due mostly to mergers because the most efficient scale of operation is not more than 3 to 5 per cent of the industry. A high degree of concentration is unnecessary.
- There is a positive correlation between concentration and profitability that gives evidence of monopoly power in concentrated industries-the ability to elevate prices and the persistence of high profits. Entry does not take place to eliminate excessive profits.
- Concentration is aggravated by product differentiation and advertising. Advertising is correlated with higher profits.

- There is oligopolistic coordination by signaling through press releases or other means.

### **3.5.3 The Regulation View**

A third group of observers holds that oligopoly corporations should not be broken up because their large size has beneficial consequences that would be lost if they were forced to decentralise. In particular, they argue, mass production and mass distribution of goods can be carried out only by using the highly centralised accumulation of assets and personnel that the large corporation makes possible. Moreover, the concentration of assets allows large firms to take advantage of the economies made possible by large-scale production in large plants. These savings are passed on to consumers in the form of cheaper and more plentiful products.

Although firms should not be broken up, it does not follow that they should not be regulated. According to this third view, concentration gives large firms an economic power that allows them to fix prices and engage in other forms of behaviour that are not in the public interest. To ensure that consumers are not harmed by large firms, regulatory agencies and legislation should be set up to restrain and control the activities of large corporations.

Some observers, in fact, advocate that where large firms cannot be effectively controlled by the usual forms of regulation, then regulation should take the form of nationalisation. That is, the government should take over the operation of firms in those industries where only public ownership can ensure that firms operate in the public interest.

Other advocates of regulation, however, argue that nationalisation is not in the public interest. Public ownership of firms, they claim, inevitably leads to the creation of unresponsive and inefficient bureaucracies. Moreover, publicly owned enterprises are not subject to competitive market pressures, and this results in higher prices and higher costs.

Which of these three views is correct: the do-nothing view, the antitrust view, or the regulation view? Readers will have to decide this issue for themselves because at the moment there does not appear to be sufficient evidence to answer this question unequivocally.

## **3.6 Social and Ethics Issues in Marketing Communications**

According to Belch and Belch (2004) while many laws and regulations determine what advertisers can and cannot do, not every issue is

covered by a rule. Marketers must often make decisions regarding responsible actions on the basis of ethical considerations rather than on what is legal or within industry guidelines. Berkswitz et al, (1997) *define ethics as moral principles and values that govern the actions and decisions of an individual and group.*

A particular action may be within the law and still not be ethical. A good example of this involves target marketing. No laws restrict tobacco companies from targeting advertising and promotion for new brands to African Americans. However, given the high levels of lung cancer and smoking related illnesses among the black population, many people will consider this an unethical business practice. In Nigeria, the tobacco industries present a dilemma. While government encourages the tobacco industry by providing a conducive farming, production and business environment, it also actively discourages the advertisement of tobacco products.

Ethical issues must be considered in integrated marketing communications decisions. And advertising and promotion are areas where a lapse in ethical standards or judgment can result in actions that are highly visible and often very damaging to a company. The role of advertising in society is controversial and has sometimes resulted in attempts to restrict advertising and other form of promotion to certain group for certain products.

### **Social and Ethical Criticisms of Advertising**

Much of the controversy over advertising stems from the way many companies used it as a selling tool and from its impact on society in terms of tastes, values, and lifestyles. Specific techniques used by advertisers are criticised as deceptive or untruthful, offensive or in bad taste, and exploitative of certain groups, such as children and women.

### **Advertising as Untruthful or Deceptive**

One of the major complaints against advertising is that many advertisements are misleading or untruthful and deceive consumers. A number of studies have shown a general mistrust of advertising among consumers. A study by Banwari Mittal found that consumers felt that less than one quarter of TV commercials are honest and believable.

However, deception can occur more subtly as a result of how consumers perceive the advertisement and its impact on their beliefs. The difficulty of determining just what constitutes deception, along with the fact that advertisers have the right to use puffery and make subjective ~~about~~ their products, tends to complicate issue. But a concern of many

critics is the extent to which advertisers are deliberately untruthful or misleading.

Sometimes advertisers have made overtly false or misleading claims or failed to award prizes promoted in a contest or sweepstakes. The problem of untruthful or fraudulent advertising and promotion exists more at the local level and in specific areas such as mail order marketing, and other forms of direct marketing. Yet there have been many cases where large companies were accused of misleading consumers with their advertisement or promotions.

### **Advertising as Offensive or in Bad Taste**

Another common criticism of advertising, particularly by consumers is that advertisements are offensive, tasteless, irritating, boring, obnoxious, and so on. In a recent study by Shavitt and her colleagues, about half of the respondents reported feeling offended by advertising at least sometimes. A number of their studies have found that consumers feel most advertising insults their intelligence and that many advertisements are in poor taste (Mittal, 1999).

### **Sources of Distaste**

Consumers can be offended or irritated by advertising in a number of ways. Some object when products like contraceptives or personal hygiene products are advertised. Most media did not accept advertisement for condom until the AIDS crisis forced them to affiliate permission to accept condom advertising in 1987. But the first condom advertisement did not appear on network TV until 1991 in USA, when fox broadcast a spot. There are currently no restrictions in Nigeria because of the AIDS crisis.

Another way advertising can offend consumers is by the type of appeal or the manner of presentation it is done. For example, many people object to appeals that exploit consumer anxieties. Fear appeals to advertisement, especially for products such as deodorants, mouthwash, and dandruff shampoos, which are criticised for attempting to create anxiety and using the weapon of fear of social rejection to sell these products. Some advertisements for home computers were also criticised for attempting to make parents think that if their young children couldn't use a computer, they would fail in school.

### **Sexual Appeals**

The advertising appeals that have received the most criticism for being in poor taste are those using sexual appeals and/or nudity. These techniques are often used to win consumers' attention and may not even

be appropriate to the product being advertised. Even if the sexual appeal relates to the product, people may be offended by it. Many people object to nudity in advertising and sexually suggestive advertisement. A common criticism of sexual appeals is that it can demean women (or men) by depicting them as sex objects. Advertisement for cosmetics and lingerie are among the most criticised for their portrayal of women as sex objects.

### **Shock Advertising**

With the increasing clutter in the advertising environment, advertisers continue to use sexual appeal and other techniques that offend many people but catch the attention of consumers and may even ~~publicity~~ <sup>publicity</sup> for their companies. In recent years there has been an increase in what is often referred to as shock advertising, in which marketers use nudity, sexual suggestiveness, or other startling images to get consumers' attention.

### **Advertising and Children**

One of the most controversial topics advertisers must deal with is the issue of advertising and children. TV is a vehicle through which advertisers can reach children easily. Children between the ages of 2 and 11 watch an average of 21.5 hours of TV a week and may see between 22,000 commercials a year. Studies show that television is an important source of information for children about products. Concern has also been expressed about marketers' use of other promotional vehicles and techniques such as radio advertisements, point -of- purchase displays, premiums in packages, and the use of commercial characters as the basis of TV shows.

Critics argue that children, particularly young ones, are especially vulnerable to advertising because they lack the experience and knowledge to understand and evaluate critically the purpose of persuasive advertising appeals. Research has shown that pre-school children cannot differentiate between commercials and programmes, do not perceive the selling intent of commercials, and cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy. Research has also shown that for children to cultivate a more than skeptical attitude toward advertising, they must understand how advertising works in order to use their cognitive defences against it effectively. Because of children's limited ability to interpret the selling intent of a message or identify a commercial, critics charge that advertising to them is inherently unfair and deceptive and should be banned or severely edited.



At the other extreme are those who argue that advertising is part of life and that children must learn to deal with it in the marketplace. They say existing restrictions are adequate for controlling advertising target for children.

### **Social and Cultural Consequences**

Concern is often expressed over the impact of advertising in a society, particularly on values and lifestyles. While a number of factors influence cultural values, lifestyles, and behaviour of a society, the overwhelming amount of advertising and its prevalence in the mass media lead many critics to argue that advertising plays a major role in influencing and transmitting social values. Advertising is criticised for encouraging materialism, manipulating consumers to buy things they do not need, perpetuating stereotypes, and controlling the media. The following insight explains the social implication of continuous marketing of tobacco to consumers. The question is: is it ethical to continue marketing tobacco even as available evidence indicates more and more smokers die and more are liable to die?

### **Advertising Encourages Materialism**

Many critics claim advertising has an adverse effect on consumers' values by encouraging materialism, a preoccupation with material things rather than intellectual or spiritual concerns. Many critics maintain that advertising seeks to create needs rather than merely showing how a product or service fulfills them; surrounds consumers with images of the good life and suggests that the acquisition of material possessions leads to contentment and happiness and adds to the joy of living; suggests material possessions are symbols of status, success, and accomplishment and/or will lead to greater social acceptance, popularity, sex appeal, and so on.

The criticism of advertising assumes that materialism is undesirable and is sought at the expense of other goals. But many believe materialism is an acceptable part of the protestant ethic, which stresses hard work, individual effort and initiative and views the accumulation of material possessions as evidence of success.

### **Advertising Makes People Buy Things They Don't Need**

A common criticism of advertising is that it manipulates consumers into buying things they do not need. Many critics say advertising should just

provide information useful in making purchase decisions and should not persuade. They view informative advertising (which report price, performance, and other objective criteria) as desirable and persuasive advertising (which plays on consumers' emotions, anxieties, and psychological needs and desires such as status, self esteem, and attractiveness) as unacceptable. Persuasive advertising is criticised for fostering discontent among consumers and encouraging them to purchase products and services to solve deeper problems. Critics say advertising exploits consumers and persuade them to buy things they don't actually need.

Defenders of advertising offer a number of rebuttals to these criticisms. First, they point out that a substantial amount of advertising is essentially informative in nature. Also, it is difficult to separate desirable informative advertising from undesirable persuasive advertising.

Second, it ignores the fact that consumers have the freedom to make their own choices when confronted by persuasive intents of advertisers. Even at that, advertisers are quick to note that it is extremely difficult to make consumers purchase a product they do not want or for which they do not see a personal benefit. If advertising were as powerful as the critics claim, we would not see products with multimillion-naira advertising budgets failing in the marketplace. The reality is that consumers do have choices and they are not being forced to buy. Consumers ignore advertisements for products and services they do not really need or that fail to interest them.

### **Advertising and Stereotyping**

Advertising is often accused of creating and perpetuating stereotypes through its portrayal of women, ethnic minorities, and other group. The portrayal of women in advertising is an issue that has received a great deal of attention through the years. Advertising has received much criticism for stereotyping women and failing to recognise the change of women in society. Critics have argued that advertising often depicts women as preoccupied with beauty, household duties, and motherhood or shows them as decorative objects or sexually provocative figures.

Research on gender stereotyping in advertising targeted at children has found a pattern of results similar to that reported for adults. Boys are generally shown as being more knowledgeable, active, aggressive, and instrumental than girls. Non-verbal behaviours involving dominance and control are associated more with boys than girls. Advertising directed towards children has also been shown to feature more boys and girls, to position boys in more dominant, active roles, and to use male voice-overs more frequently than female ones.

## **Advertising and the Media**

The fact that advertising plays such an important role in financing the media has led to concern that advertisers may influence or even control the media. It is well-documented that economic censorship occurs, whereby the media avoid certain topics or even present biased news coverage, in acquiescence to advertisers' demands.

## **Arguments Supporting Advertiser Control**

Advertising is the primary source of revenue for nearly all the news and entertainment media all over the world and because advertising pays the bills, newspaper and magazine publishers, as well as TV and radio networks and station executives must keep their advertisers happy. Some critics charge that the media's dependence on advertisers' supports makes them susceptible to various forms of influence, including exerting control over the editorial content of magazines and newspapers; biasing editorial opinions to favour the position of an advertiser; limiting coverage of a controversial story that might reflect negatively on a company; and influencing the programme content of television.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

.Define the following concepts: perfect competition, demand curve, supply curve, equilibrium point, monopoly competition, oligopolistic competition, price-fixing, manipulation of supply, tying arrangements, retail price maintenance, price discrimination, price-setting, price leadership, extortion, countervailing power, do nothing view on oligopoly power, antitrust view on oligopoly power, regulation view on oligopoly power

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

By breaking up large corporations into smaller units, higher levels of competition will emerge in those industries that are currently highly concentrated. The result is a decrease in explicit and tacit collusion, lower prices for consumers, greater innovation, and the increased development of cost-cutting technologies that will benefit us all.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Social benefits generated by free markets cannot be secured unless the managers of firms maintain competitive market relationships among

themselves. The ethical rules prohibiting collusion are meant to ensure that markets are structured competitively. These rules may be voluntarily followed or legally enforced. They are justified insofar as society is justified in pursuing the utilitarian benefits, justice, and rights to negative freedom that free competitive markets can secure.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. From an ethical point of view, big business is always bad business.” Discuss the pros and cons of this statement.
2. What kind of public policy do you think Nigeria should have with respect to business competition? Develop moral arguments to support your answer (i.e., arguments showing that the kinds of policies you favour will advance the public welfare, or secure certain important rights, or ensure certain forms of justice).

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 4 THE ETHICS OF CONSUMER PRODUCTION AND MARKETING**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body

3.1	Markets and Consumer Protection
3.2	The Contract View of the Business Firm' Duties to Consumers
3.2.1	The Duty to Comply
3.2.2	The Duty of Disclosure
3.2.3	The Duty not to Misrepresent
3.2.4	The Duty not to Coerce
3.2.5	Problems with the Contractual Theory
3.3	The Due Care Theory
3.3.1	The Duty to Exercise Due Care
3.3.2	Problems with "Due Care"
3.4	The Social Costs View of the Manufacturer's duties
3.4.1	Problems with the Social Costs View
3.5	Advertising Ethics
3.5.1	Definition of Advertising
3.5.2	Social Effects of Advertising
3.5.3	Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Desires
3.5.4	Advertising and Its Effects on Consumer Beliefs
3.6	Consumer Privacy
3.7	Consumerism
	3.7.1 Public and Other Actions to Protect Consumers in Nigeria
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit examines the many ethical issues raised by product quality and advertising. The first few sections discuss various approaches to consumer issues, and the last sections deal with consumer advertising. We begin with a focus on what is perhaps the most urgent consumer product injuries and the responsibilities of manufacturers.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- identify how far manufacturers must go to make their products safe
- analyse the relationship between a business and its customers

- explain the fact that companies usually know more about their products than their customers and the resultant effect on their duty to protect customers from injury or harm
- describe the responsibilities businesses do have for customer injuries which no one could reasonably have foreseen or prevented
- explain how advertising helps or harms consumers
- identify how companies protect their customers' privacy.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Markets and Consumer Protection

Many people believe that consumers automatically will be protected from injury by the operations of free and competitive markets and that neither governments nor free markets promote an allocation, use, and distribution of goods that are, in a certain sense, just, respectful of rights, and efficiently productive of maximum utility for those who participate in the market. Moreover, in such markets, the consumer is said to be "sovereign." When consumers want and will willingly pay for something, sellers have an incentive to cater for their wishes. If sellers do not provide what consumers want, then sellers will suffer losses. However, when sellers provide what consumers want, they will profit. As the author of a leading textbook on economics wrote, "Consumers direct by their innate or learned tastes, as expressed in their votes, the ultimate uses to which society's resources are channeled".

In the "market" approach to consumer protection, consumer safety is seen as a good that is most efficiently provided through the mechanism of the free market whereby sellers must respond to consumer demands. If consumers want products to be safer, they will indicate this preference in markets by willingly paying more for safer products and showing a preference for manufacturers of safe products while turning down the goods of manufacturers of unsafe products. Producers will have to respond to this demand by building more safety into their products or they risk losing customers to competitors who cater to the preferences of consumers. Thus, the market ensures that producers respond adequately to consumers' desires for safety.

However, if consumers do not place a high value on safety and do not demonstrate neither a willingness to pay more for safety nor a preference for safer products, then it is wrong to push increased levels of safety down their throats through government regulations that force producers to build more safety into their products than consumers demand. Such government interference, as we saw earlier, distorts markets, making them unjust, disrespectful of rights, and inefficient. It is just as wrong for businesspeople to decide on their own that consumers

should have more protection than they are demanding as to force on them costly safety devices that they would not buy on their own. Only consumers can say what value they place on safety, and they should be allowed to register their preferences through their free choices in markets and not be coerced by businesses or governments into paying for safety levels they may not want.

Unfortunately, virtually all consumer choices are based on probability estimates we make concerning the chances that the products we buy will function as we think they will. All the research available shows that we become highly inept, irrational, and inconsistent when we make choices based on probability estimates.

First, as is obvious to any observer, few of us are good at estimating probabilities. We typically underestimate the risks of personal life-threatening activities, such as driving, smoking, or eating fried foods, and of being injured by the products we use, and we overestimate the probabilities of unlikely but memorable events such as tornadoes or attacks by animals at the zoo. Studies have shown that our probability judgments go astray for a number of reasons, including the following:

- Prior probabilities are ignored when new information becomes available, even if the new information is irrelevant.
- Emphasis on “causation” results in the underweighting of evidence that is relevant to probability but is not perceived as “causal.”
- Generalisations are made on the basis of small sample findings.
- Belief is placed in a self-correcting but nonexistent “law of averages.”
- People believe that they exert control over purely chance events.

Second, as a number of researchers have shown, people are irrational and inconsistent when weighing choices based on probability estimates of future costs or payoffs. For example, one set of researchers found that when people are asked to rank probable payoffs, they inconsistently will rank one payoff as being both better and worse than another. Another investigator found that when people were asked which of two probable payoffs they preferred, they would often say that they would pay more for the payoff that they least preferred. Another set of studies found that, in many cases, a majority of persons would prefer one probable payoff to another in one context but reversed their preferences in a different context although the probable payoffs were identical in both contexts.

Finally, as several critics have pointed out, markets often fail to incorporate the most fundamental characteristic of competitive markets: the presence of numerous buyers and sellers. Although buyers or consumers in most markets are numerous, still many, perhaps most, consumer markets are monopolies or oligopolies; that is, they are

dominated by one or a few large sellers. Sellers in monopoly or oligopoly markets are able to extract abnormally high profits from consumers by ensuring that supply is insufficient to meet demand, thereby creating shortages that put upward pressures on prices.

On balance, then, it does not appear that market forces by themselves can deal with all consumer concerns for safety, freedom from risk, and value. Market failures characterised by inadequate consumer information, irrationality in the choices of consumers, and concentrated markets, undercut arguments that try to show that markets alone can provide adequate consumer protection. Instead, consumers must be protected through the legal structures of government and through the voluntary initiatives of responsible businesspeople.

### **3.2 The Contract View of the Business Firm's Duties to Consumers**

According to the contract view of the business firm's duties to its customers, the relationship between a business firm and its customers is essentially a contractual relationship, and the firm's moral duties to the customer are those created by this contractual relationship. When a consumer buys a product, this view holds, the consumer voluntarily enters into a "sales contract" with the business firm. The firm freely and knowingly agrees to give the consumer a product with certain characteristics, and the consumer in turn freely and knowingly agrees to pay a certain sum of money to the firm for the product. By virtue of having voluntarily entered this agreement, the firm then has a duty to provide a product with those characteristics, and the consumer has a correlative right to get a product with those characteristics.

The contract theory of the business firm's duties to its customers rests on the view that a contract is a free agreement that imposes on the parties the basic duty of complying with the terms of the agreement. A person has a duty to do what the person contracts to do because failure to the terms of a contract is a practice that (a) is not universalized, and (b) treats the other person as a means and not as an end. Rawls's theory also provides a justification for the view, but one that is based on the idea that our freedom is expanded by the recognition of contractual rights and duties: An enforced system of social rules that requires people to do what they contract to do will provide them with the assurance that contracts will be kept. Only if they have such assurance will people feel able to trust each other's word and, on that basis, to secure the benefits of the institution of contracts. Traditional moralists have argued that the act of entering into a contract is subject to several secondary moral constraints:



- Both of the parties to the contract must have full knowledge of the nature of the agreement they are entering.
- Neither party to a contract must intentionally misrepresent the facts of the contractual situation to the other party.
- Neither party to a contract must be forced to enter the contract under duress or undue influence.

These secondary constraints can be justified by the same sorts of arguments that Kant and Rawls use to justify the basic duty to perform one's contracts. Kant, for example, easily shows that misrepresentation in the making of a contract cannot be universalised, and Rawls argues that if misrepresentation were not prohibited, fear of deception would make members of a society feel less free to enter contracts. However, these secondary constraints can also be justified on the grounds that a contract cannot exist unless these constraints are fulfilled. A contract is essentially a free agreement struck between two parties. Because an agreement cannot exist unless both parties know what they are agreeing to, contracts require full knowledge and the absence of misrepresentation. Because freedom implies the absence of coercion, contracts must be made without duress or undue influence.

Hence, the contractual theory of business firms' duties to consumers claims that a business has four main moral duties: the basic duty of Complying with the terms of the sales contract and the secondary duties of:

- Disclosing the nature of the product,
- Avoiding misrepresentation, and
- Avoiding the use of duress and undue influence. By acting in accordance with these duties, a business respects the right of consumers to be treated as free and equal persons—that is, in accordance with their right to be treated only as they have freely consented to be treated.
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### 3.2.1 The Duty to Comply

The most basic moral duty that a business firm owes its customers, according to the contract view, is the duty to provide consumers with a product that lives up to those claims that the firm expressly made about the product, which led the customers to enter the contract freely and which formed the customers' understanding concerning what they were agreeing to buy.

Any affirmation of fact or promise made by the seller to the buyer that related to the goods and becomes part of the basis of the bargain creates an express warranty that the goods shall conform to the affirmation or promise.

In addition to the duties that result from the express claim a seller makes about the product, the contract view also holds that the seller has a duty to carry through on any implied claims knowingly made about the product.

Where the seller at the time of contracting has reason to know particular purpose for which the goods are required and that the buyer is relying on the seller's skill or judgment to select or furnish goods, there is . . . an implied warranty that the goods shall be fit for such purpose.

The express or implied claims that a seller might make about the qualities possessed by the product range over a variety of areas and are affected by a number of factors. Frederick Sturdivant classified these areas in terms of four variables: The definition of product quality used here is: the degree to which product performance meets predetermined expectation with respect to

- Reliability,
- Service life,
- Maintainability, and
- Safety.

Risks of bodily harm to users are not unreasonable when consumers understand that risks exist, can appraise their probability and severity, know how to cope with them, and voluntarily accept them to obtain benefits they could not obtain in less risky ways. When there is risks of this character, consumers have reasonable opportunity to protect themselves; and public authorities should hesitate to substitute their value judgments about the desirability of the risk for those of the consumers who choose to incur it. But preventable risk is not reasonable

- When consumers do not know that it exists; or
- When, though aware of it, consumers are unable to estimate its frequency and severity; or
- When consumers do not know how to cope with it, and hence are likely to incur harm unnecessarily; or
- When risk is unnecessary in that it could be reduced or eliminated at a cost in money or in the performance of the product that consumers would willingly incur if they knew the facts and were given the choice.

Thus, the seller of a product (according to the contractual theory) has a moral duty to provide a product whose use involves no greater risks than those the seller expressly communicates to the buyer or those the seller implicitly communicates by the implicit claims made when marketing the product for a use whose normal risk level is well known.

### **3.2.2 The Duty of Disclosure**

An agreement cannot bind unless both parties to the agreement know what they are doing and freely choose to do it. This implies that the seller who intends to enter a contract with a customer has a duty to disclose exactly what the customer is buying and what the terms of the sale are. At a minimum, this means the seller has a duty to inform the buyer of any characteristics of the product that could affect the customer's decision to purchase the product. Some have argued that sellers should also disclose a product's components or ingredients, its performance characteristics, costs of operation, product ratings, and any other applicable standards.

Behind the claim that entry into a sales contract requires full disclosure is the idea that an agreement is free only to the extent that one knows what alternatives are available: Freedom depends on knowledge. The more the buyer knows about the various products available on the market and the more comparisons the buyer is able to make among them, the more one can say that the buyer's agreement is voluntary.

### **3.2.3 The Duty Not to Misrepresent**

Misrepresentation, even more than the failure to disclose information, renders freedom of choice impossible. That is, misrepresentation is coercive: The person who is intentionally misled acts as the deceiver wants the person to act and not as the person would freely have chosen to act if the person had known the truth. Because free choice is an essential ingredient of a binding contract, intentionally misrepresenting the nature of a commodity is wrong.

Sellers misrepresent a commodity when they represent it in a way deliberately intended to deceive the buyer into thinking something about the product that the seller knows is false. The deception may be created by a verbal lie, as when a used model is described as new, or it may be created by a gesture, as when an unmarked used model is displayed together with several new models. That is, the deliberate intent to misrepresent by false implication is as wrong as the explicit lie.

### **3.2.4 The Duty Not to Coerce**

People often act irrationally when under the influence of fear or emotional stress. When a seller takes advantage of a buyer's fear or emotional stress to extract consent to an agreement that the buyer would not make if the buyer were thinking rationally, the seller is using duress or undue influence to coerce. An unscrupulous funeral director, for example, may skillfully induce guilt-ridden and grief-stricken survivors to invest in funeral services they cannot afford. Because entry into a contract requires freely given consent, the seller has a duty to refrain from exploiting emotional states that may induce buyers to act irrationally against their own best interests. For similar reasons, the seller also has the duty not to take advantage of gullibility, immaturity, ignorance, or any other factors that reduce or eliminate the buyer's ability to make free rational choices.

### 3.2.5 Problems with the Contractual Theory

The main objections to the contract theory focus on the unreality of the assumptions on which the theory is based. First, critics argue, the theory unrealistically assumes that manufacturers make direct agreements with consumers. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Normally, a series of wholesalers and retailers stands between the manufacturer and the ultimate consumer. The manufacturer sells the product to the wholesaler, who sells it to the retailer, who finally sells it to the consumer. The manufacturer never enters into any direct contract with the consumer. How then can one say that manufacturers have contractual duties to the consumer?

Advocates of the contract view of manufacturers' duties have tried to respond to this criticism by arguing that manufacturers enter into indirect agreements with consumers. Manufacturers promote their products through their own advertising campaigns. These advertisements supply the promises that lead people to purchase products from retailers, who merely function as "conduits" for the manufacturer's product. Consequently, through these advertisements, the manufacturer forges an indirect contractual relationship not only with the immediate retailers who purchase the manufacturer's product but also with the ultimate consumers of the product. The most famous application of this doctrine of broadened indirect contractual relationships is to be found in a 1960 court opinion, *Henningsen v. Bloomfield Motors*. Mrs. Henningsen was driving a new Plymouth when suddenly gave off a loud cracking noise. The steering wheel spun out of her hands and the car lurched to the right and crashed into a brick wall. Mrs. Henningsen sued the manufacturer, Chrysler Corporation. The court opinion read.

- Under modern conditions the ordinary layman, on responding to the importuning of colourful advertising, has neither the opportunity nor the capacity to inspect or to determine the fitness of an automobile for use; he must rely on the manufacturer who has control of its construction, and to some degree on the dealer who, to the limited extent called for by the manufacturer's instructions, inspects and services it before delivery. In such a marketing milieu his remedies and those of persons who properly claim through him should not depend "upon the intricacies of the law of sales. The obligation of the manufacturer should not be based alone on privity of contract [that is, on a direct contractual relationship]. It should rest, as was once said, upon" "the demands of social justice" Mazetti v. *Ar7110us &- Co. (1913)*. "If privity of contract is required," then, under the circumstances of modern merchandising, "privity of contract exists in the consciousness and understanding of all right-thinking persons. . . ." Accordingly, we hold that under modern marketing conditions, when a manufacturer puts a new automobile in the stream of trade and promotes its purchase by the public, an implied warranty that it is reasonably suitable for use as such accompanies it into the hands of the ultimate purchaser. Absence of agency between the manufacturer and the dealer who makes the ultimate sale is immaterial.

Thus, Chrysler Corporation was found liable for Mrs. Henningsen's injuries on the grounds that its advertising had created a contractual relationship with Mrs. Henningsen and this contract created an "implied warranty" about the car, which Chrysler had a duty to fulfill.

In fact, sellers and buyers do not exhibit the equality that these doctrines assume. A consumer who must purchase hundreds of different kinds of commodities cannot hope to be as knowledgeable as a manufacturer who specialises in producing a single product. Consumers have neither the expertise nor the time to acquire and process the information on which they must base their purchase decisions. Consequently, consumers must usually rely on the judgment of the seller in making their purchase decisions and are particularly vulnerable to being harmed by the seller. Equality, far from being the rule, as the contract theory assumes, is usually the exception.

### 3.3 The Due Care Theory

The "due care" theory of the manufacturer's duties to consumers is based on the idea that consumers and sellers do not meet as equals and that the consumer's interests are particularly vulnerable to being harmed by the manufacturer who has a knowledge and an expertise that the consumer lacks. Because manufacturers are in a more advantaged

position, they have a duty to take special care to ensure that consumers' interests are not harmed by the products that they offer them. The doctrine of caveat emptor is here replaced with a weak version of the doctrine of caveat vendor: Let the seller take care.

Today as never before the product in the hands of the consumer is often a most sophisticated and even mysterious article. Not only does it usually emerge as a sealed unit with an alluring exterior rather than as a visible assembly of component parts, but its functional validity and usefulness often depend on the application of electronic, chemical, or hydraulic principles far beyond the ken of the average consumer.

Advances in the technologies of materials, of processes, of operational means have put it almost entirely out of the reach of the consumer to comprehend why or how the article operates, and thus even farther out of his reach to detect when there may be a defect or a danger present in its design or manufacture. In today's world it is often only the manufacturer who can fairly be said to know and to understand when an article is suitably designed and safely made for its intended purpose. Once floated on the market, many articles in a very real practical sense defy detection of defect, except possibly in the hands of an expert after labourious, and perhaps even destructive, disassembly.

By way of direct illustration, how many automobile purchasers or users have any idea how a power steering mechanism operates or is intended to operate, with its "circulating work and piston assembly and its cross shaft splined to the Pitman arm"? We are accordingly persuaded that from the standpoint of justice as regards the operating aspect of today's products, responsibility should be laid on the manufacturer, subject to the limitations we set forth.

The "due care" view holds, then, that because consumers must depend on the greater expertise of the manufacturer, the manufacturer not only has a duty to deliver a product that lives up to the express and implied claims about it but also has a duty to exercise due care to prevent others from being injured by the product even if the manufacturer explicitly disclaims such responsibility and the buyer agrees to the disclaimer. The manufacturer violates this duty and is negligent when there is a failure to exercise the care that a reasonable person could have foreseen would be necessary to prevent others from being harmed by use of the product. Due care must enter into the design of the product, the choice of reliable materials for constructing the product, the manufacturing processes involved in putting the product together, the quality control used to test and monitor production, and the warnings, labels, and instructions attached to the product.

In each of these areas, according to the due care view, the manufacturer, in virtue of a greater expertise and knowledge, has a positive duty to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that when the product leaves the plant it is as safe as possible, and the customer has a right to such assurance. Failure to take such steps is a breach of the moral duty to exercise due care and a violation of the injured person's right to expect such care—a right that rests on the consumer's need to rely on the manufacturer's expertise.

Although the demands of an ethic of care are aligned with the due care principle that manufacturers have a duty to protect vulnerable consumers, the principle has also been defended from other moral perspectives. Rule utilitarians have defended the principle on the grounds that if the rule is accepted, everyone's welfare will be advanced. The principle has been argued for on the basis of Kant's theory because it seems to follow from the categorical imperative that people should be treated as ends and not merely as means—that is, that they have a positive right to be helped when they cannot help themselves.

Rawls has argued that individuals in the "original position" would agree to the principle because it would provide the basis for a secure social environment.<sup>40</sup> The judgment that individual producers have a duty not to harm or injure vulnerable parties, therefore, is solidly based on several ethical perspectives.

### **3.3.1 The Duty to Exercise Due Care**

According to the due care theory, manufacturers exercise sufficient care only when they take adequate steps to prevent whatever injurious effects they can foresee that the use of their product may have on consumers after having conducted inquiries into the way the product will be used and after having attempted to anticipate any possibly misuses of the product. A manufacturer then is not morally negligent when others are harmed by a product and the harm was not one that the manufacturer could have possibly foreseen or prevented. Nor is a manufacturer morally negligent after having taken all reasonable steps to protect the consumer and ensure that the consumer is informed of any irremovable risks that might still attend the use of the product. For example, a car manufacturer cannot be said to be negligent from a moral point of view when people carelessly misuse the cars the manufacturer produces. A car manufacturer would be morally negligent only if it had allowed unreasonable dangers to remain in the design of the car that consumers cannot be expected to know about or cannot guard against by taking their own precautionary measures.

What specific responsibilities does the duty to exercise due care impose on the producer? In general, the producer's responsibilities would extend to the following three areas: Design, production, and information.

### **3.3.2 The Problems with “Due Care”**

The basic difficulty raised by the “due care” theory is that there is no clear method for determining when one has exercised enough “due care.” That is, there is no hard-and-fast rule for determining how far a firm must go to ensure the safety of its product. Some authors have proposed this general utilitarian rule: The greater the probability of harm and the larger the population that might be harmed, the more the firm is obligated to do.

However, this fails to resolve some important issues. Every product involves at least some small risk of injury. If the manufacturer should try to eliminate even low-level risks, this would require that the manufacturer invest so much in each product that the product would be priced out of the reach of most consumers. Moreover, even attempting to balance higher risks against added costs involves measurement problems; for example, how does one quantify risks to health and life?

A second difficulty raised by the “due care” theory is that it assumes that the manufacturer can discover the risks that attend the use of a product before the consumer buys and uses it. In fact, in a technologically innovative society, new products whose defects cannot emerge until years or decades have passed will continually be introduced into the market. Only years after thousands of people were using and being exposed to asbestos, for example, did a correlation emerge between the incidence of cancer and exposure to asbestos. Although manufacturers may have greater expertise than consumers, their expertise does not make them omniscient. Who, then, is to bear the costs of injuries sustained from products whose defects neither the manufacturer nor the consumer could have uncovered beforehand?

Third, the “due care” view appears to some to be paternalistic. It assumes that the manufacturer should be the one who makes the important decisions for the consumer, at least with respect to the levels of risks that are proper for consumers to bear. One may wonder whether such decisions should not be left up to the free choice of consumers, who can decide for themselves whether they want to pay for additional risk reduction.

### **3.4 The Social Costs View of the Manufacturer’s Duties**



A third theory on the duties of the manufacturer would extend the manufacturer's duties beyond those imposed by contractual relationships and beyond those imposed by the duty to exercise due care in preventing injury or harm. This third theory holds that a manufacturer should pay the costs of any injuries sustained through any defects in the product, even when the manufacturer exercised all due care in the design and manufacture of the product and has taken all reasonable precautions to warn users of every foreseen danger.

According to this third theory, a manufacturer has a duty to assume the risks of even those injuries that arise out of defects in the product that no one could reasonably have foreseen or eliminated. The theory is a strong version of the doctrine of caveat vendor: Let the seller take care.

This third theory, which has formed the basis of the legal doctrine of strict liability, is founded on utilitarian arguments. The utilitarian arguments for this third theory hold that the “external” costs of injuries resulting from unavoidable defects in the design of an artifact constitute part of the costs society must pay for producing and using an artifact. By having the manufacturer bear the external costs that result from these injuries as well as the ordinary internal costs of design and manufacture, all costs are internalised and added on as part of the price of the product. Internalising all costs in this way, according to proponents of this theory, will lead to a more efficient use of society's resources.

First, because the price will reflect all the costs of producing and using the artifact, market forces will ensure that the product is not overproduced and resources are not wasted on it. (Whereas if some costs were not included in the price, then manufacturers would tend to produce more than is needed.) Second, because manufacturers have to pay the costs of injuries, they will be motivated to exercise greater care and thereby reduce the number of accidents. Therefore, manufacturers will strive to cut down the social costs of injuries, and this means a more efficient care for our human resources. To produce the maximum benefits possible from our limited resources, therefore, the social costs of injuries from defective products should be internalised by passing them on to the manufacturer even when the manufacturer has done all that could be done to eliminate such defects. Third, internalising the costs of injury in this way enables the manufacturer to distribute losses among all the users of a product instead of allowing losses to fall on individuals who may not be able to sustain the loss by themselves.

Underlying this third theory on the duties of the manufacturer are the standard utilitarian assumptions about the values of efficiency. The theory assumes that an efficient use of resources is so important for society that social costs should be allocated in whatever way will lead to

a more efficient use and care of our resources. On this basis, the theory argues that a manufacturer should bear the social costs for injuries caused by defects in a product even when no negligence was involved and no contractual relationship existed between the manufacturer and user.

### **3.4.1 Problems with the Social Costs View**

The major criticism of the social costs view of the manufacturer's duties is that it is unfair. It is unfair, the critics charge, because it violates the basic canons of compensatory justice. Compensatory justice implies that a person should be forced to compensate an injured party only if the person could have foreseen and prevented the injury. By forcing manufacturers to pay for injuries they could neither foresee nor prevent, the social costs theory (and the legal theory of "strict liability" that flows from it) treats manufacturers unfairly. Moreover, insofar as the social costs theory encourages passing the costs of injuries on to all consumers (in the form of higher prices), consumers are also being treated unfairly.

A second criticism of the social costs theory attacks the assumption that passing the costs of all injuries on to manufacturers will reduce the number of accidents. On the contrary, critics' claim, by relieving consumers of the responsibility of paying for their own injuries, the social costs theory will encourage carelessness in consumers. An increase in consumer carelessness will lead to an increase in consumer injuries.

A third argument against the social costs theory focuses on the financial burdens the theory imposes on manufacturers and insurance carriers. Critics claim that a growing number of consumers successfully sue manufacturers for compensation for any injuries sustained while using a product even when the manufacturer took all due care to ensure that the product was safe. Not only have the number of "strict liability" suits increased, critics claim, but the amounts awarded to injured consumers have also escalated. Moreover, they continue, the rising costs of the many liability suits that the theory of "strict liability" has created have precipitated a crisis in the insurance industry because insurance companies end up paying the liability suits brought against manufacturers. These high costs have imposed heavy losses on insurance companies and have forced many insurance companies to raise their rates to levels that are so high that many manufacturers can no longer afford insurance. Thus, critics claim, the social costs or "strict liability" theory wreaks havoc with the insurance industry, forces the costs of insurance to climb to unreasonable heights, and forces many valuable firms out of business because they can no longer afford liability

insurance nor can they afford to pay for the many and expensive liability suits they must now face.

Defenders of the social costs view, however, have replied that in reality the costs of consumer liability suits are not large. Studies have shown that the number of liability suits filed in state courts has increased at a fairly low rate. Less than 1 per cent of product-related injuries results in suits. Defenders of the social costs theory also point out that insurance companies and the insurance industry as a whole have remained quite profitable; they also claim that higher insurance costs are due to factors other than an increase in the amount of liability claims.

### **3.5 Advertising Ethics**

Who pays for these advertising expenditures? In the end, advertising costs must be covered by the prices consumers pay for the goods they buy-the consumer pays.

What do consumers get for their advertising payment? According to most consumers, they get very little. Surveys have shown that 66 per cent of consumers feel that advertising does not reduce prices, 65 per cent believe it makes people buy things they should not buy, 54 per cent feel advertisements insult the intelligence, and 63 per cent feel advertisements do not present the truth. However, defenders of the advertising industry see things differently. Advertising, they claim, "is, before all else, communication." Its basic function is to provide consumers with information about the products available to them-a beneficial service.

Is advertising, then, a waste or a benefit? Does it harm consumers or help them?

#### **3.5.1 Definition of Advertising**

Commercial advertising is sometimes defined as a form of "information" and an advertiser as "one who gives information." The implication is that the defining function of advertising is to provide information to consumers. This definition of advertising, however, fails to distinguish advertisements from, say, articles in publications like Consumer Reports, which compare, test, and objectively evaluate the durability, safety, defects, and usefulness of various products. One study found that more than half of all television ads contained no consumer information whatsoever about the advertised product and that only half of all magazine ads contained more than one informational cue.

Advertisements often do not include much objective information for the simple reason that their primary function is not that of providing information. The primary function of commercial advertisements, rather, is to sell a product to prospective buyers, and whatever information they happen to carry is subsidiary to this basic function and usually determined by it.

A more helpful way of characterising commercial advertising is in terms of the buyer-seller relationship: Commercial advertising can be defined as a certain kind of communication between a seller and potential buyers. It is distinguished from other forms of communication by two features. First, it is publicly addressed to a mass audience as distinct from a private message to a specific individual. Because of this public feature, advertising necessarily has widespread social effects.

Second, advertising is intended to induce members of its audience to buy the seller's products. An advertisement can succeed in this intent in two main ways:

- by creating a desire for the seller's product in consumers and
- by creating a belief in consumers that the product is a means of satisfying some desire the buyer already has.

Discussion of the ethical aspects of advertising can be organised around the various features identified in the prior definition: its social effects, its creation of consumer desires, and its effects on consumer beliefs. We begin by discussing the social effects of advertising.

### **3.5.2 Social Effects of Advertising**

Critics of advertising claim that it has several adverse effects on society: It degrades people's tastes, it wastes valuable resources, and it creates monopoly power.

### **3.5.3 Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Desires**

John K. Galbraith and others have long argued that advertising is manipulative: It is the creation of desires in consumers for the sole purpose of absorbing industrial output. Galbraith distinguished two kinds of desires: those that have a "physical" basis, such as desires for food and shelter, and those that are "psychological in origin," such as the individual's desires for goods that "give him a sense of personal achievement, accord him a feeling of equality with his neighbors, divert his mind from thought, serve sexual aspiration, promise social acceptability, enhance his subjective feeling of health, contribute by conventional canons to personal beauty, or are otherwise psychologi-

cally rewarding.” The physically based desires originate in the buyer and are relatively immune to being changed by persuasion. The psychic desires, however, are capable of being managed, controlled, and expanded by advertising.

Because the demand created by physical needs is finite, producers soon produce enough to meet these needs. If production is to expand, therefore, producers must create new demand by manipulating the pliable psychic desires through advertising. Advertising is therefore used to create psychic desires for the sole purpose of "ensuring that people buy what is produced"-that is, to absorb the output of an expanding industrial system.

The effect of this management of demand through advertising is to shift the focus of decision in the purchase of goods from the consumer, where it is beyond control, to the firm, where it is subject to ~~Production~~ **Production**. Production is not molded to serve human desires; rather, human desires are molded to serve the needs of production. If this view of Galbraith's is correct, then advertising violates the individual's right to choose: Advertising manipulates the consumer. The consumer is used merely as a means for advancing the ends and purposes of producers, and this diminishes the consumer's capacity to freely choose.

It is not clear that Galbraith's argument is correct. As we have already seen, the psychological effects of advertising are still unclear. Consequently, it is unclear whether psychic desires can be manipulated by advertising in the wholesale way that Galbraith's argument assumes. Moreover, as F. A. von Hayek and others have pointed out, the “creation” of psychic wants did not originate with modern advertising. New wants have always been "created" by the invention of novel and attractive products (such as the first bow and arrow, the first painting, the first perfume), and such a creation of wants seems harmless enough.

However, although it is unclear whether advertising as a whole has the massive manipulative effects that Galbraith attributes to it, it is clear that some particular advertisements are at least intended to manipulate. They are intended to arouse in consumers a psychological desire for the product without consumers' knowledge and without consumers being able to rationally weigh whether the product is in their own best interests. Advertisements that intentionally rely on “subliminal suggestion,” or that attempt to make consumers associate unreal sexual or social fulfillment with a product, fall into this class, as do advertisements that are aimed at children.

### **3.5.4 Advertising and Its Effects on Consumer Beliefs**

The most common criticism of advertising concerns its effect on the consumer's beliefs. Because advertising is a form of communication, it can be as truthful or deceptive as any other form of communication. Most criticisms of advertising focus on the deceptive aspects of modern advertising.

Deceptive advertising can take several forms. An advertisement can misrepresent the nature of the product by using deceptive mock-ups, using untrue paid testimonials, inserting the word guarantee where nothing is guaranteed, and quoting misleading prices, failing to disclose defects in a product, misleadingly disparaging a competitor's goods, or simulating well-known brand names. Some fraudulent forms of advertising involve more complex schemes. For example, bait advertisements announce the sale of goods that later prove not to be available or to be defective. Once consumers are lured into the store, they are pressured to purchase another, more expensive item.

A long ethical tradition has consistently condemned deception in advertising on the grounds that it violates consumers' rights to choose for themselves (a Kantian argument) and on the grounds that it generates a public distrust of advertising that diminishes the utility of this form and even of other forms of communication (the utilitarian argument). The central problem, then, is not understanding why deceptive advertising is wrong, but understanding how it becomes deceptive and, therefore, unethical.

All communication involves three elements: (a) the author(s) who originates the communication, (b) the medium that carries the communication, and (c) the audience who receives the communication. Because advertising is a form of communication, it involves these three elements, and the various ethical problems raised by the fact that it is a form of communication can be organised around them.

The moral issues raised by advertising are complex and involve several still unsolved problems. However, the following summarises the main factors that should be taken into consideration when determining the ethical nature of a given advertisement.

### **Social Effects**

- What does the advertiser intend the effect of the advertisement to be ?
- What are the actual effects of the advertisement on individuals and on society as a whole?

### Effects on Desire

- Does the advertisement inform or does it also seek to persuade?
- If it is persuasive, does it attempt to create an irrational and possibly injurious desire?

### Effects on Belief

- Is the content of the advertisement truthful?
- Does the advertisement have a tendency to mislead those to whom it is directed?

## 3.6 Consumer Privacy

Advances in computer processing power, database software, and communication technologies have given us the power to collect, manipulate, and disseminate personal information about consumers on a scale unprecedented in the history of the human race. This new power over the collection, manipulation, and dissemination of personal information has enabled mass invasions of the privacy of consumers and has created the potential for significant harms arising from mistaken or false information. For example, a pair of British investigators reported that in England, where companies register with the government the kind of information they will collect, businesses were collecting highly detailed and very personal information about their customers.

It is clear, then, that our interest in privacy is important enough to recognise it as a right that all people have, including consumers. However, this right must be balanced against the rights and legitimate needs of others. If banks are to provide loans to consumers, for example, they need to know something about the credit history of the individuals to whom they are providing loans and how diligent they have been in repaying previous loans. Consumers ultimately benefit from such a banking system.

Insurance companies that want to provide life insurance to individuals need to know whether such individuals have any life-threatening illnesses, and so they must have access to their medical information. Consumers benefit from having life insurance available to them. Thus, there are significant consumer benefits that businesses can provide but that they can provide only if there exist agencies that can collect information about individuals and make that information available to those businesses. Thus, consumers' rights to privacy have to be balanced with these legitimate needs of businesses. Several considerations have

been suggested as key to balancing legitimate business needs with the right to privacy, including (a) relevance, (b) informing, (c) consent, (d) accuracy, (e) purpose, and (f) recipients and security.

### 3.7 Consumerism

The demand on businesses for ethical practices has been further fuelled by consumerism. Consumerism is the organised movement of consumers/customers and government aimed at aiding and protecting the rights, interests and powers of consumers/customers by exerting legal, moral and economic pressures on business organisations. It can also be seen as protest by consumers against real and/or perceived injustices and efforts to remedy injustices perceived by consumers. The protest may also be against marketing malpractices and injustice and adverse effects of business activities on the environment.

Consumerism is on the rise. This because consumers are more educated, knowledgeable, and organised. They are demanding better consumer information, quality service, and dependability, and fair prices. The consumerism movement is one reason businesses need to adopt an ethical perspective.

What consumer rights? Much of the current interest in marketability towards customers can be traced on the rise of consumerism-social activism dedicated to protecting the rights of consumers in their dealing with businesses. The first former declaration of consumer rights protection came in 1962 when President John F. Kennedy identified four basic consumer rights. Since that time, a general agreement on four additional rights has also emerged. In all we can now talk of 8 consumer rights. These include:

- Consumers have a right to save products: Marketers can't knowingly sell products that they suspect of being defective. For example, a central legal argument in the recent problems involving Firestone tire was weather or not company officials knew in advance that the firm was selling defective.
- Consumers have a right to be informed about relevant aspects of a product: For example, apparel manufacturers are now required to provide full disclosure on all fabrics used (cotton, silk, polyester, and so forth) and instruction for (dry-clean, machine wash, hand wash).
- Consumers have a right to be heard: consumers must be given the opportunity to register their complaints about poor product or service delivery. Labels on products sold should carry telephone numbers and/or Web site of the marketers.



- Consumers have a right to choose what they buy: Consumers should be able to choose from a whole range of products supplied by a firm and competitors. There should be no competitive restriction on what should be made available to consumers.
- Consumers have a right to be educated about purchases: All prescription drugs and foods now come with detailed information regarding dosage, possible side effect, expiry date, caution and potential interactions with other medications.
- Consumers have a right to basic needs: The basic needs of life worldwide include food, shelter, clothing, healthcare and transportation. Every government should provide these basic needs to guarantee consumers' minimum standard of living.
- Consumers have a right to representation: This becomes necessary where the rights of consumers have been trampled upon. Consumers suffering from any form of infringements can seek redress in law courts, tribunals and regulatory authorities.
- Consumers have a right to a good environment: Because companies' productive, marketing, and distributive activities sometimes cause environmental degradation, which affects the quality of life of consumers, consumers need to be insulated from this right.

### **3.7.1 Public and other Actions to Protect Consumers in Nigeria**

Various measures have been taken to protect consumers in Nigeria. Various individuals, organisations and governments have attempted to protect consumers in Nigeria. The various measures for protecting consumers are:

#### **1. Government Economic and Social Policy Measures**

- Promulgation of the Price Control Decree of 1970. It was aimed at checking profiteering and hoarding.
- Establishment of Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Nigerian Communications Commission(NCC),National Broadcasting Commission(NBC) and several other agencies .

They were set up for the following reasons:

- To continuously formulate laws and regulations aimed at protecting consumers.
- To cater for the welfare of consumers.
- NAFDAC ensures that manufactured foods and drugs are tested, duly approved and registered with the container carrying the registration number as stamp of authority and assurance to consumers.
- SON ensures that goods and services conform to set minimum quality levels.
- It stipulates weights and measures to be used by organisations.
- NCC ensures that telecommunications companies pursue minimum standards at reasonable rates.

## **2. Newspapers and Magazines: Most newspapers and government**

agencies' magazines devote sections regularly to consumer awareness.

For instance, there was a media report on how some Nigerian marketers rip off Nigerian motorists. Oil marketers such as Conoil, and Global Feet oil, Sea Petroleum and Gas and Ine Oil Filling Stations were found to have tampered with their pumps, dispensing lower value of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) to their customers. In a report by Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), following inspection exercise it carried out in the Lekki area of Lagos, customers lose 1.2 litres of PMS in every 10 litres of the product bought in Conoil, 0.8 litres in Oando and 0.6 litres in Texaco.

## **3. Formation of Tenants Associations and Consumers**

**Associations:** This is to protect consumers by taking all necessary actions within the law to minimise exploitation.

**4. Introduction of Consumer Suggestion Box:** This is used by some organisations to encourage consumers' complaints and suggestions. How well consumers employ this avenue to air their grievances and how efficiently organisations react is a matter that should really concern customer-oriented organisations.

**5. Consumers' Boycott:** This is a threat or decision by a group of customers to stop buying a particular product or service for reasons such as high price, poor quality and poor services. For instance, a boycott of GSM service was undertaken in Nigeria a few years ago.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. How far must manufacturers go to make their product safe?

2. On the whole, does advertising help or harm consumers?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Manufacturers must go to a large extent to make sure that their products are safe for consumption and must desist from making false advertisement, as payment of compensation to injured consumer will have a costly effect on the finances of the affected organisation.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

There are problems with the assumption of full information and problems with the Assumption of Rational Utility Maximisation. Manufacturers have moral duties to consumers under the contractual theory but there are various criticisms of social cost views. Finally manufacturers must desist from giving false information to consumers as this is contrary to the ethics of marketing.

## **60 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. “Advertising should be banned because it diminishes a consumer’s freedom of choice.” Discuss this statement. Review the materials available in your library and decide whether you agree that “criticisms of advertising based on its social effects are inconclusive.
2. Carefully examine two or more advertisements taken from current newspapers or magazines and assess the extent to which they meet what you would consider adequate ethical standards for advertising. Be prepared to defend your standards.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 5 ETHICS AND ENVIRONMENTALISM**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 Environmentalism
    - 3.1.1 The Dimensions of Pollution and Resource Depletion
  - 3.2 Air pollution
    - 3.2.1 Global Warming
    - 3.2.2 Ozone Depletion
    - 3.2.3 Acid Rain
    - 3.2.4 Airborne Toxics
    - 3.2.5 Air Quality
  - 3.3 Water Pollution
    - 3.3.1 Organic Wastes
  - 3.4 Land Pollution
    - 3.4.1 Toxic Substances
    - 3.4.2 Depletion of Species and Habitats
    - 3.4.3 Depletion of Fossil Fuels
    - 3.4.4 Depletion of Minerals
  - 3.5 The Ethics of Pollution Control
    - 3.5.1 Ecological Ethics
    - 3.5.2 Environmental Rights and Absolute Bans
    - 3.5.3 Markets and Partial Controls
    - 3.5.4 Private Costs and Social Costs
    - 3.5.5 Remedies: The Duties of the Firm
    - 3.5.6 Justice
    - 3.5.7 Costs and Benefits
    - 3.5.8 Social Ecology, Ecofeminism, and the Demands of Caring
  - 3.6 The Ethics of Conserving Depletable Resources
    - 3.6.1 Rights of Future Generations
    - 3.6.2 Justice to Future Generations
    - 3.6.3 Economic Growth?
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues raise large and complicated ethical and technological questions for our business society. What is the extent of the environmental pollution produced by present and projected industrial technology? How large a threat, that is, damage, is posed to our welfare? What values must we give up to halt or slow such damage? Whose rights are violated by pollution and who should be given the responsibility of paying for the costs of polluting the environment? How long will our natural resources last? What obligations do firms have to future generations to preserve the environment and conserve our resources?

This unit explores these environmental issues. It begins with an assessment of the various technical aspects of environmental resource use. This is followed by a discussion of the ethical basis of environmental protection. The final sections will discuss two controversial issues: our obligations to future generations and the prospects for continued economic growth.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

When you complete this unit, you should be able to:

- define environmentalism
- describe the two main sources of threats to the environment
- explain ethical issues raised by pollution from commercial and industrial enterprises
- identify obligations, if any, we have to conserve our resources.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Environmentalism

Environmentalism is also referred to as the “Green Movement” and should not be confused with consumerism. Environmentalism is concerned with the ecology, with maximising life quality. Consumerism is concerned with ensuring that the consumer is treated fairly and that the consumer’s rights are respected.

Environmentalists are concerned with issues that affect the global environment upon which we all depend. Probably the issue that has caused the widest concern is the so-called hole in the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect which is forecast to make major changes to our climate.

Of concern are such issues as strip mining, forest depletion, the effluent from factories, some nuclear waste and the destruction of wildlife habitat to build new motorways. Quality of life issues such as loss of recreational areas, excessive outdoor advertising and litter also fall within the limit.

Environmentalists are not opposed to marketing – their desire is to ensure that organisations, and individuals, operate on good ecological principles. That decision is evaluated for their impact on the environment with only those that have positive value being progressed. Thus, environmentalism is at first a concern of top management since its principles must be adopted at corporate level, as policy, before an organisation can properly adopt them throughout.

Environmental protection naturally incurs cost, which raises prices, and so many organisations are reluctant to take the long-term decisions for fear of doing short-term harm. As the “Green Movement” gathers pace, however, it is becoming obvious that consumers are pressing for environmentally sound products and services and as this shift becomes established as a consumer need, it is hoped that managements will respond, not least because it will be in their short- as well as long-term interests.

### **3.1.1 The Dimensions of Pollution and Resource Depletion**

Environmental damage inevitably threatens the welfare of human beings as well as plants and animals. Threats to the environment come from two sources: pollution and resource depletion. Pollution refers to the undesirable and unintended contamination of the environment by the manufacture or use of commodities. Resource depletion refers to the consumption of finite or scarce resources. In a certain sense, pollution is really a type of resource depletion because contamination of air, water, or land diminishes their beneficial qualities. But for purposes of discussion, we keep the two issues distinct.

## **3.2 Air Pollution**

Air pollution is not new; it has been with us since the ~~Revolution~~ <sup>Industrial</sup> Revolution introduced the world to the belching factory smokestack. However, the costs of air pollution increased exponentially as industrialisation expanded. Today, air pollutants affect vegetation, decrease agricultural yields and inflict losses on the timber industry; they deteriorate exposed construction materials through corrosion, discoloration, or rot; they are hazardous to health and life, raising medical costs and lessening the enjoyment of living; and they pose

catastrophic global damage in the form of global warming and destruction of the stratospheric ozone layer.

### 3.2.1 Global Warming

Carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, and chlorofluorocarbons are gases that absorb and hold heat from the sun, preventing it from escaping back into space; much like a greenhouse absorbs and holds the sun's heat. Greenhouse gases occur naturally in the atmosphere where they have kept the earth's temperature about 33°C warmer than it would otherwise be, enabling life as we know it to evolve and flourish. However, industrial, agricultural, and other human activities during the last 150 years have released substantially more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, particularly by the burning of fossil fuels such as oil and coal.

Since the beginning of the industrial era, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 25 per cent. Measurements at Mauna Loa, Hawaii, indicate that carbon dioxide is currently increasing at the rate of 1.4 per cent a year and that this rate accelerates each year. Computer models indicate that rising levels of greenhouse gases will trap increasing amounts of heat on earth and so will raise temperatures around the globe. Average global temperatures are now 1°C (1.8°F) higher than in 1900 and are expected to rise by 1.5° to 4.5°C during this century. This rising heat will expand the world's deserts; melt the polar ice caps, causing sea levels to rise; make several species of plants and animals extinct; disrupt farming; and increase the distribution and severity of diseases. All these are eminent in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

### 3.2.2 Ozone Depletion

Of equally serious concern is the gradual breakdown of ozone gas in the stratosphere above us caused by the release of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) into the air. A layer of ozone in the lower stratosphere screens all life on earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation. This ozone layer, however, is destroyed by CFC gases, which have been used in aerosol cans, refrigerators, air conditioners, industrial solvents, and industrial foam blowers. When released into the air, CFC gases rise; in 7 to 10 years, they reach the stratosphere, where they destroy ozone molecules and remain for 75 to 130 years, continuing all the while to break down additional ozone molecules. Worldwide monitoring data indicate that global average losses of the ozone layer have totalled about 5 percent since the 1960s, with cumulative losses of about 10 percent in the winter and spring and 8 percent in the summer and autumn over Europe, North America, and Australia. Studies predict that the shrinking of the ozone



layer and the subsequent increase of ultraviolet rays will cause several hundred thousand new cases of skin cancer and may cause considerable destruction of the 75 per cent of the world's major crops that are sensitive to ultraviolet light. Other studies caution that the plankton that float on the surface layers of the earth's oceans and on which the entire food chain of the world's oceans ultimately depends is sensitive to ultraviolet light and may suffer mass destruction. International agreements to which the United States is a party pledged to gradually phase out the use of CFC gases by 2000, and emissions of CFCs have dropped by 87 percent from their peak in 1988. However, scientists warn that even if the use of CFC gases were completely halted, CFC levels in the atmosphere would still continue their dangerous upward climb because those gases already released will continue to rise upward for many years and will persist for perhaps a century. Moreover, not all countries have agreed to cease making and producing CFC gases, and CFC gases are often released when refrigeration or air-conditioning systems built many years ago are repaired or disposed of.

### **3.2.3 Acid Rain**

Acid rain is a threat to the environment that, like global warming, is closely related to the combustion of fossil fuels (oil, coal, and natural gas), which are heavily used by utilities to produce electricity. Burning fossil fuels, particularly coal containing high levels of sulfur, releases large quantities of sulfur oxides and nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere. Electric utility plants account for 70 per cent of annual sulfur oxide emissions and 30 per cent of nitrogen oxides. When these gases are carried into the air, they combine with water vapour in clouds to form nitric acid and sulfuric acid. These acids are then carried down in rain, which often falls hundreds of miles away from the original sources of the oxides.

The acidic rainfall sometimes as acidic as vinegar is carried into lakes and rivers, where it raises the acidity of the water. It also soaks into soils and falls directly on trees, grasses, and other vegetation. Numerous studies have shown that many fish populations and other aquatic organisms-including algae, zooplankton, and amphibians-are unable to survive in lakes and rivers that have become highly acidic due to acid rain.

Other studies have shown that acid rain directly damages or destroys trees, plants, lichens, and mosses and indirectly destroys the wildlife and species that depend on forests for food and breeding. Acidic rainwater can also leach toxic metals cadmium, nickel, lead, manganese and mercury-from soil and carry these into waterways, where they contaminate drinking water or fish. Finally, acid rain can corrode and damage

buildings, statues, and other objects, particularly those made of iron, limestone, and marble. Dozens of people were killed in West Virginia when a steel bridge collapsed as a result of acid rain corrosion, and priceless monuments such as the Acropolis in Athens and the Taj Mahal in India have been corroded by acid rain. Many researchers fear that future emissions will devastate the world's forests, particularly those located near industrial centres.

Acid rain is an international problem. Acid rain that falls on one country often has its origins in sulfur and nitrogen oxides produced in another country and blown by prevailing winds. Much of Canada and the northeastern part of the United States, for example, are subject to acid rain whose origins lie in industrial areas around the Great Lakes, and the Netherlands have suffered from acid rain that has its origins in Germany.

### **3.2.4 Airborne Toxics**

Less catastrophic but highly worrisome air pollution threats are the 2.4 billion pounds of airborne toxic substances released annually into the western nation's atmosphere, including phosgene, a nerve gas used in warfare, and methyl isocyanate, which killed more than 2,000 Indians in Bhopal. The chemical brew released into the air annually includes 235 million pounds of carcinogens, such as benzene and formaldehyde, and 527 million pounds of such neurotoxins as toluene and trichloroethylene.

Although levels of most airborne toxics have been declining gradually across the world, some western countries have registered increases in the levels of several carcinogenic toxics in the air. Airborne toxics are highly present in the industrial cities like Lagos and Port-Harcourt in Nigeria. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated that 20 of the more than 329 toxics released into the air alone cause more than 2,000 cases of cancer each year and that living near chemical plants raises a person's chances of cancer to more than 1 in 1,000. Exceptionally high cancer rates have been found near plants in several places, e.g., West Virginia and Louisiana and in Lagos, Port-Harcourt and the Niger-delta region .

### **3.2.5 Air Quality**

The most prevalent forms of air pollution, however, are the gases and particulates spewed out by autos and industrial processes, which affect the quality of the air we breathe. The six "principal air pollutants" for which the EPA sets "national air quality standards" are carbon monoxide, sulfur oxides, nitrogen oxides, ozone (or photochemical

smog), particulates, and airborne lead. The effects of these pollutants were recognised more than two decades ago.

More recent long-range studies have indicated that the deterioration of lung function in human beings caused by their chronic exposure to air pollutants, whether it is auto smog or industrial smokestack emissions, is long lasting and often irreversible. Some of the 2,500 subjects in the studies suffered as much as 75 per cent loss of lung capacity during a 10-year period of living in Los Angeles communities-a region with very high levels of air pollution-leaving them vulnerable to respiratory disease, emphysema, and impairment of their stamina. Damage to the still-developing lungs of children was especially problematic. All these are recorded in Lagos, being the commercial and industrial nerve centre of Nigeria. The Niger-delta, with its heavy pollution as a result of the activities of oil companies present in those parts is also affected.

The major sources of the pollution that affects air quality are utilities, industrial smokestacks, and automobiles. In congested urban areas, estimates of the proportion of air pollution caused by automobiles rise to as much as 80 per cent. Industrial pollution is derived principally from power plants and plants that refine and manufacture basic metals. Electrical power plants that depend on fossil fuels such as oil, coal, or natural gas throw tons of sulfur oxides, nitrogen oxides, and ashes into the air. When taken into the lungs, sulfur oxides form sulfuric acid, which damages the linings of the lungs and causes emphysema and bronchitis. Sulfur oxides have also been found to be a major factor in infant deaths, and particulates have been implicated in deaths from pneumonia and influenza. As mentioned earlier, sulfur oxides and nitrogen oxides also produce acid rain. Copper refineries and smelters produce large quantities of copper oxides and ash, and steel, nickel, cement, and chemical plants produce a variety of airborne particulates.

The health costs of low air quality are known to be high. Studies have indicated that when the concentrations of sulfur oxides over our major cities were cut in half from their 1960 levels, this added an average of 1 year to the life of each of their residents. If air quality in urban areas were similar to the levels of rural regions with clean air, the deaths rates for asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema would drop by about 50 percent, and deaths from heart disease would drop by about 15 percent. Improvements in air quality since 1970, it is believed, now save about 14,000 lives per year.

### **3.3 Water Pollution**

The contamination of water sources is an old problem one that has been with us since civilisation began using water to dispose of its wastes and sewage. Water pollutants today, however, are much more diverse, consisting not only of organic wastes but also dissolved salts, metals, and radioactive materials as well as suspended materials such as bacteria, viruses, and sediments. These can impair or destroy aquatic life, threaten human health, and foul the water. About 40 per cent of our surface water today is too polluted to fish or swim in. Water pollutants enter surface water or underground water basins either from a single or point source, such as a pipe or a well carrying sewage or industrial material or they enter from a diffused or no point source covering a large area, such as crop pesticides or animal wastes carried in rainwater or runoff.

#### **3.3.1 Organic Wastes**

In water are comprised, in large part, of untreated human wastes and sewage, but a substantial amount is also derived from industrial processing of various food products, from the pulp and paper industry, and from animal feedlots. Organic wastes that find their way into water resources are consumed by various types of bacteria, which in the process deplete the water of its oxygen. The oxygen-depleted water then becomes incapable of supporting fish life and other organisms.

Phosphorus compounds also contaminate many of our water sources. Phosphorus compounds are found in cleansing detergents used both domestically and industrially, in fertilizers used for agricultural purposes, and in untreated human and animal sewage. Lakes with high concentrations of phosphorus give rise to explosive expansions of algae populations that choke waterways, drive out other forms of life, deplete the water of its oxygen, and severely restrict water visibility.

### **3.4 Land Pollution**

#### **3.4.1 Toxic Substances**

Hazardous or toxic substances are those that can cause an increase in mortality rates or irreversible or incapacitating illness or those that have other seriously adverse health or environmental effects. Toxic substances released on land include acidic chemicals, inorganic metals (such as mercury or arsenic), flammable solvents, pesticides, herbicides, phenols, explosives, and so on. (Radioactive wastes are also classified as hazardous substances, but these are discussed separately later.).

### **3.4.2 Depletion of Species and Habitats**

It is well known that human beings have depleted dozens of plant and animal species to the point of extinction. Since 1600 A.D., at least 63 major identifiable species of mammals and 88 major identifiable species of birds are known to have become extinct. Several hundred more species, such as whales and salmon, today find themselves threatened by commercial predators. Forest habitats on which the bulk of species depend are also being decimated by the timber industry. Experts estimate that the planet's rain forests are being destroyed at the rate of about 1 percent a year. The loss of forest habitats combined with the effects of pollution is thought to have led to the extinction of phenomenal number of species. A recent comprehensive study of 18,000 species and subspecies around the world found that 11,046 of them were in danger of disappearing forever. It is estimated that between half a million to two million species (15 to 20 percent of all species on earth) were rendered extinct by 2000.

### **3.4.3 Depletion of Fossil Fuels**

Until the early 1980s, fossil fuels were being depleted at an exponentially rising rate. That is, the rate at which they were being used had doubled with the passage of a regular fixed time period. Some early predictions of resource depletion assumed that fossil fuels would continue to be depleted at these exponentially rising rates. If continued, an exponentially rising rate of depletion would end with the complete and catastrophic depletion of the resource in a relatively short time. Estimated world resources of coal would be depleted in about 100 years, estimated world reserves of oil would be exhausted in about 40 years, and estimated reserves of natural gas would last only about 25 years.

Researchers point out, however, that our consumption of fossil fuels could not continue rising at historical exponential rates. As reserves of any resource shrink, they become increasingly difficult, and therefore more costly, to extract, this in turn slows down their depletion rates. Consequently, although the rates at which reserves are depleted may rise exponentially for a period, the rising costs of extraction eventually cause the rates to peak and then begin to decline without complete depletion ever being attained.

### **3.4.4 Depletion of Minerals**

The depletion of mineral reserves, like the depletion of fossil fuels, can also be calculated either on the basis of an exponential growth model or on the basis of a peaked growth model. If earlier exponentially rising rates of depletion continued, then aluminum would have been scheduled

for exhaustion in the year 2003, iron in 2025, manganese in 2018, bismuth in 2006, nickel in 2025, tungsten in 2000, zinc in 1990, and copper and lead in 1993. Clearly, if these depletion schedules were correct, the economic consequences would be catastrophic because running out of these essential minerals within these relatively short time frames would lead to a collapse of numerous industries that rely on them. During the early 1970s, many researchers believed that such an industrial and economic collapse was imminent. However, further research has indicated that such catastrophic depletion schedules were mistaken. There are physical limits, then, to our natural resources: many are abundant, they cannot be exploited indefinitely. Eventually, they will peter out and the costs of extraction will rise exponentially. More plentiful substitute materials may be found for many of these resources, but it is likely that substitutes cannot be found for all of them. Whatever substitutes are developed will also be limited, so the day of reckoning will only be delayed.

### 3.5 The Ethics of Pollution Control

For centuries, business institutions were able to ignore their impact on the natural environment, an indulgence created by a number of causes. First, business was able to treat air and water as free goods—that is, as goods that no one owns and that each firm can therefore use without reimbursing anyone for their use. For several years, for example, the DuPont plant in West Virginia had been dumping 10,000 tons of chemical wastes each month into the Gulf of Mexico until it was forced to stop. The waters of the Gulf provided a free dumping site for whose damages DuPont did not have to pay. Because such resources are not privately owned, they lack the protection that a private owner would normally provide, and businesses were able to ignore the damages they inflicted on them.

Second, businesses have seen the environment as an unlimited good. That is, the "carrying capacity" of air and water is relatively large, and each firm's contribution of pollution to these resources is relatively small and insignificant. The amount of chemicals DuPont was dumping into the Gulf, for example, might be relatively small compared with the size of the Gulf and the effects viewed as being negligible. When the effects of its activities are seen as so slight, a firm will tend to ignore these effects. However, when every firm reasons in this way, the combined negligible effects of each firm's activities may become enormous and potentially disastrous. The carrying capacity of the air and water is soon exceeded, and these free and unlimited goods rapidly deteriorate.

Of course, pollution problems are not rooted only in business activities. Pollution also results from the use that consumers make of products and

from human waste products. A primary source of air pollution, for example, is automobile use, and a primary source of water pollution is sewage. We are truly all polluters. Because every human being pollutes, pollution problems have increased as our population has multiplied. The world's population grew from 1 billion in 1850 to 2 billion in 1930 to 6.3 billion in 2003 and is projected to grow to 8.9 billion by 2050. This population explosion has put severe strains on the air and water resources into which we dump our share of pollutants. Moreover, these strains have been aggravated by our tendency to concentrate our populations in urban centers. All over the world, urban areas are growing rapidly, and the high-population densities that urbanisation has created multiplies the pollution burdens placed on air and water resources.

The problems of pollution, then, have a variety of origins, and their treatment requires a similarly variegated set of solutions. Our focus in what follows, however, concentrates on a single range of problems: the ethical issues raised by pollution from commercial and industrial enterprises.

In controlling pollution, the injection of harmful substances into the environment - is a significant challenge for several business firms. Although noise pollution is now attracting increased concern, air, water, and land pollution remains the greatest problem and need of solution from government and business alike.

### **3.5.1 Ecological Ethics**

The problem of pollution (and environmental issues in general) is seen by some researchers as a problem that can best be framed in terms of our duty to recognise and preserve the ecological systems within which we live. An ecological system is an interrelated and interdependent set of organisms and environments, such as a lake-in which the fish depend on small aquatic organisms, which in turn live off decaying plant and fish waste products. Because the various parts of an ecological system are interrelated, the activities of one of its parts will affect all the other parts. Because the various parts are interdependent, the survival of each part depends on the survival of the other parts. Business firms (and all other social institutions) are parts of a larger ecological system, "spaceship earth." Business firms depend on the natural environment for their energy, material resources, and waste disposal, and that environment in turn is affected by the commercial activities of business firms.

Unless businesses recognise the interrelationships and interdependencies of the ecological systems within which they operate and unless they ensure that their activities will not seriously injure these systems, we cannot hope to deal with the problem of pollution.

The fact that we are only a part of a larger ecological system has led many writers to insist that we should recognise our moral duty to protect the welfare not only of human beings but also of other non human parts of this system. This insistence on what is sometimes called ecological ethics or deep ecology is not based on the idea that the environment should be protected for the sake of human beings. Instead, ecological ethics is based on the idea that non human parts of the environment deserve to be preserved for their own sake, regardless of whether this benefits human beings. Several supporters of this approach have formulated their views in a platform consisting of the following statements:

- The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non human world for human purposes.
- Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realisation of these values and are also values in themselves.
- Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non human life requires such a decrease.
- Present human interference with the non human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
- The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living.
- Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

An ecological ethic is thus an ethic that claims that the welfare of at least some non-humans is intrinsically valuable and that, because of this intrinsic value, we humans have a duty to respect and preserve them. These ethical claims have significant implications for those business activities that affect the environment.

### **3.5.2 Environmental Rights and Absolute Bans**

In an influential article, William T. Blackstone argued that the possession of a livable environment is not merely a desirable state of affairs, but something to which each human being has a right. That is, a livable environment is not merely something that we would all like to have: It is something that others have a duty to allow us to have. They have this duty, Blackstone argued, because we each have a right to a



livable environment, and our right imposes on others the correlative duty of not interfering in our exercise of that right. This is a right, moreover, that should be incorporated into our legal system.

Why do human beings have this right? According to Blackstone, a person has a moral right to a thing when possession of that thing is “essential in permitting him to live a human life” (i.e., in permitting him to fulfill his capacities as a rational and free being). At this time in our history, it has become clear that a livable environment is essential to the fulfillment of our human capacities. Consequently, human beings have a moral right to a decent environment, and it should become a legal right. Moreover, Blackstone adds, this moral and legal right should override people's legal property rights. Our great and increasing ability to manipulate the environment has revealed that, unless we limit the legal freedom to engage in practices that destroy the environment, we shall lose the very possibility of human life and the possibility of exercising other rights, such as the right to liberty and equality.

Several states have introduced amendments to their constitution that grant to their citizens an environmental right, much like Blackstone advocated.

The main difficulty with Blackstone's view, however, is that it fails to provide any nuanced guidance on several pressing environmental choices. How much pollution control is really needed? Should we have an absolute ban on pollution? How far should we go in limiting property rights for the sake of the environment? What goods, if any, should we cease manufacturing to halt or slow environmental damage? Who should pay for the costs of preserving the environment? Blackstone's theory gives us no way of handling these questions because it imposes a simple and absolute ban on pollution.

This lack of nuance in the absolute rights approach is especially problematic when the costs of removing certain amounts of pollution are high in comparison to the benefits that will be attained.

### **3.5.3 Markets and Partial Controls**

One way to answer the questions that Blackstone's theory of environmental rights leaves unanswered is to see environmental problems as market defects. If an industry pollutes the environment, the market prices of its commodities will no longer reflect the true cost of producing the commodities; the result is a misallocation of resources, a rise in waste, and an inefficient distribution of commodities. Consequently, society as a whole is harmed as its overall economic welfare declines.

Marketers who are environmentally aware need to check into the environmental results of their potential actions. All the potential consequences of product decision have to be identified and taken into account. This includes everything from the damage arising from extraction and transport of raw materials to the production process and its wastes, and on into package design and disposal. Environmentalists are concerned about the excessive packaging which, even at a minimum, wastes precious natural resources and they are concerned about promotion that encourages conspicuous and unnecessary consumption.

Individuals, then, should avoid pollution because they should be ~~harming~~ society's welfare. The following paragraphs explain this argument in greater detail and explain the more nuanced approach to pollution that this market analysis seems to provide.

### 3.5.4 Private Costs and Social Costs

Economists often distinguish between what it costs a private manufacturer to make a product and what the manufacture of that product cost society as a whole. Suppose, for example, that an electric firm consumes a certain amount of fuel, labour, and equipment to produce 1 kilowatt of electricity. The cost of these resources is its private cost: The price it must pay out of its own pocket to manufacture 1 kilowatt of electricity. However, producing the kilowatt of electricity may also involve other external costs for which the firm does not pay. When the firm burns fuel, for example, it may generate smoke and soot that settles on surrounding neighbours, who have to bear the costs of cleaning up the grime and paying for any medical problems the smoke creates.

From the viewpoint of society as a whole, then, the costs of producing the kilowatt of electricity include not only the internal costs of fuel, labour, and equipment for which the manufacturer pays but also the external costs of cleanup and medical care that the neighbours pay. This sum total of costs (the private internal costs plus the ~~neighbour's~~ costs) is the social costs of producing the kilowatt of electricity: the total price society must pay to manufacture 1 kilowatt of electricity. Of course, private costs and social costs do not always diverge as in this example; sometimes the two coincide. If a producer pays for all the costs involved in manufacturing a product, for example, or if manufacturing a product imposes no external costs, then the producer's costs and the total social costs are the same.

Thus, when a firm pollutes its environment in any way, the firm's private costs are always less than the total social costs involved. Whether the

pollution is localised and immediate, as in the neighbourhood effects described in this example, or whether the pollution is global and long-range, as in the hot-house effects predicted to follow from introducing too much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, pollution always imposes external costs-that is, costs for which the person who produces the pollution does not have to pay. Pollution is fundamentally a problem of this divergence between private and social costs.

Why should this divergence be a problem? It is a problem because when the private costs of manufacturing a product diverge from the social costs involved in its manufacture, markets no longer price commodities accurately. Consequently, they no longer allocate resources efficiently. As a result, society's welfare declines.

### **3.5.5 Remedies: The Duties of the Firm**

The remedy for external costs, according to the preceding market analysis, is to ensure that the costs of pollution are internalised-that is, that they are absorbed by the producer and taken into account when determining the price of its goods. In this way, goods will be accurately priced, market forces will provide the incentives that will encourage producers to minimise external costs, and some consumers will no longer end up paying more than others for the same commodities. Justice will once more reassert itself because the people who were being victimised by pollution costs no longer have to pay those costs, and people's rights will no longer be violated because they are no longer forced into exchanges they did not voluntarily choose.

There are various ways to internalise the external costs of pollution. One way is for the polluting agent to pay to all of those being harmed, voluntarily or by law, an amount equal to the costs the pollution imposes on them.

A problem with this way of internalising the costs of pollution, however, is that when several polluters are involved, it is not always clear just who is being damaged by whom. How much of the environmental damage caused by several polluters should be counted as damages to my property and how much should be counted as damages to your property, when the damages are inflicted on things such as air or public bodies of water, and for how much of the damage should each polluter be held responsible? Moreover, the administrative and legal costs of assessing damages for each distinct polluter and granting separate compensations to each distinct claimant can become substantial.

A second remedy is for the polluter to stop pollution at its source by installing pollution-control devices. In this way, the external costs of

polluting the environment are translated into the internal costs the firm pays to install pollution controls. Once costs are internalised in this way, market mechanisms again provide cost-cutting incentives and ensure that prices reflect the true costs of producing the commodity. In addition, the installation of pollution-control devices serves to eliminate the long-range effects of pollution.

### 3.5.6 Justice

This way of dealing with pollution (i.e., by internalising costs) also seems to be consistent with the requirements of distributive justice in so far as distributive justice favours equality. Observers have noted that pollution often has the effect of increasing inequality. If a firm pollutes, its stockholders benefit because their firm does not have to absorb the external costs of pollution; this leaves them with greater profits. And those customers who purchase the firm's products also benefit because the firm does not charge them for all the costs involved in making the product. Therefore, the beneficiaries of pollution tend to be those who can afford to buy a firm's stock and its products. However, the external costs of pollution are borne largely by the poor phenomenon some have termed environmental injustice.

*Property values in polluted neighbourhoods are generally lower, and consequently they are inhabited by the poor and abandoned by the wealthy.* Thus, pollution may produce a net flow of benefits away from the poor and toward the well-off, thereby increasing inequality.

We should note that, if a firm makes basic goods (food products, clothing, gasoline, automobiles) for which the poor must allocate a larger proportion of their budgets than the affluent, then internalising costs may place a heavier burden on the poor than on the affluent because the prices of these basic goods will rise. The poor may also suffer if the costs of pollution control rise so high that unemployment results (although as noted earlier, current studies indicate that the unemployment effects of pollution-control programs are transitory and minimal). There is some rudimentary evidence that tends to show that current pollution-control measures place greater burdens on the poor than on the wealthy. This suggests the need to integrate distributional criteria into our pollution-control programs.

Internalising external costs also seems to be consistent with the requirements of retributive and compensatory justice. In Retributive justice requires that those who are responsible for and benefit from an injury should bear the burdens of rectifying the injury, whereas compensatory justice requires that those who have been injured should be compensated by those who injure them. Taken together, these

requirements imply that (a) the costs of pollution control should be borne by those who cause pollution and who have benefited from pollution activities, whereas (b) the benefits of pollution control should flow to those who have had to bear the external costs of pollution. Internalising external costs seems to meet these two requirements: (a) The costs of pollution control are borne by stockholders and customers, both of whom benefit from the polluting activities of the firm, and (b) the benefits of pollution control flow to those neighbours who once had to put up with the firm's pollution.

### 3.5.7 Costs and Benefits

The technology for pollution control has developed effective but costly methods for abating pollution. Up to 60 per cent of water pollutants can be removed through primary screening and sedimentation processes, up to 90 per cent can be removed through more expensive secondary biological and chemical processes, and amounts over 95 per cent can be removed through even more expensive tertiary chemical treatment. Air pollution abatement techniques include the use of fuels and combustion procedures that burn more cleanly; mechanical filters that screen or isolate dust particles in the air; scrubbing processes that pass polluted air through liquids that remove pollutants; and, most expensive of all, chemical treatment that transforms gases into more easily removed compounds.

It is possible, however, for a firm to invest too much in pollution-control devices. Suppose, for example, that the pollution from a certain firm causes N100 worth of environmental damage, and suppose that the only device that can eliminate this pollution would cost the firm at least N1,000. Then obviously the firm should not install the device; if it does so, the economic utility of society will decline. The costs of eliminating the pollution will be greater than the benefits society will reap, thereby resulting in shrinkage of total utility.

How much should a firm invest in pollution control then? Consider that the costs of controlling pollution and the benefits derived from pollution control are inversely related. As one rises, the other falls. Why is this so? Think for a moment that if a body of water is highly polluted, it will probably be quite easy and consequently quite cheap to filter out a certain limited amount of pollutants. To filter out a few more pollutants, however, will require finer and, therefore, additional and more expensive filters. Costs will keep climbing for each additional level of purity desired, and getting out the last few molecules of impurities would require astronomically expensive additional equipment. However, getting out those last traces of impurities will probably not matter much to people and will be of little benefit. At the other end of the scale,

however, getting rid of the first gross amounts of pollutants will be highly beneficial to people: The costs of damages from these pollutants are substantial.

To enable the firm to make such cost-benefit analyses, researchers have devised an array of theoretical methods and techniques for calculating the costs and benefits of removing pollution. These make use of estimates of consumer surplus, rents, market prices and shadow prices, adjustment for transfers, discounted future values, and recognition of risk factors. Thomas Klein summarised the procedures for cost-benefit analysis as follows:

- Identify costs and benefits of the proposed program and the person or sectors incurring or receiving them. Trace transfers.
- Evaluate the costs and benefits in terms of their value to beneficiaries and donors. The standard of measure is the value of each marginal unit to demanders and suppliers ideally captured in competitive prices. Useful refinements involve:
  - Incorporating time values through the use of a discount rate.
  - Recognising risk by factoring possible outcomes according to probabilities and, where dependent, probability trees.
- Add up costs and benefits to determine the net social benefit of a project or programme

To avoid erratic and costly use of these procedures, Klein recommended that firms introduce a system of social accounting that "routinely measures, records, and reports external effects to management and other parties.

It is at this point, however, that a fundamental difficulty in the utilitarian approach to pollution emerges. The cost-benefit analyses just described assume that the costs and benefits of reducing pollution can be accurately measured. However, the costs and benefits of pollution are difficult to measure when they involve damages to human health and loss of life: What is the price of life?

### **3.5.8 Social Ecology, Ecofeminism, and Demands of Caring**

The difficulties inherent in cost-benefit and rights-based approaches to the ethical issues raised by environmental degradation have led many to

look for alternative approaches. Some have argued, in fact, that cost-benefit and rights-based theories embody a kind of calculative and rationalistic way of thinking that is responsible for environmental crises. Cost-benefit thinking assumes that nature is to be measured and used efficiently, whereas rights-based theories see humans and other entities in individualistic terms and ignore their relationships with the rest of nature. These ways of thinking, it has been argued, are tightly linked to the kind of society in which we live.

Many thinkers have argued that the environmental crises we face are rooted in the social systems of hierarchy and domination that characterize our society. This view, now referred to as social ecology, holds that until those patterns of hierarchy and domination are changed, we will be unable to deal with environmental crises. In a system of hierarchy, one group holds power over another and members of the superior group are able to dominate those of the inferior group and get them to serve their ends. Examples of such systems of hierarchy include social practices such as sexism, and social classes, as well as social institutions such as property rights, capitalism, bureaucracies, and the mechanisms of government. Such systems of hierarchy and domination go hand in hand with the widespread environmental destruction taking place all around us and with economic ways of managing the environment. Murray Bookchin, the most well-known proponent of this view, wrote.

- “We must look into the cultural forms of domination that exist in the family, between generations, sexes, and ethnic groups, in all institutions of political, economic, and social management, and very significantly in the way we experience reality as a whole, including nature and non human life forms”.

Systems of hierarchy and domination, Bookchin suggested, facilitate the rise of a broad cultural mentality that encourages domination in many forms, including the domination of nature. Success becomes identified with dominance and control. The greater the number of people who work for a person, the greater that person's wealth, power, and status, and the more successful the person is deemed to be. Success also becomes identified with the domination of nature as society comes to identify “progress” with the increasing ability to control and dominate nature and its processes. Science, technology, and agriculture all join hands in this attempt to dominate and control nature. Weighing the costs and benefits of destroying nature is inevitable in this perspective. The widespread destruction of nature that results, then, cannot be halted until our societies become less hierarchical, less dominating, and less oppressive. The ideal society is one that eschews all domination and in which all power is decentralised. Agriculture and technology would be

restricted to those that are sustainable and in which humans live in harmony with nature.

Several feminist thinkers have argued that the key form of hierarchy connected to destruction of the environment is the domination of women by men. Ecofeminism has been described as “the position that there are important connections-historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical-between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to both feminism and environmental ethics.”

Ecofeminists have argued that the root of our ecological crisis lies in a pattern of domination of nature that is tightly linked to the social practices and institutions through which women have been subordinated to men. Underlying this subordination of women to men are ways of thinking that justify and perpetuate the subordination. One key pattern of thinking the “logic of domination” sets up dualisms (masculine-feminine, reason-emotion, artifact-nature, mind-body, objective-subjective) that are used to characterise men and women. Because of their roles in childbearing, child raising, and human sexuality, women are seen as more emotional, closer to nature and the body, and more subjective and passive, whereas men are masculine, more rational, closer to constructed artifacts and the life of the mind, and more objective and active.

The masculine characteristics are then seen as superior to as and more valuable than the feminine characteristics (reason, objectivity, and the mind are superior to emotion, subjectivity, and bodily feelings), and this is taken as justifying the subordination of women to men. The subordination of what is feminine in turn is transferred to nature, which is seen as feminine (Mother Nature) and with which women are felt to be more closely associated. Thus, the domination of nature accompanies the domination of women, and as women are exploited for the interests of men, so too is nature.

If the forms of thinking that accompany hierarchy and domination are responsible for the destruction of the environment, with what should they be replaced? Social ecologists such as Bookchin have argued that humans should see themselves as stewards of nature, not as masters who should dominate nature. Some ecofeminists have argued that women should strive for an androgynous culture, which eradicates traditional gender roles and does away with the distinction between feminine and masculine that justifies a destructive domination of nature. Many ecofeminists have argued that instead one should try “to remedy ecological and other problems through the creation of an alternative culture”. . . based on revaluing, celebrating and defending what



patriarchy has devalued, including the feminine, nonhuman nature, the body and the emotions.” In particular, some have argued, the destructive masculine perspective of domination and hierarchy must be replaced with the feminine perspective of caring.

### **3.6 The Ethics of Conserving Depletable Resources**

Conservation refers to the saving or rationing of natural resources for later uses. Conservation, therefore, looks primarily to the future: to the need to limit consumption now to have resources available for tomorrow.

In a sense, pollution control is a form of conservation. Pollution “consumes” pure air and water, and pollution control “conserves” them for the future. However, there are basic differences between the problems of pollution and the problems of resource depletion that makes the term conservation more applicable to the latter problems than to the former. With some notable exceptions (such as nuclear wastes), most forms of pollution affect present generations, and their control will benefit present generations.

The depletion of most scarce resources, however, lies far in the future, and the effects of their depletion will be felt primarily by posterity and not by present generations. Consequently, our concern over the depletion of resources is primarily a concern for future generations and for the benefits that will be available to them. For this reason, conservation is more applicable to the problems of resource depletion than to those of pollution. Moreover (again with notable exceptions), pollution is a problem concerned primarily with “renewable” resources, insofar as air and water can be “renewed” by ceasing to dump pollutants into them and allowing them time to recover.

Tomorrow's supply, therefore, will be created anew over and over if we take the proper precautions. Resource depletion, however, is concerned with finite, nonrenewable resources. The only store of a finite, nonrenewable resource that will be around tomorrow is that which is left over from today. Conservation, therefore, is the only way of ensuring a supply for tomorrow's generations. Resource depletion forces two main kinds of questions on us. Why should we conserve resources for future generations? How much should we conserve?

#### **3.6.1 Rights of Future Generations**

It might appear that we have an obligation to conserve resources for future generations because they have an equal right to the limited

resources of this planet. If future generations have an equal right to the world's resources, then by depleting these resources, we are taking what is actually theirs and violating their equal right to these resources.

A number of writers, however, have claimed that it is a mistake to think that future generations have rights. Consequently, it is a mistake to think that we should refrain from consuming natural resources because we are taking what future generations have a right to. Three main reasons have been advanced to show that future generations cannot have rights.

First, future generations cannot intelligently be said to have rights because they do not now exist and may never exist. I may be able to think about future people, but I cannot hit them, punish them, injure them, or treat them wrongly.

Second, if future generations did have rights, we might be led to the absurd conclusion that we must sacrifice our entire civilisation for their sake.

Third, we can say that someone has a certain right only if we know that he or she has a certain interest which that right protects. The purpose of a right, after all, is to protect the interests of the right holder, but we are virtually ignorant of what interests future generations will have.

If these arguments are correct, then to the extent that we are uncertain what future generations will exist or what they will be like, they do not have any rights. It does not follow, however, that we have no obligations to any future generations, because our obligations may be based on other grounds.

### **3.6.2 Justice to Future Generation**

John Rawls argued that, although it is unjust to impose disproportionately heavy burdens on present generations for the sake of future generations, it is also unjust for present generations to be nothing for future generations. To determine a just way of distributing resources between generations, he suggested, the members of each generation should put themselves in the "original position" and, without knowing what generation they belong to, they should do the following.

- Ask what is reasonable for members of adjacent generations to expect of one another at each level of (historical) advance. They should try to piece together a just savings schedule by balancing how much at each stage (of history) they would be willing to save for their immediate descendants against what they would feel entitled to claim of their immediate predecessors. Thus, imagining themselves

to be parents, say, they are to ascertain how much they would set aside for their children by noting what they would believe themselves entitled to claim of their own parents.

In general, Rawls claims that this method of ascertaining what earlier generations in justice owe to later generations will lead to the conclusion that what justice demands of us is merely that we hand to the next generation a situation no worse than we received from the generation before us.

- Each generation must not only preserve the gains of culture and civilisation, and maintain intact those just institutions that have been established, but it must also put aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation. (It should be kept in mind here that capital is not only factories, and machines, and so on, but also the knowledge and culture, as well as the techniques and skills, that make possible just institutions and the fair value of liberty.) This is in return for what is received from previous generations that enables the later ones to enjoy better life in a more just society.

### 3.6.3 Economic Growth

However, to many observers, conservation measures fall far short of what is needed. Several writers have argued that if we are to preserve enough scarce resources so that future generations can maintain their quality of life at a satisfactory level, we shall have to change economies substantially, particularly by scaling down our pursuit of economic growth. E. F. Schumacher, for example, claimed that the industrialised nations will have to convert from growth-oriented, capital-intensive technologies to much more labour-intensive technologies in which humans do work machines now do. Others argue that economic systems will have to abandon their goal of steadily increasing production and put in its place the goal of decreasing production until it has been scaled down to "a steady state" that is, a point at which "the total population and the total stock of physical wealth are maintained constant at some desired levels by a 'minimal' rate of maintenance throughout (that is, by birth and death rates that are equal at the lowest feasible level, and by physical production and consumption rates that are equal at the lowest feasible level)." The conclusion that economic growth must be abandoned if society is to be able to deal with the problems of diminishing resources has been challenged. It is at least arguable that adherence to continual economic growth promises to degrade the quality of life of future generations.

The arguments for this claim are simple, stark, and highly controversial.

If the world's economies continue to pursue the goal of economic growth, the demand for depletable resources will continue to grow. Because world resources are finite, at some point supplies will simply run out. At this point, if the world's nations are still based on growth economies, we can expect a collapse of their major economic institutions (i.e., of manufacturing and financial institutions, communication networks, the service industries), which in turn will bring down their political and social institutions (i.e., centralised governments, education and cultural programmes, scientific and technological development, health care).

Living standards will then decline precipitously in the wake of widespread starvation and political dislocations. Various scenarios for this sequence of events have been constructed, all of them more or less speculative and necessarily based on uncertain assumptions. The most famous and oldest of these are the studies of the Club of Rome, which over two decades ago projected on computers the catastrophic results of continuing the economic growth patterns of the past in the face of declining resources. Later studies came to similar conclusions.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

.Define the following concepts: pollution, toxic substance, nuclear wastes, exponential depletion, peaked depletion, free good, unlimited good, ecological system, ecological ethic, right to a livable environment, absolute ban, private costs, social costs, external costs, to internalize costs, cost-benefit analysis, risk, social audit, right of consent, conservation, rights of future generations, justice toward future generations, multiple access, time preference, doomsday scenario, high-consumption nation.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

It is very important that you understand how strategic it is to take care of our environment. And a corporate organisation has onerous responsibility towards protecting the environment. This is considering the fact that corporate organisations derive tremendous benefits from the environment. Hence, they are expected to reciprocate by taking measures to ensure healthy environment, which guarantees their future access to environmental resources.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Ethics demand that we should:

- Leave the world no worse than we found it
- Leave our children a world no worse than we received
- Leave the world as productive as we found it

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Define the main forms of pollution and resource depletion and identify the major problems associated with each form.
2. Do you agree with the claims that (a) future generations have no rights, and (b) the future generations to which we have obligations actually include only the generation that will immediately succeed us? Explain your answer. If you do not agree with these claims, state your own views, and provide arguments to support them.

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### **MODULE 3**

Unit 1 The Ethics of Job Discrimination

Unit 2 The Individual in the Organisation

Unit 3 Corporations and Corporate Governance

Unit 4 Executive Incentives

## Unit 5 Accountants and Auditors

# UNIT 1 THE ETHICS OF JOB DISCRIMINATION

## CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Ethics of Job Discrimination
  - 3.2 Forms of Discrimination
  - 3.3 Discrimination: Its extent
    - 3.3.1 Average Income Comparisons
  - 3.4 Discrimination: Utility, Rights and Justice
    - 3.4.1 Sexual Harassment
  - 3.5 Affirmative Action
    - 3.5.1 Affirmative Action as Compensation
    - 3.5.2 Affirmative Action as an Instrument for Achieving Utilitarian Goals and Equal Justice
    - 3.5.3 Implementing Affirmative Action and Managing Diversity
    - 3.5.4 Comparable Pay for Jobs of Comparable Worth
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The debates over equality, diversity, and discrimination have been prolonged and acrimonious. Controversy continues to swirl around the nature of the plight of the inequality of women, and the harm that males have suffered as a result of preference shown to women. These continuing debates over sexual diversity have often focused on business and its needs. This is inevitable: sexual discrimination has had a long history in business, and diversity now promises to have significant benefits for business.

Perhaps more than any other contemporary social issue, public discussions of discrimination and diversity have clearly approached the subject in ethical terms: The words; justice, equality, right and discrimination inevitably find their debate. This unit analyses the various sides of this ethical issue. This unit begins by examining the nature and extent of discrimination. It then turns to discussing the ethical

aspects of discriminatory behaviour in employment and ends with a discussion of diversity and affirmative action programmes.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

When you complete this unit, you should be able to:

- identify distinctions companies can make between applicants without engaging in discrimination
- analyse the widespread of job discrimination
- examine why it is wrong to discriminate
- explain affirmative action and why it is so controversial.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Job Discrimination: It's Nature**

The root meaning of the term discriminate is "to distinguish one object from another," a morally neutral and not necessarily wrongful activity. However, in modern usage, the term is not morally neutral; it is usually intended to refer to the wrongful act of distinguishing illicitly among people not on the basis of individual merit, but on the basis of prejudice or some other invidious or morally reprehensible attitude. This morally charged notion of invidious discrimination, as it applies to employment, is what the issue in this unit is.

In this sense, to discriminate in employment is to make an adverse decision (or set of decisions) against employees (or prospective employees) who belong to a certain class because of morally unjustified prejudice toward members of that class. Thus, discrimination in employment must involve three basic elements. First, it is a decision against one or more employees (or prospective employees) that is not based on individual merit, such as the ability to perform a given job, seniority, or other morally legitimate qualifications. Second, the decision derives solely or in part from sexual prejudice, false stereotypes, or some other kind of morally unjustified attitude against members of the class to which the employee belongs. Third, the decision (or set of decisions) has a harmful or negative impact on the interests of the employees, perhaps costing those jobs, promotions, or better pay.

### **3.2 Forms of Discrimination: Intentional and Institutional Aspects**

A helpful framework for analysing different forms of discrimination can be constructed by distinguishing the extent to which a discriminatory act



is intentional and isolated (or non institutionalised) and the extent to which it is unintentional and institutionalised. First, a discriminatory act may be part of the isolated (non-institutionalised) behaviour of a single individual who intentionally and knowingly discriminates out of personal prejudice. Second, a discriminatory act may be part of the routine behaviour of an institutionalised group, which intentionally and knowingly discriminates out of the personal prejudices of its members.

The Ku Klux Klan, for example, is an organisation that historically has intentionally institutionalised discriminatory behaviour. Third, an act of discrimination may be part of the isolated (non-institutionalised) behaviour of a single individual who unintentionally and unknowingly discriminates against someone because the individual unthinkingly adopts the traditional practices and stereotypes of the surrounding society. Fourth, a discriminatory act may be part of the systematic routine of a corporate organisation or group that unintentionally incorporates into its formal institutionalised procedures practices that discriminate against women.

The two companies examined in the ABC experiment, for example, described organisations in which the best-paying jobs are routinely assigned to men and the worst-paying jobs are routinely assigned to women on the stereotypical assumption that women are fit for some jobs and not for others. There may be no deliberate intent to discriminate, but the effect is the same: a sexually based pattern of preference toward males.

During the last century, an important shift in emphasis occurred—from seeing discrimination primarily as an intentional and individual matter to seeing it as a systematic and not necessarily intentional feature of institutionalised corporate behaviour. During the early 1960s, employment discrimination was seen primarily as an intentional act performed by one individual on another.

### **3.3 Discrimination: It's Extent**

How do we estimate whether an institution or a set of institutions is practicing discrimination against a certain group? We do so by looking at statistical indicators of how the members of that group are distributed within the institution. A *prima facie* indication of discrimination exists when a disproportionate number of the members of a certain group hold the less desirable positions within the institutions despite their preferences and abilities. Three kinds of comparisons can provide evidence for such a distribution:

- Comparisons of the average benefits the institutions bestow on the discriminated group with the average benefits the institutions bestow on other groups.
- Comparisons of the proportion of the discriminated group found in the lowest levels of the institutions with the proportions of other groups found at those levels.
- Comparisons of the proportions of that group that holds the more advantageous position with the proportions of other groups that hold those same positions. If we look at the Nigerian society in terms of these three kinds of comparisons, it becomes clear that some form of tribal and sexual discrimination is present in the society as a whole. It is also clear that for some segments of the minority population (such-as Urobo, Efik, Ebira, etc.) discrimination is not as intense as it once was.

### 3.3.1 Average Income Comparisons

Income comparisons also reveal large inequalities based on sex. A comparison of average incomes for men and women shows that women receive only a portion of what men receive. One study found that firms employing mostly men paid their workers as average 40 per cent more than those employing mostly women.

The disparities in earnings between men and women begin as soon as men and women graduate from school, contrary to the optimistic belief held by each generation of graduating women that "my generation will be different.

### 3.4 Discrimination: Utility, Rights, and Justice

Given the statistics on the comparative incomes and low-status positions of women, the question we must ask ourselves is this: Are these inequalities wrong, and if so, how should they be changed? To be sure these inequalities directly contradict the fundamental principles on which Nigeria was founded: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights." However, historically we have often tolerated large discrepancies between these ideals and reality. In some developed countries, through much of the 19th century, women could not hold office, could not vote, could not serve on juries, nor bring suit in their own names; a married woman lost control over her property (which was acquired by her husband), she was considered incapable of making contracts, and, in a major opinion, she was declared by the Supreme Court to have "no legal existence, separate from her husband, who was regarded as her head and representative in the social state."

Why are these forms of inequality wrong? Why is it wrong to discriminate?

The arguments mustered against discrimination generally fall into three groups

- Utilitarian arguments, which claim that discrimination leads to an inefficient use of human resources;
- Rights arguments, which claim that discrimination violates basic human rights;
- Justice arguments, which claim that discrimination results in an unjust distribution of society's benefits and burdens.

### **3.4.1 Sexual Harassment**

Women, as noted earlier, are victims of a particularly troublesome kind of discrimination that is both overt and coercive: They are subjected to sexual harassment. Although males are also subjected to some instances of sexual harassment, it is women who are by far the most frequent victims. For all its acknowledged frequency, sexual harassment still remains difficult to define and to police and prevent.

In several major respects, the guidelines on sexual harassment are clearly morally justified. They are intended to outlaw those situations in which an employee is coerced into giving in to another employee's sexual demands by the threat of losing some significant job benefit, such as a promotion, raise, or even the job. This kind of degrading coercion exerted on employees who are vulnerable and defenseless inflicts great psychological harm on the employee, violates the employee's most basic rights to freedom and dignity, and is an outrageously unjust misuse of the unequal power that an employer can exercise over the employee. It is thus a crude violation of the moral standards of utilitarianism rights, justice, and care.

Should this kind of situation count as the kind of "intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment" that the guidelines prohibit as sexual harassment? The answer to this legal question is unclear, and different courts have taken different position on the question. But a different question and one that is more relevant to our inquiry is this: Is it morally wrong to create or allow this kind of environment? The answer to this question seems in general to be "yes" because such an environment is degrading, it is usually imposed by more powerful male parties upon more vulnerable female employees, and it imposes heavy costs on women because such environments tend to belittle them and make it more difficult for them to compete with males as equals.

Nevertheless, some critics object that these kinds of environments were not created to intentionally degrade women that they are part of the social mores of male workers, that it is hopeless to try to change them, and that they do not unjustly harm women because women have the power to take care of themselves. A Forbes magazine article, for example, asked rhetorically, “Can women really think they have the right to a pristine work environment free of rude behaviour?” Such sentiments are indicative of the uncertainties surrounding this issue.

### 3.5 Affirmative Action

All of the equal opportunity policies discussed are ways of making employment decisions blind with respect to sex. These policies are all negative: They aim to prevent any further discrimination. Therefore, they ignore the fact that as a result of past discrimination, women do not now have the same skills as their male counterparts; because of past discrimination, women are now underrepresented in the more prestigious and desirable job positions. The policies discussed so far do not call for any positive steps to eliminate these effects of discrimination.

To rectify the effects of past discrimination, many employers have instituted affirmative action programmes designed to achieve a more representative distribution of women within the firm by giving preference to women. What does an affirmative action programme involve? The heart of an affirmative action programme is a detailed study (called “utilisation analysis”) of all the major job classifications in the firm. The purpose of the study is to determine whether there are fewer women in a particular job classification than could be expected by their availability in the area from which the firm recruits.

The utilisation analysis will compare the percentage of women in each job classification with the percentage of those female workers available in the area from which the firm recruits who have the requisite skills or who are capable of acquiring the requisite skills with training the firm could reasonably supply. If the utilisation analysis shows that women are underutilised in certain job classifications, the firm must establish recruiting goals and timetables for correcting these deficiencies. Although the goals and timetables must not be rigid and inflexible quotas, they must nonetheless be specific, measurable, and designed in good faith to correct the deficiencies uncovered by the utilisation analysis within a reasonable length of time. The firm appoints an officer to coordinate and administer the affirmative action program, and it undertakes special efforts and programmes to increase the recruitment of women so as to meet the goals and timetables it has established for itself.

### 3.5.1 Affirmative Action as Compensation

Arguments that defend affirmative action as a form of compensation are based on the concept of compensatory justice. Compensatory justice implies that people have an obligation to compensate those whom they have intentionally and unjustly wronged. Affirmative action programmes are then interpreted as a form of reparation by which the majorities now compensate the minorities for unjustly injuring them by discriminating against them in the past.

The difficulty with arguments that defend affirmative action on the basis of the principle of compensation is that the principle requires that compensation should come only from those specific individuals who intentionally inflicted a wrong, and it requires them to compensate only those specific individuals whom they wronged. For example, if five Yoruba persons wrongfully injure five Hausa persons, then compensatory justice obligates only the five Yoruba persons to give to only the five Hausa persons whatever the Hausa persons would have had if the five Yoruba had not injured them.

Compensatory justice, however, does not require that compensation should come from all the members of a group that contains some wrongdoers, nor does it require that compensation should go to all the members of a group that contains some injured parties. In this example, although justice requires that the five Yoruba persons must compensate the five Hausa persons, it does not require that all Yoruba persons should compensate all Hausa persons. By analogy, only the specific individuals who discriminated against women in the past should now be forced to make reparation of some sort, and they should make reparation only to those specific individuals against whom they discriminated.

Although affirmative action programmes usually benefit all the members of a sexual group, regardless of whether they specifically were discriminated against in the past, and because these programmes hinder every male regardless of whether he specifically discriminated against someone in the past, it follows that such preferential programmes cannot be justified on the basis of compensatory justice. In short, affirmative action programmes are unfair because the beneficiaries of affirmative action are not the same individuals who were injured by past discrimination, and the people who must pay for their injuries are usually not the ones who inflicted those injuries.

Various authors have tried to counter this objection to the “affirmative action as compensation” argument by claiming that actually every

woman living today has been injured by discrimination and that every male has benefited from those injuries.

### **3.5.2 Affirmative Action as an Instrument for Achieving Utilitarian Goals and Equal Justice**

A second set of justifications advanced in support of affirmative action programmes is based on the idea that these programmes are morally legitimate instruments for achieving morally legitimate ends. For example, utilitarians have claimed that affirmative action programmes are justified because they promote the public welfare. They have argued that past discrimination has produced a high degree of ~~correlation~~ <sup>between</sup> sex and poverty. As female were systematically excluded from better-paying and more prestigious jobs, their members have become impoverished. Impoverishment in turn has led to unmet needs, lack of self-respect, resentment, social discontent, and crime. Therefore, the public welfare is promoted if the position of these impoverished females is improved by giving them special educational and employment opportunities.

If opponents object that such affirmative action programmes are unjust because they distribute benefits on the basis of an irrelevant criterion such as sex, the utilitarian can answer that need, not sex, is the criterion by which affirmative action programmes distribute benefits. Sex provides an inexpensive indicator of need because past discrimination has created a high correlation between sex and need. Need, of course, is a just criterion of distribution. Appealing to the reduction of need is consistent with utilitarian principles because reducing need will increase total utility.

The major difficulties encountered by these utilitarian justifications of affirmative action have concerned, first, the question of whether the social costs of affirmative action programmes outweigh their obvious benefits. The utilitarian defender of affirmative action, of course, will reply that the benefits far outweigh the costs. Second, and ~~important~~ <sup>important</sup>, opponents of these utilitarian justifications of affirmative action have questioned the assumption that sex is an appropriate indicator of need. It may be inconvenient and expensive to identify the needy directly, critics argue, but the costs might be small compared to the gains that would result from having a more accurate ~~identify~~ <sup>WQY</sup> identify the needy. Utilitarians answer this criticism by arguing that all and women have been impoverished and psychologically harmed ~~past~~ <sup>by</sup> discrimination. Consequently, sex provides accurate indicators of need.

Although utilitarian arguments in favour of affirmative action programmes are quite convincing, the most elaborate and persuasive array of arguments advanced in support of affirmative action have proceeded in two steps. First, they argue that the end envisioned by affirmative action programmes is equal justice. Second, they argue that affirmative action programmes are morally legitimate means for achieving this end.

The end that affirmative action programmes are supposed to achieve is phrased in various ways. In our present society, it is argued, jobs are not distributed justly because they are not distributed according to the relevant criteria of ability, effort, contribution, or need. Statistics show that jobs are in fact still distributed according to tribe and sex. One end of affirmative action is to bring about a distribution of society's benefits and burdens that is consistent with the principles of distributive justice and that eliminates the important position tribe and sex currently have in the assignment of jobs. In our present society, women and minorities do not have the equal opportunities that males and majorities have and that justice demands.

A second end of affirmative action programmes is to neutralise such conscious and unconscious bias to ensure equal opportunity to women and minorities. The lack of equal opportunity under which women and minorities currently labour has also been attributed to the privations they suffered as children. Economic privation hindered females from acquiring the skills, experience, training, and education they needed to compete equally with males. Furthermore, because women and minorities have not been represented in society's prestigious positions, young men and women have had no role models to motivate them to compete for such positions.

A third end of affirmative action programmes is to neutralise these competitive disadvantages with which women and minorities are currently burdened when they compete, and thereby bring women and minorities to the same starting point in their competitive race with others. The aim is to ensure an equal ability to compete.

The basic end that affirmative action programmes seek is a more just society—a society in which an individual's opportunities are not limited by tribe or sex. This goal is morally legitimate as it is morally legitimate to strive for a society with greater equality of opportunity. The means by which affirmative action programmes attempt to achieve a just society is giving qualified minorities and females' preference over qualified males in hiring and promotion and instituting special training programmes for minorities and females that will qualify them for better jobs. By these means, it is hoped, the more just society outlined will eventually be

born. Without some form of affirmative action, it is argued, this end could not be achieved. But is preferential treatment a morally legitimate means for attaining this end?

Strong arguments can be made in support of affirmative action programs, and strong objections can be lodged against them. Because there are such powerful arguments on both sides of the issue, the debate over the legitimacy of affirmative action programmes continues to rage without resolution. However, the review of the arguments seems to suggest that affirmative action programmes are at least a morally permissible means for achieving just ends, even if they may not show that they are a morally required means for achieving those ends.

### **3.5.3 Implementing Affirmative Action and Managing Diversity**

Opponents of affirmative action programmes have argued that other criteria besides tribe and sex have to be weighed when making decisions in an affirmative action programme. First, if sex and tribe are the only criteria used, this will result in the hiring of unpersonified and a consequent decline in productivity. Second, many jobs have significant impacts on the lives of others. Consequently, if a job has significant impact on, say, the safety of others (such as the job of flight controller or surgeon), then criteria other than tribe or sex should have a prominent place and should override affirmative action. Third, opponents have argued that affirmative action programmes if continued will turn us into a more tribal and sexually conscious nation. Consequently, the programmes should cease as soon as the defects they are meant to remedy are corrected.

The following guidelines have been suggested as a way to fold these sorts of considerations into an affirmative action programme when minorities are underrepresented in a firm.

- Both minorities and non-minorities should be hired or promoted only if they reach certain minimum levels of competency or are capable of reaching such levels in a reasonable time.
- If the qualifications of the minority candidate are only slightly less (or equal to or higher) than those of the non-minority, then the minority should be given preference.
- If both the minority and non-minority candidates are adequately qualified for a position but the non-minority candidate is much more qualified, then: if performance in the job directly affects the lives and safety of people (such as a surgeon or an airline pilot) or if performance on the job has a substantial and critical effect on the entire firm's



efficiency (such as head comptroller), then the more qualified non-minority should be given preference; but if the position (like most positions in a firm) does not directly involve safety factors and does not have a substantial and highly critical effect on a firm's efficiency, then the minority person should be given preference.

- Preference should be extended to minority candidates only so long as their representation throughout the various levels of the firm is not proportional to their availability the success or failure of an affirmative action programme also depends on part on the accommodations a company makes to the special needs of tribal and sexually diverse workforce. Both women and minorities encounter special workplace problems, and companies need to devise innovative means for addressing these needs. The major problems faced by women relate to the fact that a large number of married couples have children, and it is women who physically bear children and who in our culture carry most of the burden of raising and caring for them. Some people have suggested that companies respond by creating two career tracks for women: one track for women who indicate that they plan to have and actively participate in raising their own children while pursuing their careers, and the other track for women who either plan not to have children or plan to have others (husbands or child-care providers) raise their children while they devote themselves to pursuing their careers by putting in extra hours, making sacrifices in their personal lives, travelling, transferring, and relocating to advance their careers, and taking every opportunity for professional development.

This approach, however, has been criticised as unjust because it may force women, unlike men, to choose between their careers and their families, and it may result in a lower status cohort of mommies who are discriminated against in favour of a high-status cohort of career females. Others have suggested that so long as our culture continues to put child-care tasks primarily on women, companies should help women by providing more generous family leave policies. For example, Federal Government of Nigeria provides the 3 months of paid maternity leave. On the international level, for instance, IBM provides up to 8 weeks of paid maternity leave and additional year of unpaid leave for a new parent with the option of part-time work during that year and a guarantee of their jobs when they return, and pays a portion of the employee's adoption expenses.

In related terms, some companies in the Western world provide for more flexible work schedules (allowing parents to schedule their arrival and departure times to fit the needs of their children's schedules in a 8-hour, and allowing mothers of school-age children to work full-time during the school year and either rely on temporary replacements during vacations or allow, others to only work part-time; sick leave for parents

whose children are sick (or for non-parents who have special needs); special job arrangements for parents (letting new parents spend several years working part-time while their children are growing up and guaranteeing their jobs when they return, or letting two parents share the same job); and child-care support (setting up a child-care facility at or near the workplace, reimbursing employees for child-care expenses, setting up a child-care referral service, providing special daycare personnel who can care for employees' sick children, or providing an onsite clinic that can care for sick children while parents work).

### **3.5.4 Comparable Pay for Jobs of Comparable Worth**

During the 1990s, some groups advanced a proposal to deal with sexual discrimination that is much more radical and far-reaching than affirmative action programmes. Affirmative action programmes attempt to increase the proportions of women in positions where they are underrepresented, but they leave untouched the wages and salaries that attach to the positions women already tend to hold. That is, affirmative action programmes do not address the problem posed by the fact that jobs women historically have filled tend to pay low wages and salaries and merely ensure that more women are hired into those jobs with higher wages and salaries. In contrast to this, the new comparable worth programmes that many groups have advocated to deal with sexually biased earnings attempt to alter the low wages and salaries that market mechanisms tend to assign to jobs held by women. Unlike affirmative action programmes, a comparable worth programme does not attempt to place more women into those positions that have higher salaries. Instead, it attempts to place higher salaries on those positions that most women already hold.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Define the following concepts: job discrimination, institutionalised/isolated discrimination, intentional/nonintentional discrimination, statistical indicators of discrimination, utilitarian argument against discrimination, Kantian arguments against discrimination, formal principle of "equality," discriminatory practices, affirmative action program, utilisation analysis, "reverse discrimination," compensation argument for preferential treatment, instrumental argument for preferential treatment, utilitarian argument for preferential treatment, the end goals of affirmative action programmes, invidious contempt, comparable pay.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Earlier sections examined several future trends that will affect the future status of women and minorities in the workforce. Of particular significance is the fact that only a small proportion of new workers will be males. Most new workers will be women and minorities. Unless major changes are made to accommodate their needs and special characteristics, they will not be incorporated smoothly into the workplace

We have reviewed a number of programmes that provide special assistance to women and minorities on moral grounds. However, it should be clear, in view of the future demographic trends, that enlightened self-interest should also prompt business to give women and minorities a special hand. The costs of not assisting the coming influx of women and minorities with their special needs will not be borne entirely by women and minorities. Unfortunately, if businesses do not accommodate themselves to these new workers, businesses will not be able to find the workers they need and they will suffer recurrent and crippling shortages over the next decade. The pool of traditional male workers simply will be so small that businesses will not be able to rely on them to fill all their requirements for skilled and managerial positions.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Many businesses, aware of these trends, have undertaken programmes to prepare themselves now to respond to the special needs of women and minorities. To respond to women's needs, for example, many companies have instituted day-care services and flexible working hours that allow women with children to care for their children's needs especially in the Western world. Other companies have instituted aggressive affirmative action programmes aimed at integrating large groups of minorities into their firms where they are provided with education, job training, skills, counseling, and other assistance designed to enable them to assimilate into the workforce. The belief of such companies is that if they act now to recruit women and minorities, they will be familiar with their special needs and will have a large cadre of women and minorities capable of bringing other women and minorities along.

Valuing and managing a diverse work force is more than ethically and morally correct. It is also a business necessity. Work force demographics for the next decade make it absolutely clear that companies which fail to do an excellent job of recruiting, retaining, developing and promoting women and minorities simply will be unable to meet their staffing needs.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. In your judgment, was the historical shift in emphasis from intentional/isolated discrimination to non-intentional/institutionalised discrimination good or bad? Justify your judgment.
2. Compare and contrast the three main kinds of arguments against tribal and sexual job discrimination. Which of these seem to you to be the strongest and the weakest?  
Can you think of different kinds of arguments not discussed in the text? Are there important differences between tribal discrimination and sexual discrimination?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 2 THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE ORGANISATION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Individuals in the Organisation
  - 3.2 The Rational Organisation
  - 3.3 The Employee's Obligations to the Firm
  - 3.4 The Firm's Duties to the Employee
    - 3.4.1 Wages
    - 3.4.2 Working Conditions: Health and Safety
    - 3.4.3 Working Conditions: Job Satisfaction
  - 3.5 The Political Organisation
  - 3.6 Employee's Rights
  - 3.7 Organisational Politics
    - 3.7.1 Political Tactics in Organisations
    - 3.7.2 The Ethics of Political Tactics
  - 3.8 The Caring Organisation
  - 3.9 The Role of Corporate Whistle-blowers in Corporate Governance
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit explores individuals in the organisation and other problems raised by life within business organisations. The unit is divided into three main parts. The first part begins by describing the traditional model of the organisation: the organisation as a “rational” structure. The following sections then discuss the employee's duties to the firm as defined by this traditional model, and the employer's duties to the employee, again as defined by this model. The second main part of the unit turns to describing a more recent view of the organisation: the organisation as a “political” structure.

The sections in this part of the chapter discuss the two main ethical issues raised by this more recent “political” analysis of the firm: employee rights and organisational politics. The third main part of the chapter discusses a new view of the organisation: the organisation as a network of personal relations focused on caring. The discussion of this third, most recent, and still emerging view is, of necessity, much briefer

than the earlier discussions, which have a much longer history of development.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- examine how proponents of the rational model define a business organisation
- explain conflict of interest and how can it be avoided
- identify factors to be considered when determining fair wages
- explain how the political model of the organisation differs from the rational model of the organisation
- analyse ways in which a modern corporation is like a government
- explain kinds of political tactics that are often encountered in business organisations
- identify the key ethical issues from the perspective of the caring organisation

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 The Individual in the Organisation

The individual in the organisation dwells on 3 main parts of organisation which are:

- The traditional model of an organisation
- The political structure of an organisation
- The organisation as a network of personal relations.

### 3.2 The Rational Organisation

An organisation is the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal, through a division of labour and function and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility.

If the organisation is looked at in this way, then the most fundamental realities of the organisation are the formal hierarchies of authority identified in the organisational chart that represents the various official positions and lines of authority in the organisation.

At the bottom of the organisation is the “operating layer” of employees and their immediate supervisors who directly produce the goods and services that constitute the essential outputs of the

organisation. Above the operating layer of labourers are ascending levels of “middle managers” who direct the units below them and who are in turn directed by those above them in ascending formal lines of authority. At the apex of the pyramid is top management: the board of directors, the chief executive officer, and the CEO’s staff.

The rational model of an organisation supposes that most information is collected from the operating layers of the organisation, rises through the various formal management levels, each of which aggregates the information, until it reaches top management levels. On the basis of this information, the top managers make general policy decisions and issue general commands, which are then passed downward through the formal hierarchy, where they are amplified at each managerial level until they reach the operating layer as detailed work instructions. These decisions of the top managers are assumed to be designed to achieve some known and common economic goal, such as efficiency, productivity, profits, maximum return on investment, and so on. The goal is defined by those at the top of the hierarchy of authority, who are assumed to have a legitimate right to make this decision.

What is the glue that holds together the organisation’s many layers of employees and managers and that fixes these people onto the organisation’s goals and formal hierarchy? Contracts. The model conceives of the employee as an agent who freely and knowingly agreed to accept the organisation’s formal authority and to pursue its goals in exchange for support in the form of a wage and fair working conditions. These contractual agreements cement each employee into the organisation by formally defining each employee’s duties and scope of authority. By virtue of this contractual agreement, the employee has a moral responsibility to obey the employer in the course of pursuing the organisation’s goals, and the organisation in turn has a moral responsibility to provide the employee with the economic support it has promised.

As we have already discussed at some length, when two persons knowingly and freely agree to exchange goods or services with each other, each party to the agreement acquires a moral obligation to fulfill the terms of the contract. Utilitarian theory provides additional support for the view that the employee has an obligation to loyally pursue the goals of the firm: Businesses could not function efficiently and productively if their employees were not single-mindedly devoted to pursuing their firm’s goals. If each employee were free to use the resources of the firm to pursue personal ends, chaos would ensue and everyone’s utility would decline.

The basic ethical responsibilities that emerge from these “rational” aspects of the organisation focus on two reciprocal moral obligations:

- The obligation of the employee to obey organisational superiors, pursue the organisation’s goals, and avoid any activities that might threaten that goal; and
- The obligation of the employer to provide the employee with a fair wage and fair working conditions. These duties in turn are presumed to be defined through the organisation’s formal lines of authority and through the contracts that specify the employee’s duties and working conditions. We examine these two reciprocal duties in turn.

### **3.3 The Employee’s Obligations to the Firm**

In the rational view of the firm, the employee’s main moral duty is to work toward the goals of the firm and avoid any activities that might harm those goals. To be unethical, basically, is to deviate from these goals to serve one’s own interests in ways that, if illegal, are counted as a form of “white-collar crime.”

As administrator of the company’s finances, for example, the financial manager is entrusted with its funds and has the responsibility of managing those funds in a way that will minimise risk while ensuring a suitable rate of return for the company’s shareholders. Financial managers have this contractual duty to the firm and its investors because they have contracted to provide the firm with their best judgment and to exercise their authority only in the pursuit of the goals of the firm and not for their own personal benefit. Financial managers fail in their contractual duty to the firm when they misappropriate funds, when they waste or squander funds, when they are negligent or fraudulent in the preparation of financial statements, when they issue false or misleading reports, and so on.

These traditional views of the employee’s duties to the firm have made their way into the “law of agency” that is, the law that specifies the legal duties of “agents” (e.g., employees) toward their “principals” (e.g., employers). The “restatement” of the law of agency, for example, states that “an agent is subject to a duty to his principal to act solely for the benefit of the principal in all matters connected with his agency”; and prohibits the agent from acting “for persons whose interests conflict with those of the principal in matters in which the agent is employed.” In short, the employee must pursue the goals of the firm and must do nothing that conflict with those goals while working for the firm.

There are several ways in which the employee might fail to live up to the duty to pursue the goals of the firm: The employee might act on a



“conflict of interest,” the employee might steal from the firm, or the employee might use the position as leverage to force illicit benefits out of others through extortion or commercial bribery.

### **3.4 The Firm’s Duties to the Employee**

The basic moral obligation that the employer has toward employees, according to the rational view of the firm, is to provide them with the compensation they have freely and knowingly agreed to receive in exchange for their services. There are two main issues related to this obligation: the fairness of wages and the fairness of employee working conditions. Both wages and working conditions are aspects of the compensation employees receive from their services, and both are related to the question of whether the employee contracted to take a job freely and knowingly. If an employee was “forced” to accept a job with inadequate wages or inadequate working conditions, then the work contract would be unfair.

#### **3.4.1 Wages**

From the employee’s point of view, wages are the principal (perhaps the only) means for satisfying the basic economic needs of the worker and the worker's family. From the employer's point of view, wages are a cost of production that must be kept down lest the product be priced out of the market. Therefore, every employer faces the dilemma of setting fair wages: How can a fair balance be struck between the employer's interests in minimising costs and the workers’ interest in providing a decent living for themselves and their families?

Although there is no way to determine fair salaries with mathematical exactitude, we can at least identify a number of factors that should be taken into account in determining wages and salaries in most countries.

- The going wage in the industry and the area: Although labour markets in an industry or an area may be manipulated or distorted (e.g., by job shortages), they generally provide at least rough indicators of fair wages if they are competitive and if we assume competitive markets are just. In addition, the cost of living in the area must be taken into account if employees are to be provided with an income adequate to their families' needs. In developing nations employers should ensure that wages enable employees to live reasonably and to provide for their families.
- The firm’s capabilities: In general, the higher the firm’s profits, the more it can and should pay its workers; the smaller its profits, the less it can afford. Taking advantage of cheap labour in captive

markets-such as those found in many developing nations-when a company is perfectly capable of paying higher wages is exploitation.

- The nature of the job: Jobs that involve greater health risks, offer less security, require more training or experience, impose heavier physical or emotional burdens, or take greater effort should carry higher levels of compensation.
- Minimum wage laws: The minimum wages required by law set a floor for wages. In most circumstances, wages that fall beneath this floor are unfair. Minimum wage laws should be respected even if government does not enforce those minimums.
- Relation to other salaries: If the salary structure within an organisation is to be fair, workers who do roughly similar ~~work~~ should receive to force wage concessions out of a wholly dependent community, or when a union “blackmails” a failing company with a strike that is certain to send the firm into bankruptcy, the resulting wages have little likelihood of being fair.
- The fairness of wage negotiations: Salaries and wages that result from “unfree” negotiations in which one side uses fraud, power, ignorance, deceit, or passion to get its way will rarely be fair. For example, when the management of a company uses the threat of relocation. The nature of the job; Jobs that involve greater health risks, offer less security, require more training or experience, impose heavier physical or emotional burdens, or take greater effort should carry higher levels of compensation.
- Local costs of living: The goods and services that a family needs to meet their basic needs (food, housing, clothing, transportation, child care, and education) differ from one geographical region to another. Wages should be sufficient to enable a family of four to meet their basic needs (taking into account whether families in the region are traditionally one-wage or two-wage families), even if such wages would be above the minimum wage.

### **3.4.2 Working Conditions: Health and Safety**

Each year many workers are killed and more are injured as a result of job accidents. Ten per cent of the job force suffers a job-related injury

or illness each year. Delayed occupational diseases resulting from exposure to chemical and physical hazards kill off additional numbers.

Workplace hazards include not only the more obvious categories of mechanical injury, electrocution, and burns but also extreme heat and cold, noisy machinery, rock dust, textile fiber dust, chemical fumes, mercury, lead, beryllium, arsenic, corrosives, poisons, skin irritants, and radiation.

Risk is, of course, an unavoidable part of many occupations. A race-car driver, a circus performer, and a rodeo cowboy all accept certain hazards as part of their jobs. If an employer (a) takes reasonably adequate measures both to inform itself and the workers about workplace risks and to eliminate workplace risks, and (b) fully compensates and insures workers for assuming risks that cannot be eliminated, and (c) workers freely and knowingly accept those remaining risks in exchange for the added compensation, then we may generally conclude that the employer has acted ethically. The basic problem, however, is that in many hazardous occupations, these conditions do not obtain.

- Wages' will fail to provide a level of compensation proportional to the risks of a job when labour markets in an industry are not competitive or when markets do not register risks because the risks are not yet known. In some rural mining areas, for example, a single mining company may have a monopoly on jobs. The health risks involved in mining or using a certain mineral, such as manganese, may not be known until many years afterward. In such cases, wages will not fully compensate for risks.
- Workers might accept risks unknowingly because they do not have adequate access to information concerning those risks. Collecting information on the risks of handling certain chemicals, for example, takes a great deal of time, effort, and money. Determining the dangers of manganese, for example, took many years of studies. Therefore, workers acting individually may find it too costly to collect the information needed to assess the risks of the jobs they accept.
- Workers might accept known risks out of desperation because they lack the mobility to enter other, less risky industries or because they lack information on the alternatives available to them. Low-income manganese miners or welders, for example, may know the hazards inherent in breathing manganese vapors. However, because they lack the resources needed to look elsewhere, they may be forced to accept the job they have or starve.

When any of the three conditions obtain, the contract between employer and employee is no longer fair. The employer has a duty, in such cases,

to take steps to ensure that the worker is not being unfairly manipulated into accepting a risk unknowingly, unwillingly, or without due compensation. Assuming that the employer has eliminated all workplace health and safety hazards that violate local laws and has eliminated all other hazards that can be eliminated with a reasonable investment, then:

- If any workplace health and safety risks cannot be eliminated at a reasonable cost, the employer has an obligation to fund studies of those risks, to clearly and explicitly inform workers of the risks, particularly those involving health and life, and an obligation to compensate workers for any injuries they sustain.
- Employers should offer wages that reflect the risk-premiums prevalent in other similar but competitive labour markets, so that workers are adequately compensated for the risks their jobs involve.
- To insure their workers against unknown hazards, the employer should provide them with suitable health insurance programmes and suitable disability insurance.
- Employers have an obligation (working singly or together with other firms) to collect information on the health hazards that accompany a given job and make all such information available to workers

### **3.4.3 Working Conditions: Job Satisfaction**

The rational parts of the organisation put a high value on efficiency: All jobs and tasks are to be designed so as to achieve the organisation's goals as efficiently as possible. When efficiency is achieved through specialisation, the rational aspects of organisations tend to incorporate highly specialised jobs.

Jobs can be specialised along two dimensions. Jobs can be specialized horizontally by restricting the range of different tasks contained in the job and increasing the repetition of this narrow range of tasks.

Jobs can also be specialised vertically by restricting the range of control and decision making over the activity that the job involves. Whereas the job of the spot-welder is highly specialized vertically, the job of the plant manager is much less vertically specialised.

Job specialisation is most obvious at the operating levels of organisations. Assembly-line work usually consists of closely supervised, repetitive, and simple tasks. Low-level clerical jobs also tend to be fragmented, repetitive, dull, and closely monitored,

The debilitating effects that job specialisation can have on workers were first noted over 200 years ago by Adam Smith:

In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations, frequently to one or two. But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations has no occasion to exert his understanding. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. . It corrupts even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance, in any other employment than that to which he has been bred.

Not all workers are equally affected by job specialisation. Older workers and workers in large urban areas seem to show more tolerance for routine monotonous jobs apparently because older workers scale down their expectations over the years and urban workers reject the Puritan work ethic and prefer not to become involved in their work. Nonetheless, only 24 per cent of all blue-collar workers would choose the same type of work if they could start all over again-an indication that a substantial portion of workers do not find their jobs intrinsically satisfying.

The injuries that highly specialised work has on the well-being of workers pose an important problem of justice for employees. The most narrowly specialised forms of work are those that require the least skills (because one of the functions of specialisation is to dispense with the need for training). Unskilled labour, of course, commands the lowest levels of compensation. As a consequence, the psychological costs of dull, meaningless, and repetitive work tend to be borne by the group of workers that is paid least: unskilled labourers. Not only may the injuries of specialisation be inequitable, they are also often related to a lack of freedom. Unskilled workers often have no real freedom of choice: They must either accept work that is meaningless and debilitating or else not work at all. Therefore, the freedom that is essential to a fair work contract is often absent.

Excessive job specialisation is undesirable for other reasons than that it places unjust burdens on workers. There is also considerable evidence that it does not contribute to efficiency. Research findings have demonstrated that there is a linkage between worker productivity and programmes that improve the quality of work life for workers by giving workers greater involvement in and control over a variety of work tasks

How should these problems of job dissatisfaction and mental injury be dealt with? Hackman, Oldham, Jansen, and Purdy have argued that there are three determinants of job satisfaction:

- Experienced Meaningfulness: The individual must perceive his work as worthwhile or important by some system of values he accepts.
- Experienced Responsibility: He must believe that he is personally accountable for the outcome of his efforts.
- Knowledge of Results: He must be able to determine, on some regular basis, whether the outcomes of his work are satisfactory.

To influence these three determinants, jobs must be expanded along five dimensions:

- Skill Variety: The degree to which a job requires the worker to perform activities that challenge his skills and abilities.
- Task Identity: The degree to which the job requires a completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work-doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome.
- Task Significance: The degree to which the job has a substantial and perceivable impact on lives of other people, whether in the immediate organisation or the world at large.
- Autonomy: The degree to which the job gives the worker freedom, independence, and discretion in scheduling work and determining how he will carry it out.
- Feedback: The degree to which a worker, in carrying out the work activities required by the job, gets information about the effectiveness of his efforts.

In short, the solution to job dissatisfaction is perceivable enlargement of the narrowly specialised jobs that give rise to dissatisfaction: broadening the job “horizontally” by giving the employee a wider variety of tasks and deepening the job “vertically” by allowing the employee perceivable control over these tasks. For example, jobs can be horizontally enlarged by replacing single workers performing single repetitive tasks with teams of three or four who are jointly responsible for the complete assembly of a certain number of machines. Such team jobs can be vertically enlarged by delegating to the team the responsibility of determining their own work assignments, work breaks, and inspection procedures.

### 3.5 The Political Organisation

The political analysis of the organisation that we now sketch is a more recently developed view of organisations than the rational analysis.

Unlike the rational model, the political model of the organisation does not look merely at the formal lines of authority and communication within an organisation nor does it presume that all organisational behaviour is rationally designed to achieve an objective and a given economic goal such as profitability or productivity. Instead, the political model of the organisation sees the organisation as a system of competing power coalitions and formal and informal lines of influence and communication that radiate from these coalitions.

In place of the neat hierarchy of the rational model, the political model postulates a messier and more complex network of clustered power relationships and criss-crossing communication channels.

In the political model of the organisation, individuals are seen as grouping together to form coalitions that then compete with each other for resources, benefits, and influence. Consequently, the “goals” of the organisation are those established by the historically most powerful or dominant coalition. Goals are not given by “rightful” authority, but are bargained for among more or less powerful coalitions. The fundamental organisational reality, according to this model, is not formal authority or contractual relationship, but power: the ability of the individual (or group of individuals) to modify the conduct of others in a desired way without having one's own conduct modified in undesired ways.

Behaviour within an organisation may not be aimed at rational organisational goals such as efficiency or productivity, and both power and information may travel completely outside (even contrary to) formal lines of authority and communication. Nonetheless, formal managerial authority and formal communication networks provide rich sources of power.

The formal authority and sanctions put in the hands of superiors are a basic source of the power they wield over subordinates.

If we focus on power as the basic organisational reality, then the main ethical problems we will see when we look at an organisation are problems connected with the acquisition and exercise of power. The central ethical issues will focus not on the contractual obligations of employers and employees (as the rational model would focus them), but on the moral constraints to which the use of power within organisations must be subjected. The ethics of organisational behaviour as seen from the perspective of the political model focus on this question: What are the moral limits, if any, to the exercise of power within organisations? In the sections that follow, we will discuss two aspects of this question:

- What, if any, are the moral limits to the power managers acquire and

exercise over their subordinates?

- What, if any, are the moral limits to the power employees acquire and exercise on each other?

### 3.6 Employee Rights

Observers of corporations have repeatedly pointed out that the power of modern corporate management is much like that of a **Government**. Governments are defined in terms of four features: (a) a centralised decision-making body of officials who (b) have the power and recognized authority to enforce their decisions on subordinates (citizens); these officials (c) make decisions that determine the public distribution of social resources, benefits, and burdens among their subordinates, and (d) they have a monopoly on the power to which their subordinates are subject. These same four features, observers have argued, also characterise the managerial hierarchies that run large corporations:

- (a) Like a city, state, or federal government, the top managers of a corporation constitute a centralised decision-making body;
- (b) These managers wield power and legally recognised authority over their employees—a power that is based on their ability to fire, demote, or promote employees and an authority that is based on the law of agency that stands ready to recognise and enforce managerial decisions;
- (c) The decisions of managers determine the distribution of income, status, and freedom among the corporation's constituencies; and
- (d) Through the law of agency and contract, through their access to government agencies, and through the economic leverage they possess, managers of large corporations effectively share in the monopoly on power that political governments possess.

These analogies between governments and managements, several observers have held, show that the power managers have over their employees is fully comparable to the power government officials have over their citizens. Consequently, if there are moral limits to the power government officials may legitimately exercise over citizens, then there are similar moral limits that should constrain the power of managers. In particular, just as the power of government should respect the **rights** of citizens, so the power of managers must respect the moral rights of employees. What are these employee rights? The moral rights of employees would be similar to the civil rights of citizens: the right to privacy, the right to consent, the right to freedom of speech, and so on.

The major objection to this view of employee rights is that there are a number of important differences between the power of corporate



managers and the power of government officials, and these differences undercut the argument that the power of managers should be limited by employee rights comparable to the civil rights that limit the power of government.

First, the power of government officials (in theory at least) is based on consent, whereas the power of corporate managers is (in theory again) based on ownership. Government officials rule because they have been elected or because they have been appointed by someone who has been elected; corporate managers rule (if that is the right word) because they own the firm for which workers freely choose to work or because they have been appointed by the owners of the firm. Consequently, because the power of government rests on the consent of the governed, that power can legitimately be limited when the governed choose to limit it. However, because the power of managers rests on ownership of the firm, they have the right to impose whatever conditions they choose to impose on employees, who freely and knowingly contracted to work on their firm's premises.

Second, the power of corporate managers, unlike that of most government officials, is effectively limited by unions: Most blue-collar and some white-collar workers belong to a union that provides them with a degree of countervailing power that limits the power of management. Accordingly, moral rights need not be invoked to protect the interests of employees.

Third, whereas a citizen can escape the power of a particular government only at great cost (by changing citizenship), an employee can escape the owner of a particular management with considerable ease (by changing jobs). Because of the relatively high costs of changing citizenship, citizens need civil rights that can insulate them from the inescapable power of government. They do not need similar employee rights to protect them from the power of a corporation whose influence is easily escaped.

Advocates of employee rights have responded to these three objections in a number of ways: First, they claim, corporate assets are no longer controlled by private owners; they are now held by a dispersed and almost powerless group of stockholders. This kind of dispersed ownership implies that managers no longer function as agents of the firm's owners and, consequently, that their power no longer rests on property rights. Second, although some workers are unionised, many are not, and these non unionised workers have moral rights that managers do not always respect. Third, changing jobs is sometimes as difficult and traumatic as changing citizenship, especially for the

employee who has acquired specialised skills that can be used within a specific organisation.

There is, then, a continuing controversy over the adequacy of the general argument that, because managements are like governments, the same civil rights that protect citizens must also protect employees. Regardless of whether this general argument is accepted, a number of independent arguments have been advanced to show that employees have certain particular rights that managers should respect.

### 3.7 Organisational Politics

In this course material, we shall be looking at political tactics in organisations and its ethics.

#### 3.7.1 Political Tactics in Organisations

There is no settled definition of organisational politics. For our purposes, however, we can adopt the following definition: the processes in which individuals or groups within an organisation use non formally sanctioned power tactics to advance their own aims; we call such tactics political tactics. A word of caution is necessary, lest the reader interpret their own aims to mean “aims in conflict with the best interests of the organisation.” Although the aims of a coalition in a firm may conflict with the best interests of the firm (a problem we will examine later), such conflict is neither inevitable nor even, perhaps, frequent. Factors tend to suppress such conflicts:

- (a) The careers of individuals often depend on the health of their organisations;
- (b) Long-time association with an organisation tends to generate bonds of loyalty to the organisation. Often, therefore, what one person perceives as a conflict between a certain group’s aims and the best interests of the organisation is in fact a conflict between the beliefs of that person and the beliefs of the group concerning what the “best interests” of the organisation are. The group may genuinely believe that X is in the best interests of both the organisation and itself, whereas the person may genuinely believe instead that Y, which conflicts with X, is what is in the best interests of the organisation.

Because organisational politics aim at advancing the interests of one individual or group (such as acquiring promotions, salary or budgets, status, or even more power) by exerting non formally sanctioned power over other individuals or groups, political individuals tend to be covert about their underlying intents or methods.

The fact that political tactics are usually covert means that they can easily become deceptive or manipulative. This is evident if we examine more examples of organisational political tactics.

### **3.7.2 The Ethics of Political Tactics**

Obviously, political behaviour in an organisation can easily become abusive: Political tactics can be used to advance private interests at the expense of organisational and group interests, they can be manipulative and deceptive, and they can seriously injure those who have little or no political power or expertise. However, political tactics can also be put to the service of organisational and social goals, they may sometimes be necessary to protect the powerless, and they are sometimes the only defense a person has against the manipulative and deceptive tactics of others. The dilemma for the individual in an organisation is knowing where the line lies that separates morally legitimate and necessary political tactics from those that are unethical.

Very few authors have examined this dilemma. This is unfortunate because although few organisations are totally pervaded by political behaviour, it is also the case that no organisation is free of it. We are all political animals even if our political campaigns are largely confined to the office. Here we only start to analyse the many complex ethical issues raised by the political maneuvering that inevitably goes on within organisations. The issues can best be approached by addressing four questions that can focus our attention on the morally relevant features of using political tactics:

- (a) The utilitarian question: Are the goals one intends to achieve by the use of the tactics socially beneficial or socially harmful?
- (b) The rights question: Do the political tactics used as means to these goals treat others in a manner consistent with their moral rights?
- (c) The justice question: Will the political tactics lead to an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens?
- (d) The caring question: What impact will the political tactics have on the web of relationships within the organisation?

### **3.8 The Caring Organisation**

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