

COMMON ETHICAL INTUITIONS

❖ The Golden Rule: A Global Ethical Principle

The Golden Rule expresses a fundamental maxim for living on friendly terms with others and can be formulated in colloquial terms as 'Put yourself in the place of the other' or 'Treat others as you would like to be treated.' A more accurate developed articulation might read: 'Treat others only as you would be willing to be treated in an identical situation.'

As the Golden Rule has been formulated by people belonging to different cultures and religions we are alerted to the capacity of human rationality to discover basic principles of morality, principles that permit humans to live together in a harmonious and peaceful way.

❖ Common Values and Virtues in the Main Religions

The Interfaith Declaration, composed in the capital of Jordan by theologians, academics and prominent business figures in 1993, identifies four key concepts or principles presented in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: (1) justice (fairness); (2) mutual respect (love and consideration); (3) stewardship (trusteeship); and (4) honesty (truthfulness)

Dalla Costa suggests that five core values (norms) emerge from two other religious declarations-The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions' (1993) and 'The Tie That Binds' (1991)- which are not dissimilar: respect life, be fair, be honest, strive for justice and honour the environment.

Moses and Lewis have identified some values common to most great world religions and wisdom traditions. They include respect for persons (Golden Rule), following one's conscience, beneficence and avoidance of malice, justice, equity, trustworthiness, truthfulness, honesty, caring, mercy (compassion), generosity, hospitality, peace, unity of humanity, stewardship, wealth sharing, magnanimity and moderation.

Psychologists Peterson and Seligman sought to identify common character strengths by studying globally influential religious and philosophical traditions. The authors found six encompassing virtues- wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance (moderation) and transcendence-which frame 24 character strengths.

❖ Human Rights Declarations

Common intuitions can also be found in the secular world, with one being the wide global consensus on the need to respect human rights.

At present, the best known and most influential document on the subject is probably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, shortly after the Second World War and the notorious Nazi human rights violations.

Although human rights declarations are relatively recent, there is no doubt that underlying them there are common elements of morality; in particular, respect for the person.

HUMAN DIGNITY

Each human is someone unique and irrepressible; not 'something' but 'someone'; not an anonymous subject but one with a rich inner life, social links and a biography; not a 'what' but a 'who?'

Human beings have a spiritual dimension expressed in their rationality and also in their self-consciousness, a capacity for self-determination and openness to nature and transcendence.

All of this leads to recognition of a great excellence in every human individual, a being that is intrinsically worthy. This is the sense of the concept of 'human dignity'.

The term 'person' not only expresses the uniqueness of every human being but also denotes dignity, meaning excellence, which deserves honour and respect. As Kant pointed out, things have a price; persons have dignity: In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what on the other hand is above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity.

Human dignity is 'constitutive'. This means that every human being has an intrinsic value, regardless of race, age, sex or any other particular condition and also independent of any legal recognition (or lack thereof). Other types of dignity associated with a role might be lost (for example, a judge) through corrupt conduct while acting in the role, but human dignity can never be lost, because it is inherent to the person.

PERSONALIST PRINCIPLE

Recognizing that every person has an intrinsic worth commands respect for human dignity of each and for his or her rights. Additionally, recognizing others as similar to oneself requires rational benevolent love.

This leads us to enunciate the 'Personalist Principle' in these terms:

The person is the kind of being towards whom the proper response is LOVE. Anything else is Utilitarianism.

While the requirements of the Personalist Principle to respect people are very specific, other aspects of rational benevolent love are quite open and cannot easily be expressed in rigid norms. Practical wisdom is essential in order to determine the best course of action in each situation.

On the one hand, acting with benevolence requires some prioritising since material resources and personal effort to take actions are limited. One criterion is to prioritise people closest to oneself, considering those belonging to the same community and those others who have more relational proximity.

COMMON GOOD

The common good means shared goods necessary for a good life (human flourishing).

It is defined as *the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.*

The common good consists of three essential elements:

- Respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person
- Prosperity or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society
- The peace and security of the group and of its members

Common Good Principle can be formulated as follows:

Every social or economic system, institution, community or social activity finds its moral legitimacy for its contribution to the common good - the good of all persons and of the whole person.

Closely related to the common good principle are three more principles: those of solidarity, subsidiarity and participation.

❖ **Solidarity Principle**

The Solidarity Principle refers to the obligation to contribute to the common good and can be formulated as follows:

Groups and persons ought to contribute to the common good of the community in accordance with their respective capacity and avoid anything contrary to this good.

❖ **Subsidiarity Principle**

While solidarity emphasises the sociability of the human being, subsidiarity centres on freedom and on the necessity of respecting and favouring individual talents and initiative to contribute to the common good of the community.

This leads us to formulate the Subsidiarity Principle as:

A larger and higher-ranking body should not exercise functions that could be efficiently carried out by a smaller and lesser body; rather, the former should support the latter and coordinate its activities, always towards the common good

❖ **Participation Principle**

In addition to the duty of building up the community (solidarity) and respecting people's initiative (subsidiarity), those who are members of a community should be heard and in some way contribute to making sound decisions for the life of the community.

The Participation Principle can be formulated as:

Those who belong to a community have the right and duty to be heard and participate, in some direct or indirect way, in decisions regarding the community in matters related to their life and situation.

STEWARDSHIP

Human goods entail an appropriate relationship with nature. However, the sensitivity for this issue has not always been too high. In fact, many generations have considered the natural environment a mere raw resource for the creation of wealth.

A different perspective is to see nature as being endowed with beauty and a rich biodiversity, with a multiplicity of identities and significant interconnectedness with a notable order. The ancient Greeks coined the expression 'cosmos' precisely to designate this order of nature.

Human activity requires caring for the environment by assuming a sense of responsibility as stewards of the Earth. This is the foundation of the Stewardship Principle, which can be formulated as follows:

Human activity should be harmonised by respecting the environment and caring for it as responsible stewards

ETERNAL LAW & NATURAL LAW

Eternal Law

Eternal Law has been described in many ways but we can say it is simply a law that cannot be added or anything cannot be taken away from this law as it is constant and everlasting.

According to Thomas Aquinas, he bases this law on the concept of creation, hence we can say it is the rule established by divine wisdom that directs all acts and operations.

It is the divine plan due to which creatures fulfil their functions in a particular way according to their nature and the laws that govern their activities.

Eternal law guides all creatures towards their end goal and it directs us through our intellect and will.

Examples:

- The Ten Commandments
- The beatitudes
- The commandment to love one another
- Canon law (Law of the Church)
- The old Law (The law of Moses)

Natural Law

The natural law is a rational law because it is proper to man to have intelligence and **it includes all the clear and elementary norms of morality that all men can know through the light of reason alone.**

It contains all the goods and the essential goals that the person ought to attain and to respect in order to reach his overall perfection and attain his final goal.

The natural law is universal and unchangeable.

It can also be defined as a group of norms that guide man in an upright manner.

The natural inclinations towards what is good for the human person may be considered to be the following:

- Conservation of life; this leads to defending one's life and avoiding all that can put one in danger.
- To be fruitful
- The human person as a rational being tends to go beyond himself and to establish relations of knowledge and love with everything around him.

The first basic and universal principle for this law is that "one must do good and avoid evil"

Various practical consequences of the essential properties

1. Natural law is always the same and it doesn't change according to the accidental circumstances of man's life
2. Natural law does not depend on what the majority think about something but rather, it is based on what ought to be done according to the right reason.
3. Natural law is not created or invented by human beings. It is simply a reflection of human nature, which is the same for all people.
4. Natural law applies to all people, regardless of their religious beliefs or political convictions. Natural law is a moral norm that affects every human being, simply because they are human. It is a universal principle that can be derived from human nature itself.

Right Reason as a Moral Guide

Reason is general; it can be right or wrong.

The right reason comes about when it adapts itself to and contains truth. Right reason, is reason that has grasped the truth.

Reason becomes upright when it knows the truth, discovers and respects the order to be found in the world, as it is in reality.

Right reason is illuminated by the first principles of the moral order, synderesis (the need to do good and to avoid evil)

Therefore, acting according to the right reason is when a person is acting freely in accord with the truth about himself as a human person; this acting will be morally good.

Reason and Moral Law

Natural light of practical reason reaches some knowledge through immediate evidence, first apprehension of the first principles and general content of the virtues.

Synderesis guides our rational activity so that our free acts are coherent with the full truth about our human nature.

In affirming whether a moral idea belongs to natural law is that the idea should have a connection with the first principles and virtues. If a connection exists, we have a rule, if not, then we give an ethical-positive disposition established by an authority, government, religion etc.

MORAL CONSCIENCE & PARTICULAR MORAL KNOWLEDGE

Universal moral knowledge is a form of wisdom that moves us to evaluate specific situations in which good or bad should be considered.

The conscience is the mediator of Natural law and specific action. It is used to bridge the distance between the universal moral law and specific human acts.

A human being has experiences that help us evaluate whether their action is right or wrong. It is part of the mechanism that helps us to make decisions.

An individual makes this judgement by himself (no one can make it for him) starting from the objective moral law. This judgement starts by comparing the act with the moral law and then with the set goal.

Moral experience - person realises whether the act is good and whether it should be done.

The human being lives not with the satisfaction of what he already is, but rather in hope of what he ought to become (action and potency). In Ethics, we see that the path of man is towards his own fulfilment as a person (self-actualization), while the conscience is the light that guides man along his path, warning him of acts that help him keep his dignity and the ones that destroy it.

The intellect is the faculty that helps us know the morality of our actions. Moreover, we get to see that the conscience is an act of the intellect because it helps man to determine whether specific acts correspond to our final goals.

The judgement made by the conscience (either right or wrong) depends on the universal moral knowledge that the person has acquired about the moral value of any act.

This means that the conscience is the reference point that a person can find for their conduct. What is known by the moral action is precisely the act that will be done and its positive or negative call to freedom which we may accept or reject an act.

PARTICULAR MORAL KNOWLEDGE

Conscience is taken to be an arbitrary judgement about good and bad, which is actually not the case. **It is based on the person's knowledge of the objective moral law.**

The person discovers and takes the universal moral law as a guide for judging the goodness or badness of his specific actions. *For instance, with the universal moral law, I know that it is bad to lie. Therefore if I lie, I will know for sure that I have done something wrong because I am aware of my actions.*

The moral conscience is a specific judgement about a particular act, that is emitted based on the person's universal moral knowledge.

Therefore, once the person knows what is good and desires what is good, he has to think out the specific requirements that the good brings along with it. (From experience, reading in advance has helped me, why not do it again?)

In the process of thinking of these very requirements, we acquire the knowledge of the main truths about what is good for man and his conduct.

It is a form of speculative knowledge in this manner; it does not make us use our energy to think about it, instead, it is the fruit of our own moral dispositions.

Nonetheless, we see that the knowledge of the first moral principles, or synderesis, work hand in hand. These two combine to form the moral judgement on whether or not to do the act.

Synderesis formulates the universal proposition, like 'one ought not to lie'. The conscience will then analyse whether that specific act is a bad action. The conclusion will therefore be that since the act is bad, it should be avoided (the conscience illuminates the action).

However much the knowledge of such things makes sense, we need the virtue of prudence because it applies the general principles of synderesis, moral knowledge and the practical rules of experience to the particular act, in order to ascertain the moral value of the act.

Through prudence, the person will have discovered the moral value of the specific act, the act of judgement about whether or not to do the act may be carried out by the conscience.

There is some sort of intervention in gaining knowledge of the moral value of particular acts, as seen: Moral knowledge applies the general principle to a particular type of act; 'lying should be avoided'. Prudence considers the moral value of a specific act; 'this is lying'. Conscience makes it a judgement; 'I ought to avoid this act'.

Types of Conscience

1. Timing of act

In terms of how conscience relates to the timing of an act, it may be:

- **Antecedent:** When one makes a moral judgement before carrying out a free act, in order to command, advise, permit & prohibit an act
- **Consequent:** When a moral judgement is made about an act after its done in order to approve of it and enjoy satisfaction, or to condemn the act and experience sorrow remorse

2. Moral Law

In terms of how judgement of conscience conforms to the moral law, it may be:

- **True or Right:** When the goodness or badness has been judged in a way that conforms to and respects the moral law
- **Erroneous or False:** When the moral judgement made by the conscience doesn't agree with the moral law because it considers a bad act to be good or vice versa

3. Judgement made by Conscience

- **Sure or Certain:** The conscience judges firmly that an act is good or bad, without fear of erring
- **Probable:** The person doesn't have complete certainty about the morality of the act, the conscience indicates that probably, one of the possibilities is true
- **Doubtful:** The fear of making a mistake moves the conscience to suspend its judgement on the goodness or badness of an act

Principles for following one's Conscience

1. **Only the sure or certain conscience is a rule of morality that must be followed:** This principle suggests that individuals should follow their conscience when they are sure or certain about the moral rightness or wrongness of an action. It implies that one should not act in opposition to what their conscience deems certain in matters of morality.
2. To be a rule of morality, as well as being certain, **the conscience must be true or invincibly erroneous:** Not only must one be certain about their moral judgement, but their conscience should also be based on truth. If one's conscience is in error, it must be a type of error that they cannot reasonably overcome (invincible error) for it to serve as a valid guide for moral decision-making.
3. **The conscience that judges erroneously while being able to overcome that error is not a legitimate rule of morality:** This principle asserts that if a person's conscience is in error and they have the capacity to correct that error through reasonable means, then they are morally obliged to do so. In other words, individuals should strive to align their conscience with moral truth when possible.
4. **It is illicit to act with a doubtful conscience** because one can possibly act badly: This principle cautions against acting with a doubtful conscience, as doing so may lead to potentially immoral actions. When in doubt about the moral implications of a choice, it is considered ethically preferable to seek clarity and ensure that one's actions align with moral principles.

The formation of a moral conscience

The human person develops a sense of what is right and what is wrong through the knowledge and information that is received from other people.

The conscience begins very early on in life, from infancy, when we begin to interact with other people in a more personal and conscious way.

The sense of right or wrong, especially in children, loses value if it is not demonstrated among the adults in authority. The sensitivity of a child's conscience is dulled and becomes deformed if they learn to habitually lie as a result of watching adults lie or from the fear of

being punished, learn to lie. To avoid this in young, developing humans, it is crucial for everyone to consciously acquire moral knowledge as they grow.

The basic knowledge of right from wrong is the necessary basis for the human conscience to function, precisely because its task is not to judge the moral law in itself, but rather to apply it in particular cases.

It becomes clear that a person has the obligation to form their conscience, so as to be able to apply it in the judgement of conscience and act in a humanly way.

The task of educating our conscience is ongoing in our lives and is connected to our growing knowledge of the truth; if the intellect can get to know the truth more and more then the moral judgement a person makes is better.

We have to make an effort to acquire the necessary moral knowledge in order to be able to apply these ethical principles to our acts.