



Professional Ethics SS-301

Lecture 7

Ethic of Self-interest–

Customs and religion, Islamic Approach to Ethics and Theories about right action

Dr. Rana Muhammad Asad Khan
Assistant Professor

masadkhan87@gmail.com, asad.khan@fcm3,paf-iastr.edu.pk

03314438163

Ethic of Self-Interest

- **Self-interest** generally refers to a focus on the needs or desires (interests) of one's self.
- Most times, actions that display self-interest are often performed without conscious knowing.
- A number of **philosophical, psychological, and economic** theories examine the role of self-interest in motivating human action.
- Individuals may have a self-serving bias towards their self-interest.

Philosophical concepts concerned with self-interest

- Enlightened self-interest, a philosophy which states that acting to further the interests of others also serves one's own self-interest.
- It is a way to create good for self and good for all at the same time.
- for example, is "I will not steal because if I steal then others may steal from me and the creation of a thieving society will likely hurt me".

Philosophical concepts concerned with self-interest

- Hedonism, the school of ethics which argues that pleasure and happiness are most beneficial outcome of an action.
- Individualism, a philosophy stressing the worth of individual selves.
- Ethical egoism, to which moral decision making should be guided entirely by self-interest. Advancing one's self-interest is the underlying motive of all human action.
- Rational egoism, a person should do what leads to their own personal long-term happiness.

Psychological concepts concerned with self-interest

Psychological egoism is the view that humans are always motivated by **self-interest and selfishness**, even in what seem to be acts of altruism.

It claims that, when people choose to help others, they do so ultimately because of the personal **benefits that they themselves expect to obtain, directly or indirectly, from doing so.**



Altruism: disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others ⁵



Self interest in business

- focuses on actions or activities that are advantageous to an individual or organization.
- For a business or individual to survive and grow, a degree of self-interest is necessary.
- When there is too much focus on self-interest, the benefits of the group at large **diminishes.**



Self interest in business

Leadership

- top managers who were concerned about meeting their quotas

In this case, the top managers put their own self-interest, i.e. desire for money and personal gain, above the well-being of their employees, and the reputation of the company they work for.

Self interest in business

Innovation

desire to create the world's first aircraft was based primarily on his own self-interest rather than to improve humanity.

Eventually, the Wright brothers were able to accomplish this task of creating the first flying machine in 1903.

Even they were motivated by the fortune and fame that came with the feat.

In this case, the brothers' self-interest benefited humanity for decades to come.

Self interest in business



Conflict of interest

- Managers are tasked with the responsibility of hiring new employees for open positions.
- When these managers choose to give these positions to friends or family, instead of the most qualified person for the job;
- it can be a result of the manager's desire to create a better situation for people in their family, thus appealing to their own self-interest.
- **Bribes**, i.e. when a store manager takes a bribe from an eager sales representative to close a deal.
- Perhaps accepting bribes is against the store's policy, but a store manager may make a deal because it is to his own personal benefit to do.

**Can we be
Ethical without
being Religious?**



Religious Beliefs & Customs

- Globally, the most popular religions are:
 - Christianity – followed by roughly 37.5% of the world's population
 - Islam – 23.2%
 - Hinduism 15%
 - Buddhism 7.1%
 - Other 5.9%
- 
- 

Role of religion in ethics

- Religions have played major roles in shaping moral views and moral values, over geographical regions.
- Christianity has influenced the Western countries
- Islam in the Middle-East countries
- Buddhism and Hinduism in Asia, and Confucianism in China
- **There is a strong psychological link between the moral and religious beliefs of people following various religions and faiths.**
- *Religions support moral responsibility*
- They have set high moral standards.
- Faith in the religions provides trust and this trust inspires people to be moral

Role of religion in ethics

- *The religions insist on tolerance and moral concern for others.*
- *Many professionals who possess religious beliefs are motivated to be morally responsible*

Role of religion in ethics

- Each religion lays stress on certain high moral standards. For example,
- **Hinduism** holds polytheistic (many gods) view, and virtues of devotion and trust
- **Christianity** believes in one deity and emphasizes on virtues of Love, Faith, and Hope.
- **Buddhism** is non-theistic and focuses on compassion
- **Islam** on one deity and adherence of piety or pursuit of excellence and prayer.

Role of religion in ethics

- **Judaism** stresses the virtue of 'tsedakah' (righteousness).
- Many religious sects have adopted poor moral standards, e.g., many religious sects do not recognize equal rights for women.
- The right to worship is denied for some people.
- People are killed in the name of or to promote religion.
- Thus, conflicts exist between the 'secular' and religious people and between one religion and another

Golden Rule

Virtually all of the world's great religions contain in their religious texts some version of the Golden Rule:

“Do unto others as you would wish them do unto you”.

In other words, we should treat others the way we would want to be treated.

This is the basic ethic that guides all religions. If we do so, happiness will ensue.

Islamic Approach to Ethics

- From an Islamic point of view, ethics is related to several Arabic terms.
- These terms are as follows:
 - ma'ruf (approved),
 - khayr (goodness),
 - haqq (truth and right),
 - birr (righteousness),
 - qist (equity),
 - 'adl (equilibrium and justice),
 - taqwa (piety).

Ethical Theories and Islamic View

Ethical theories such as **relativism, utilitarianism, egoism, deontology, the divine command theory, and the virtue ethics**, are all products of Western understanding of what ethics are and how they are applicable to help one's decision-making process.

These theories are the current theoretical framework that is applied by recent research to explain an ethical phenomenon.

Relativism Theory

- Proposes that ethical values are relative to a particular environment or location.
- It discusses that moral values can be different from one culture to another, from one time to another
- According to this theory, there are no moral principles that are completely right, relevant and applicable to companies and people of all countries

Relativism Theory

This implies that:

(a) different countries and societies may have different ethical codes;

(b) there is no standard or principle that can be used to evaluate one societal code better than the other;

(c) the ethical code of specific society has no special rank, which means it is simply one among many;

(d) there is no universal truth in moral/ethical principles that can be always held for all people all time;

(e) the moral code of a specific country or society identifies what is right within that society;

if the moral code of that country or society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right at least within that society

Criticism on Relativism Theory

- Several ethical principles and values that members of any society or culture must accept if that society is to stay alive and if its members are to act together with each other efficiently.

For example:

- all societies and cultures have norms against killing other members of the society
- norms against stealing the personal goods of other members of one's society,
- norms against taking bribe or involving in corruption
- *this theory will make little sense to disapprove the practices of other societies if their practices conform to their own principles and values.*

Islamic point of view on Relativism Theory

- From the Islamic point of view, relativism theory is also problematic.
- According to Islam, what is right and what is wrong cannot be left to a particular society
 - because human beings have inherent weaknesses in that they will tend to behave in a manner that they see is convenient
 - regardless of whether such action is right or wrong.
- This is why Muslims have to base their actions on the words of Allah (the Quran) and the Sunnah of the Prophet
- However, Islam also respects the culture of any society as long as it is not against what is Islamically prescribed

The Divine Command Theory

- **Divine command theory** argues that the nature of right and wrong is based on religious beliefs
- In this context refers to Jewish and Christian religions that are claimed to be divine.
- According to this theory, both Jewish and Christian religions define “ethically right” as being something “commanded by God”, and “ethically wrong” means something “forbidden by God”.
- In other words, ethics and religion always go together
- Religious people commonly believe that ethics can be understood only in the context of religion.

Criticism on The Divine Command Theory

- This theory has created some serious problems for believers and non-believers alike.
- Non-believers, such as atheists, reject totally the theory because they believe that God does not exist.
- When God does not exist, it does not make sense that ethics should be based on God's command.
- Because it is not clear in the first place why a conduct is commanded and why humankind exists in this world, the theory is rejected.

Islamic View on The Divine Command Theory

- In contrast to Jewish and Christian religions, Islam makes the purpose of existence of **humankind in this world clearly**
- Human beings are created for the sole purpose of worshipping the One God through the engagement of good things and avoidance from engaging in wrong things
- For Muslims, what is right and wrong is clearly **espoused** through the word of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)
- Based on these two important foundations, Muslims believe that a conduct is right because Allah s.w.t or His Prophet Muhammad has commanded it.



Consequences Theories

- Consequence theories, utilitarian theory and egoism theory, look at the consequences of any action to determine whether an act is right or wrong.
- In utilitarian theory, an act is considered to be morally right if it brings the greatest good for the greatest number.
- An action must do the most good and does the least harm
- In contrast, egoism theory is concerned about the consequences of the greatest good for the person only without considering the consequences on others.

Egoism Theory

- The general idea of egoism theory is that one must always perform in his/her own interest
- An action is considered to be morally right when it promotes a person's self-interests more than the interests of others.
- In other words, egoism theory assumes that each person ought to follow his/her own self-interest exclusively.
- This means that a person does not have an ethical duty except to do what is best for him/her

Criticism on Egoism Theory

- However, this theory repeatedly results in conflict of interest and cannot always be adapted to the mission of serving public and clients' interests like in the accounting profession.
- egoism theory might be in conflict with the principles of accountants' ethical code of conduct as accountants must have objectivity, integrity, due care, and protect public interest.
- Egoism theory is not acceptable in Islam because it is essentially against the Islamic principles of justice, helping others, and altruism.
- According to Prophet Muhammad, a Muslim has no iman (faith) until he loves his brother as he loves himself
- Muslims are strongly encouraged to be considerate and help others without looking for material rewards from the society.