

Teleological Theory

Teleological theories are a part of ethics that is derived from normative ethics. People who subscribe to teleological theories basically accept that the consequences of decision-making are what matter most, in that the desired outcome is improving good over evil. These teleologists differ from deontologists in that the deontology theory espouses the intention of decision-making as most important, despite negative outcomes. The morality of outcomes depends on whether more good has triumphed over evil, according to teleologists. (Frankena, 1973, 14) To help understand what is good and what is evil, it is necessary to define these perspectives in terms of nonmoral aspects. Among teleologists are hedonists and non-hedonists. While the hedonists purport that what is good is the outcome that is most pleasurable, they also believe that pain is equitable with evil. In contrast, non-heonists view the moral good as an ideal, synonymous with "power, knowledge, self-realization, perfection, etc." (Frankena, 1973, 15) It could be said that non-hedonistic teleologists identify with the law or religious views more so than hedonistic teleogists do, as their morality is based on principles. Hedonistic teleologists maintain a morality that is in relation to physical and mental pleasure, or those senses and feelings on Earth. What these disparate teleological camps can agree on is that accomplishing good over evil is the ultimate objective. Given different choices in the decision-making process, individuals are morally obligated to select the one that creates the greatest good over evil among the different alternatives.

Within the realm of teleological theory are the ideas of ethical egoism and ethical universalism, also known as utilitarianism. Ethical egoism is

teleological theory for the individual. It basically professes that individuals should pursue the greatest good over evil among given alternatives that benefits them with a long-term view. In this manner, ethical egoism is tantamount to self-interest. When an individual is considering higher education or careers, he or she will weigh their options based on what is in their own best interest for many years. It is similar to saying that people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Contrasted with utilitarianism, ethical egoism is very narrow in scope. Utilitarianism is focused on achieving the greatest good for a group of people or society, in general. This part of teleological theory is political or judicial in concept, as that is what the branches of government work to achieve. Views on what is actually good for society differ greatly and influence the daily lives of many people. Lending to their teleological roots, utilitarians have been either hedonists or non-hedonists. Some believe in pursuing the greatest good in terms of pleasure, while others are more concerned with adhering to a greater good established by principles.

An example of where teleological theory can be applied is in Case #1 of the Warner case studies. In this case, the issue at the heart of the matter is nepotism and whether one person should go along with it despite the very possible negative outcome. Teleological theory focuses on the morality based on the outcome of a situation. If an individual knows that the outcome of the nepotism issue will make the corporation worse, then they are obligated to behave ethically, according to teleological theory. Ethical choices might be to resist the situation internally and face possible employment termination or to voluntarily resign and have no part of the nepotism. Either way, the individual has the opportunity to be honest with shareholders and maybe even a regulatory body that could investigate the corporation. The greatest good in this situation is to protect the shareholders and the corporation itself from poor performance.

Case #5 of the Warner case studies presents another example for where teleological theory can be applied. In this dilemma, a prosecuting attorney has the opportunity to either follow through with the prosecution or to allow the defendant to be exonerated. With teleological theory, the attorney must consider the outcome when making a moral choice. If the attorney decides to be honest and present the evidence, then the defendant can be set free. Doing so may be honest, but the outcome would be horrific and morally wrong, as this evil person has shown the capacity to bring harm to others. Since the ultimate goal is to keep citizens safe, then this attorney can rest assured that the moral decision is the one that contains the greatest good.

In Case #6 of the Warner case studies, an executive at a company has the opportunity to make more money in an unethical manner. By applying teleological theory to the situation, this executive would consider the outcome of the situation, and use it as guidance for morality. Accepting the illegitimate offer might improve the executive's personal situation, but it would be at the expense of people he works with. Allowing coworkers to suffer, especially when they are not in the know, is definitely not pursuing the greater good over evil. Teleologically, the executive would choose to decline the offer.

The Warner case studies show that the teleological theory is much more than theoretical and can be applied to the real world. It has as much to do with everyday life as it does with large government decision-making. Individuals can consider the outcomes of their decisions and base their decisions on the morality of the consequences and how they impact others. Government officials should be considering the consequences of policy decisions, but that is not always the case. Sometimes politicians govern by the politics of unintended consequences. In other words, they are applying deontological theory to policy decisions, as their intentions are good regardless of the outcome. For example, in 2007, the state of Hawaii decided

to provide universal healthcare for all children who were not already covered by medical insurance. (Fox News, 2008) The program ended within a year's time, because it became too expensive for the state. Parents who covered their children through private insurance dropped the coverage and switched to state insurance. The intent, or deontological theory, was morally good, and the potential outcome was ignored. Had the state of Hawaii applied teleological theory to its policy, then this program would likely have never started.

References

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