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EXERCISE 2.1

**Normative Ethics**

Normative ethics is a branch of ethics that involves studying the connections between moral values and nonmoral values and also the moral obligation that results from the understanding of these values. The normative part of the concept refers to what the normal aspects of values are within the framework of individuals' lives. Normative ethics is separated into two distinct theories: deontological theories and teleological theories. While individuals who subscribe to deontological theories are mostly concerned with the intent of the actions that people take, those who prefer teleological theories are more apt to focus on the outcome of actions. Within these disparate theories are branches, including act-deontological theories, utilitarianism, and ethical egoism. (Frankena, 1973, 14) The theory of act-deontological holds that, in life, situations vary to the degree that one set of moral principles cannot be applied to everything. As economist John Maynard Keynes once said, "When the facts change, I change my mind – what do you do, sir?" (Gaffen, 2008) This quote describes the idea of act-deontological theory.

Theories that are rule-deontological tend to bridge the gap between a strict deference to established morals and a customized view of situations. These theories allow for exceptions to rules, as it is possible for individual morals to conflict with other morals. To further resolve conflicts between base morals and customized morals is the concept that people depend on God as the deciding factor, which is referred to as the Divine Command Theory. (Frankena, 1973, 28) If God has set forth a command, then people regard that as the over-arching rule against conflicts. Immanuel Kant argued that universal morals should be acted upon only if they are truly

universal. Otherwise, there is something not completely honest about doing so.

The contrast to deontological theories is teleological theories, or utilitarianism, which basically holds that individuals should strive to achieve the largest sum of good over bad in this world. (Frankena, 1973, 15) Simply put, utilitarianism is about vanquishing evil when the opportunities arise. Within this section of normative ethics is the notion of act-utilitarianism. This discipline focuses on the individual considering consequences of his or her actions, not the results of many people's actions. While act-utilitarianism studies the actions and consequences of an individual, general utilitarianism is much broader in the sense that it considers the actions and consequences of many individuals. If one person pursues a course of action that achieves a larger amount of good versus evil, then it is reasonable to accept that the same course of action would work for anyone. Another type of utilitarianism is rule-utilitarianism, whereby certain rules are established for what accomplishes greater good over evil. Individuals are to follow the rules rather than consider the actions to be taken.

It seems that both deontological theories and teleological theories can be useful when put together with the intention to achieve good outcomes. Why not have sound intentions and also consider the path it takes to generate those intentions? Individuals can combine moral intentions with good consequences if actions are planned out appropriately. Certainly, people who perform charity work are indulging in deontological and teleological theories. Additionally, certain moral attitudes play a major role in the normative theories, including admiration, pity, fairness, benevolence, and respect. (Rorty, 1993, 5) These attitudes lend to emotions and help to guide decisions with moral bases.

An example of deontological theories in reality is presented in Warner Case #3. This case study presents a first-person document requesting that his or her life be terminated in the event of "extreme physical or mental disability." (Warner, 1984, 34) Here, the intention is good for the person suffering from health problems, as they are willfully asking to have their misery ended. The consequences, in the event that their life is terminated, may not bode well for family. If such an event were to happen, would family truly want this person to die? What if doctors find a way to bring this person back to health? This person would have been terminated too soon. With each individual being different, this situation is act-deontological. The considerations for this situation might not apply to other individuals facing a life-death issue.

Case #5 of the Warner case studies presents strong considerations between using deontological thinking and teleological thinking. In the case, a prosecuting attorney is the only person who has evidence that could prevent a clearly guilty part from going to prison. (Warner, 1984, 36) If deontological theories dominate the attorney's thinking, then she will see the good intentions of putting someone in prison, where they belong. Doing so will remove one more villain from potentially harming innocent people. If deontological thinking clouds, the attorney's judgment, however, she might not contemplate the consequences of hiding evidence. Teleological theories would help her to reason what might happen if someone found out that she hid evidence. If such an event were to transpire, this attorney might jeopardize her career in addition to holding back evidence from a court of law.

**References**


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