

IS A UNIVERSAL ETHICS POSSIBLE?

A HUMANIST PROPOSITION

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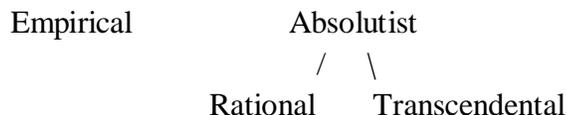
Grounds for Morals

Usually, in the philosophical literature ethics is differentiated from morals, being defined as the rational analysis of value-loaded statements and their validity.¹ Morals, on the other hand, are a set of practical statements or opinions about values usually treated in moralistic literature such as sermons and various specific codes of behavior. These normative statements derive from the necessity of coping in human societies with various human interactions. They by necessity cannot be unconditional and are in most cases ambiguous. Moral acts are performed out of a sense of obligation, duty, a moral law. Thus ethics as the theory of morals deals with the justification or grounds of morals and attempts to establish a fundamental principle or principles on which the moral codes could be based.

There were many attempts at finding these grounds of morals, e.g., in the nature of man, in the circumstances of his existence, as given by the transcendental being or as a priori concepts of reason. Most often it is impossible to separate ethics and morality and they are treated together. Though all these grounds may be useful in practice, it seems, however, that if moral action, by definition, is moral in the strictest sense because it is done for its intrinsic value, it should be independent of all motives and conditions. The last position we may call absolutist and it itself can be divided into two trends: rational and transcendental. The rational trend, exemplified by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), claims only reason as the source of moral statements, whereas the transcendental trend, represented by many religious doctrines, appeals to a supernatural authority in a more or less cryptolegal manner for the set of given moral values and

their justification. These two attitudes answer the question of how and on what ground we can know about the content of “ought” statements and whether or not they can be known in any way analogous to knowledge in empirical matters.

Grounds for Morals



Empirical and Transcendental grounds lead to conditional moral actions, dependent also on other than strictly rational basis (moral actions in a loose sense). Rational grounds lead to moral actions in a proper, strict sense.

The question of the beginning of morality is open but it has to be approached from the evolutionary standpoint of human biological history. It belongs to the realm of historical inquiry to find out when an awareness of the universality of the human condition and moral codes of a universal character emerged for the first time. This awareness is the essence of moral consciousness, and thus decisive to the emergence of humanity as something other than one more zoological species. It is obvious that if the main characteristic of mankind is the possession of reason, then reason as appointed by nature, must be the ruler of our will. But our moral consciousness must have a biological basis in the form of instinctive or intuitive behavior and as such, *mutatis mutandis*, is not significantly different from animal behavior. It is suggested that our moral norms were conceived as an extension of urges which operated universally in nature—namely self-preservation and the preservation of the species. Though we cannot talk about moral behavior of animals in their societies, since moral reflection in a strict sense seems to be specifically human quality. But we can talk about behavior of animals interpreting it in human terms. We find that higher animals have built-in mechanisms which correspond to some moral norms, e.g., the congenital inhibition preventing some animals from killing other members of the same species. Moral customs and human ideas about wrongness or rightness are the codification of the same instincts. As we analyze and discover the laws governing the physical

world, so we discover the “laws” governing the social behavior either of animals or of humans. Certainly, in social situations they are not always followed because they reflect a different reality—to be precise moral reality. They might vary according to the peculiar conditions of the natural life of human tribes, but they derive from a number of fundamental and universal rules, e.g., parents’ duties toward children, interdiction of killing useful members of the community. Certain norms operating in primitive societies may be specific for the conditions of human life, e.g., prohibition on incest, that seems to be a universal rule in all human societies, explained as an instrument to preserve the family structure, social roles within the family and the hierarchy of generations.

In human societies, however, these biological mechanisms are less efficient, perhaps due to the development of reflection and hence the possibility of a free choice to follow or not to follow them. The development of humanity, since the moment of appearance of the *nous* (mind), progresses primarily on the second functional level of the human brain. Therefore the biological mechanisms are now compensated through human mind and reason, by development of human culture, including elaborate systems of moral norms, all forms of social organization, scientific knowledge and religions which represented historically in some cultures a unifying intellectual construct.

Epistemological Theories of Moral Judgment

From a certain stage in human evolution, however, moral reflection led to moral awareness which is variously described as a sense of guilt or moral conscience. Moral lore was at this stage in most historically known cultures combined with the mythological interpretation of the world and as the result of this process religion or theistic ideology appeared. During the process the common and non-religious origin of moral foundations was obliterated. People realized that socially inherited moral rules might be verbally challenged and violated in practice by action and decree whereas natural laws cannot be challenged by human will. Thus the question arose as to why this moral prescription should be valid rather than the opposing one? Several answers were given to this question of justification of morals. Materialistic and positivistic philosophies (Hobbes, Spinoza, French naturalists, Hume) converged in the subjectivism that claimed that

whatever people say about the moral good and duties is in the realm of personal decision. Nothing is good or evil in itself, such designations are only expressions of our emotional state—our desires or repulsions. The extreme form of this version implies that value judgments and moral norms are exclamatory, expressing emotions and are meaningless because they are neither true nor false. Only logical utterances are meaningful i.e. they can be true or false. Moral and value judgments convey information about the speaker's emotional state. This suggests that people have actually to experience emotions to utter value judgments. The crucial distinction was between the meaningful or empirical statement and the meaningless or moral statement. For example one can design an experiment demonstrating that a stone is heavier than water and thus make a prediction whereas no such operation is possible for the statement "thou shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is an obvious epistemological problem with the value judgment statements. On one hand we may ask why we should accept the rule that verifiability and predictive power are identical with meaningfulness and on the other why should we ban statements that cannot be submitted to the verifiability test? This procedure of defining the conditions of empiricity of statements led to the extraction of rules that operate in science. The rule equating the meaningfulness with verifiability or with predictive power is itself a normative rule and has, arguably, empirico-rational basis. This analysis is valid for phenomena regulated by the laws of nature.

There is however, another set of statements that apply to social situations and they are meaningful in an ordinary sense of the word and its usage. For example when we say "Exploitation is evil" or "Helping one's neighbor in misfortune is our duty" -- these statements describe in a way perfectly understood by all men human relations and human situations. They are not about what is meaningful or meaningless or objective or subjective, yet they may have historically an empirical component—because they evolved from our human experience accumulated throughout history and became certain conventions. This empirical part was unfortunately reflected in mythological ideological traditions.

History indicates that in communities where myth regulated the social order there was no epistemological distinction between the laws in social and natural order—they all were "divine laws" and the punishment inflicted

for denying them was the same. But the distinction emerged between various mythological and ideological traditions not only in visualizing the cosmic order and its history, but also in what they forbid or prescribe as obligatory. So the content of moral norms is defined by tradition—e.g., Buddhist or various Christian traditions—itself undergoing historical modifications. Most differences can be settled by adherence to a commonly admitted principle but some can be settled by building consensus through experience just as in empirical matters. In the modern world agreement is shaped in empirical matters by science and its method, but even here it is not suprahistorical (i.e., independent of historical conditioning) either. But informed people have, at least, a common set of criteria in the scientific worldview.

In moral matters the situation is much more complicated than in empirical ones since human beings are affected in their behavior by a variety of psychological and volitive factors. There is therefore much disagreement among people on the content of moral rules and even when accepting them people do not necessarily always follow them.

Another solution for justifying morals which is termed utilitarianism was based on the assertion that there is in fact a good known and defined as such by all people, this good being “happiness” or “pleasure.” In accordance with common sense and usage we can by this universal standard assess the wrongness and rightness of human action. Thus all actions which increase happiness are right and the general goal by which we measure all our evaluations is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The major problem with utilitarianism is that it cannot reduce all the values we cherish to a common scale of the “happiness” or “pleasure” they produce and quantify them to say nothing of the unpredictable consequences our actions may produce. Moreover, what matters is the global amount of pleasure our actions produce. Thus no matter who is producing it, for whom and for what reason, provided the sum is constant.

Utilitarian doctrine is based on the assumption that all people seek and desire the same things.

Morality of Intentions in pre- and post-Nicaean Christianity

Other trends in moral thought were based on the intentions of agents as opposed to the effects of their actions. The actions are called good or evil in a derivative sense by reference to good or evil intentions of the authors without regard to the actual effects. This attitude is typical for the various Christian ethics and was summarized by Augustine in saying *Ama et fac quod vis* (Love and do what you wish). This implies that our actions inspired by love are intrinsically good. It remains in line with the message of Jesus and Paul (Mark 12: 29-31; Gal. 5:14): “Love your God ... And love your neighbor as yourself.” The term “love” is itself already value-loaded and the injunction raises doubts both in historical and psychological contexts. Love is an emotional experience and cannot be ordered since it does not depend on one’s free will. Moreover it is psychologically impossible to love all people and also God., since he remains after all an elusive and abstract idea. Therefore the term “love” has nothing to do with the emotion usually experienced in personal relationships, and it becomes an abstract intellectual notion. No doubt, however, that by upbringing people can be induced to be kind and helpful to each other, or to avoid hatred and envy. But this is irrespective of their religious background. In the final analysis “love” cannot be an actual requirement of morality.²

Moreover, the New Testament commandments are not equivalent. They reflect two components of the moral human tradition: one is the theistic mythological value and the other may be treated *mutatis mutandis* as the Christian formulation of the secular empirical anthropic golden rule found in all cultures. The original Messianism (early or pre-Nicaean Christianity) depended heavily on the second component. Thus the pre-Nicaean religion emphasized a code of ethics as its primary element. This code is based on personal decisions which determine the destiny of the individual. To be sure there is here an ultimate theistic motive but right or wrong is decided by action according to or against the independent universal anthropic moral principle. But with time various Christian doctrines were developed from the first component on the relation to the institution of the Church. Morality became a legalistic system based on the acceptance or not of the Church orthodoxy. The doctrine of exclusive truth about unverifiable mythological religious statements led to moral condemnation and

persecution of nonbelievers and all who did not accept the party line of the ruling theocrats, both in the Catholic and later Protestant Churches. The myth of original sin led to the pathological distortion of human sexuality and wholesale moral condemnation and oppression of women. Murder of doctrinal or ideological opponents of all sorts became a moral virtue. The theologies of some Protestants and Catholic mystics emphasized the love of God so exclusively that men disappeared as intrinsically valuable creatures. John Calvin (1509-1564), for example, believed that one should limit the amount of sin by all means, including coercion only because sins offend God. In any case, however, according to Christian theologies, our salvation does not depend on our actions. The Christian doctrine of self-perfection works against people who practice charity for the aim of softening human suffering. The ideal of sainthood urges people to practice it in order to merit one's own sainthood. The monastic ideal of a moral life is socially parasitic. The fundamental error, however, as in any theistic system, is that to subordinate relations between people to higher goals—either God's will, satisfaction or "glory," or one's own perfection, is morally risky. It is also very dangerous. In the first case when the concept of divine will consists of the desire for glory and dominion combined with the conception of might and vengeance it leads to development of theocratic totalitarianism as in the rule of the Catholic Church. In the second case it may lead to egocentrism and indifference to others. Both attitudes run against the fundamental anthropic principle of morality.

Kant's Moral Axiom

Kant's work written in 1785, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*,³ is one of the most important in the history of ethical philosophy. Kant was not interested in constructing a system or writing a casuistry of morals, but searched for an axiom which might be used for building a general system of laws of freedom (in contrast to the laws of nature, concerned with the nature), the science of which he called ethics or theory of morals. Just as natural philosophy (physics) has its empirical part so does moral philosophy because it has to determine the human will as it is affected by nature. Kant calls this anthropology. Thus the laws of moral philosophy are those according to which everything should happen, allowing for conditions under which what should happen often does not. Though the title contains the word metaphysics it is not about the understanding of ultimate reality, or metaphysics of nature, but a rigorous

search for an establishment of the supreme principle of a possible pure will which cannot be derived from observations of actual behavior of men but can be established by reason.

A. Condition of morality

Kant starts his considerations with analysis of the conditions for attaining happiness—namely of being worthy to be happy i.e. of having a good will. Our moral obligation in the Greek and Judaic traditions is to achieve this “purity of heart” or “kingdom of God,” which means good will. “Nothing in the world—indeed nothing even beyond the world—can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will.” The function of reason is the establishment of this good will. The good will is good because of its willing, that is, it is good in itself without regard to anything else. In saying this Kant describes nothing other than the common moral consciousness and derives the principle for moral action.

He insists that in deciding what we ought to do our variable desires are not important—for an action to be truly moral it has to be done in the belief and because of the belief that it is right, i.e., out of respect for moral law. For the true moral value of our action it is not sufficient that it arise from some good inclination, disposition or temperament even according to duty—it has to arise from the sense of duty, or good will. Whether the action succeeds in its purpose or not, if it is done with a good will it is morally acceptable, the consequences which we consider in passing moral judgment are those intended consequences, implicated in the motive of the action. Many actions, even if they produce good results, that are done in accordance with the law are not moral in this strict sense if they are done with some ulterior motives. Thus truly morally good action will not only be in accord with the law but also because the law is acknowledged as absolutely and universally binding. Kant formulated thus the condition of morality in three propositions: “... the first proposition of morality is that to have moral worth an action must be done from duty. The second proposition is: An action performed from duty does not have its moral worth in the purpose which is to be achieved through it but in the maxim by which it is determined. Its moral value, ... depends on the principle of volition by which the action is done ... The third principle: ... Duty is the necessity of an action executed from the respect for law.” Respect is understood to be the consciousness of the submission of the will to a law.

Maxim means the subjective principle of volition whereas the practical law is the objective principle that would serve all rational beings also subjectively if reason had full power over the faculty of desire.

B. Moral Law or Categorical Imperative

Kant next derives the concept of moral law from consideration of pure reason and will. Everything in nature works according to laws. But only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the conception of laws, i.e., according to principles. Kant equates this capacity with will. But since reason is required for derivation of actions from laws, will is nothing else but the practical reason that governs human behavior through a conception of law. In human beings, however, reason of itself does not sufficiently determine the will which is also subjugated to subjective conditions which do not always agree with objective ones. But the pure conception of duty and of moral law has the highest influence. Kant emphasizes that moral theory is put together from a mixture of incentives, feelings, inclinations and partially from rational concepts makes the mind vacillate between motives and leads only accidentally to good and often to bad.

The conception of an objective principle to which we refer in governing our actions is a command of reason and the formulation of it is an imperative, an expression containing an “ought.” If the action is good as a means to something else, the imperative is hypothetical, thus it is conditional upon circumstances and advisable only. Such a goal cannot be universally held by all men at all times. Further the hypothetical imperatives can be divided into technical (imperative of skill) belonging to art and into pragmatic (imperative of prudence), belonging to welfare of the being.

The moral imperative is unconditional, i.e., it is categorical. It is our moral consciousness that we ought to do our duty regardless of our inclinations and cannot be derived from psychological study. This principle is formulated by pure reason from the concept of “ought.” Thus the idea of obligation itself must dictate a criterion for deciding what our obligations are. A moral imperative commands unconditional conformity of our subjective maxim to a law, while the law contains no reference to specific ends on which it depends. The maxim should contain no condition which would prevent it from being itself a law and universally imperative,

i.e., valid for all men as rational beings regardless of their specific desires. Thus Kant postulates the principle of universality; the principle of the will that determines its conformity to the law is that one should never act in a way that one could not also will that this maxim should be a universal law. This principle of universality in the imperative form is the categorical imperative: “Act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

C. The principle of humanity.

Since every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, a supreme practical principle can be derived that the moral agent should act as if he were a lawgiving member of a realm of ends, i.e., of persons each of whom is an end in himself and an end for all others. Thus Kant formulates the principle of humanity: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.”

Moreover, we should act in harmony with the idea of the will of every rational being as making universal laws, therefore should endeavor to further the ends of others: “For the ends of any person, who is an end in himself, must as far as possible also be my end, if that conception for an end in itself is to have its full effect on me.” This principle of humanity is the supreme limiting condition on freedom of the action of each man. Thus the principles of universality and of humanity constitute the grounds for all practical judgment.

D. Autonomy of the will, the dignity of man and harmony.

From the moral law Kant derives a conception of the autonomy of the will, the dignity of man and harmony. The will is not only subject to the law but also the lawgiver. The moral law can obligate unconditionally only if it is a law given by man as sovereign in the realm of ends to himself as a subject in this realm. Man thus has a dignity of a lawgiver—the laws he obeys are the laws he gives himself. The being that gives the laws to himself is not merely bound to the law but is freely bound by his own lawgiving activity. This is why Kant calls moral law autonomous (from the Greek word for law *nomos*). The necessity of acting according to that principle is a duty which pertains to each member in the realm of ends (a systematic union of different rational beings through common laws). This

duty rests on the relation of rational beings to one another and reason therefore relates every maxim of the will as giving laws to every other will and also to every action toward itself. The imperative form of this principle of autonomy is: “Act by a maxim which involves its own universal validity for every rational being.” A being that takes the law from another lawgiver—God, a tyrant, his own cupidity—must be led to obedience by fear or hope. He is not then free but heteronomous. He is not truly moral because all his maxims are hypothetical and he cannot act out of respect for a universal law which takes no account of the contingent and divisive interests of individuals.

The three formulations of the imperative represent three aspects of one moral law that brings the action to intuition as much as possible. The will is unconditionally good which follows this maxim of the moral law. But a rational being cannot expect that every rational being be true to it; so Kant reformulates the law into still another, practical version: “Act according to the maxim of a universally legislative member of an only potential realm of ends.” But still it commands categorically and Kant emphasizes that it suffices that the dignity of humanity as rational nature and respect for the idea should serve as the inflexible precept of the will. Moreover, the worthiness of every rational subject to be a legislative member consists in independence of the maxims from such incentives. Hence morality is the relation of actions of possible universal lawgiving by maxims of the will. Action compatible with the authority of the will is permitted. The will whose maxims necessarily are in harmony with the laws of autonomy is an absolutely good will. The dependence of a will not absolutely good on the principle of autonomy is obligation. And the objective necessity of an action from obligation Kant calls duty.

In the concept of duty we usually think of subjection, yet there is dignity in it so far as the person who fulfills his/her duties is a legislator of the law and subject to it for that reason. Also no fear or inclination to the law may give a moral sanction in the strict sense of the word to action. Thus autonomy of the will is the supreme condition of morality: “Never choose except in such a way that the maxims of the choice are comprehended in the same volition as a universal law.” If the will seeks the determination of the law outside itself in the property of any of its objects, heteronomy results and becomes the source of the spurious principles of morality based on hypothetical imperatives in the terminology of Kant (see the list below). An example will illustrate this. According to the rule of heteronomy and

hypothetical imperative—"I should not lie if I wish to keep my reputation. According to the rule of autonomy and categorical imperative—"I should not lie even though it would not cause me the least injury."

But Kant, being a realistic man, admits that among all spurious principles he would admit as most tolerable the principle derived from the concept of moral sense because it preserves the idea of a will good in itself. He defines this moral sense as "The subjective effect which the law [his moral law of categorical imperative] has upon the will to which reason alone gives objective grounds."

Kant's List of Conditional (or Spurious) Principles of Morality from the Principle of Heteronomy

Empirical	Rational
a. from principle of happiness physical or moral; b. as concept of moral sense, the moral feeling.	from principle of perfection a. ontological concept of perfection as a possible result; b. theological concept of independent perfection (the will of God).

E. Possibility of the Categorical Imperative

So far Kant dealt with the question: "What is morality, such that we could say that an action with such and such characteristics would be moral?" Now Kant has to deal with another question: "Can such a question actually take place?" Answers to both questions cannot be given by citing examples, they have to be answered by reason. The key to the answer to the second question lies in the freedom of the will—otherwise morality is impossible, because something else would determine it and the categorical imperative would become hypothetical imperative. Thus freedom cannot be a law of nature, rather an autonomy of the that is the property of the will to be law to itself. For reason must regard itself as the author of its principles and thus practical reason or the will of a rational being must regard itself free, independent of foreign influences. Kant,

following in principle Aristotle's reasoning, explains this freedom through his theory of knowledge that there is something else in man behind the appearance of man, namely the ego or consciousness in itself or the pure activity of reason which is free from causal determination in the world of appearance i.e., things which we perceive. Thus man can be apart from nature and free from its laws, when reason exclusively determines his action, but also is a part of the world of sense under the laws of nature and as such not free. Freedom is expressed by the categorical imperative and the hypothetical imperative expresses inclinations in the world of sense. Kant summarizes this by saying: "As a rational being and thus as belonging to the intelligible world, man cannot think of the causality of his own will except under the idea of freedom, for independence from the determining causes of the world of sense (an independence which reason must always ascribe to itself) is freedom. The concept of autonomy is inseparably connected with the idea of freedom, and with the former there is inseparably bound the universal principle of morality, which ideally is the ground of all actions of rational beings, just as natural law is the ground of all appearances."

Categorical imperatives are possible because the idea of freedom makes man a member of the intelligible world. If one were a member only of this world, all actions would be always in accordance with the autonomy of the will. But since man is at the same time a member of the world of sense, his actions ought to conform to the autonomy of the will as belonging to the intelligible world, which according to reason should dominate the sensuously affected will. Anyone who is accustomed to using his reason is conscious of the good will which constitutes the law for his bad will as a member of the world of sense and acknowledges the authority of this law even while transgressing it. The moral "ought" is one's own volition as a member of the intelligible world. It is conceived as an "ought" only in so far as one regards himself at the same time as a member of the world of sense.

Kant next asserts, however, that philosophy has no knowledge of this supersensible world, it only can indicate its possibility and thus defends foundations of morality.

To summarize briefly Kant's foundations of morals:

Kant believed that ethics not only can but has to be validated without appeal to God's will or God's orders. Otherwise it would not be moral law

in the proper sense, that is, ethics would not be autonomous and thus would not be ethics properly so called. He believed that moral law was to be validated not only independently of utility, pleasure, happiness, natural desires, or positive law, but independently of God's will as well. This is a specification of Kant's general concept of moral actions: if we were acting in conformity with moral law not because it is moral law but because God wants us to do so, or because we risk divine retribution in the afterlife, we would not act morally in the strict sense. This principle of autonomy is so conceived that it excludes from moral motivations in the strict sense not only the fear of hell and purgatory, but even the pure readiness to subordinate one's will to God's orders; the motive for doing God's will is not a moral motive. Kant states that only the good will is good in a moral sense of the word, the strict sense. More, he says, there is only one motive which is morally good and this is the will to act according to duty as expressed in a general principle. Thus an act is morally praiseworthy if it is done out of a sense of duty as such, and not, for instance, from mere inclination or compassion. If what is my duty happens to coincide with what I will spontaneously, my act is morally empty (in the strict sense); a duty should be performed merely because it is duty and not for any other reason. Kant also realized that people being what they are may act from various motives. Thus the rational act performed out of a sense of moral duty is the supreme ideal of moral acts.

Kantian morality has a supreme normative principle, the Categorical Imperative, recommending us to act in such a way that we would wish the particular rule governing a given action to become a universal law. This principle has a formal character and it states the condition on which any particular moral rule may claim to be valid.

Kantian ethics enjoins us to treat each person as a goal, never as a means. It is not a monistic system: it has, to be sure, a supreme normative principle, categorical imperative, yet this principle does not contain any supreme material value; it has an admittedly formal character and it merely states the condition on which any particular moral rule claims to be valid.

Monism and Troubles with Ethical Systems

From the above considerations we may conclude that in an actual situation of the human condition any attempt to base morals on only one intrinsic value and to subordinate all others as means must lead to failure.

It is tempting to build ethics on a single value whether it is “God’s glory,” “happiness” or “freedom.” It seems that such ethics would eliminate all moral conflicts and ambiguities. However, it is not realistic and practical, since it does not reflect the basic psychological and social facts of human life, therefore it must lead to failure.

The rules of morality must be conditional and unescapably are ambiguous, and in each case of conflict we are led by a vague intuition rather than by a precise reckoning to a decision. In most cases we arrive at the decision almost mechanically, in other cases we are faced with a decision for which we have no precise rules and no reliable knowledge about the possible results of action. Then we are only too happy if someone else, a person or an institution, either makes the decision for us or convinces us that there is an absolute rule to take a decision for us. This makes of us moral automata, but such a behavior constitutes the psychological basis for survival of religious worldviews and religious institutions.

The postulate of ambiguity of morals does not mean that no rules can be safely recognized in absolute form. Some principles are valid unconditionally and some actions are morally wrong in all circumstances. But such principles should be specific and should leave almost no doubt whether the situation described actually occurs. Leszek Kołakowski² proposes among such principles e.g., prohibition of torture, including encouraging, condoning or passing it over in silence, prohibition of rape, and condemnation of people abandoning or not assisting others in danger who are helpless and dependent on them.

Other problems arise for various models of ethics. The utilitarian model runs against our ingrained moral intuition and probably against the normal meaning of the adjective “moral.” In the case when we claim that only intentions count in morals we encounter another difficulty in that in many instances we can guess people’s intentions, though very often we cannot. Moreover, people are not always aware themselves of their own intentions. Ethics, being a practical knowledge, is subject to objection if it does not have a method to test its distinctions. Moreover, its norms are instruments whereby people impose on each other ways of behaving that run against their spontaneous inclinations, thus the more so it must have a method to test them. There is a room here, especially in theistically motivated morality, for self-justification by skillful casuistry. This is a contrivance

easy to learn and apply, and Jesuits were famed for its practice.⁴ A Christian moralist might say that in God's all seeing eyes no motive or intention can be hidden, but this defers the judgment and leaves a large area of temporal life exempt from moral evaluation.

Similarly the rigorous insistence on good intention or will (either commanded by a Practical Reason or God-given) produces difficulty in assessing the difference between actions which intentionally produce reasonably good results yet were inspired by selfish or suspected motives, on one hand, and actions that are undoubtedly vicious and evil on the other. For example, it is better not to steal because one believes that stealing is intrinsically bad than not steal out of fear. Thus we might make a distinction between a minimum and a maximum requirement for morality and introduce a gradation in its evaluation. This confusion derives from the assessment that moral rules are about subjective attitudes and conduct which may have various degrees of perfection. We acquire them in a variety of ways e.g., children imitate grown-up people not because they apprehend the intrinsic virtues of these rules or we may develop good habits as a result of snobbery, yet subsequently they become our natural way of conduct. Thus it seems that in an ideal situation the moral education process should develop motivations, that is, convictions about what is right or wrong and should not be based on external sanctions legal or divine.

Practice thus indicates that we have to differentiate between what is perfect and what is reasonably good, what is more evil and what is less evil. Moreover, it has to be assured that there are few people who achieve the highest degree of moral excellence. Kołakowski² makes a mistake here assuming that, e.g., chastity, or the ideal of poverty practiced by Francis of Assisi, may be considered as such criteria of moral perfection. They are obviously anomalies, and by themselves have nothing to do with moral perfection. But when practiced with moderation they may be elements of character building, and therefore derivative goods. Most people, however, may be decent persons without being perfect. Yet he admits there are minimal rules which may safely be enumerated:

1. that no particular political ideology can ever be deduced from moral principles;
2. that moral rules by definition are universal. Those that we consider valid in private life are also valid in public life, because there is no

- clear boundary between them. The most modest requirement would be to be aware that when we violate moral norms we do in fact violate them.
3. that no moral precepts follow from historical knowledge or from a philosophical history. It means that if in the past the moral norms were violated though admirable actions were performed this does not invalidate the norms.

Need for Global Ethics

A. Do we need a new ethics ?

The suggestion is frequently voiced that since the moral corpus inherited from the Christian legacy cannot cope with the needs of modern society we now have to elaborate new codes better adapted to contemporary problems. Kołakowski² aptly dismisses the idea by presenting convenient examples demonstrating no reason for change—indeed his examples do not validate the need. Indeed moral codes should not conform to actually prevailing customs since ethics has always been about how people ought to behave irrespective of how they behave in fact. Moreover, availability of new techniques does not make, e.g., the problem of war more or less soluble by, e.g., making it easier to justify. He ignores, however, certain new discoveries that explain on a biological basis, independent of human decisions, that what was once assumed to be morally evil, e.g. homosexuality. But he contradicts himself saying that “the body of Christian ethics is not construed in such a way that it can settle all our particular moral conflicts” -- historically it pretended just to do so.

B. Ethical revolution, process of democratization and globalization

There is also another need for a new ethics connected with global processes. Each religion or culture tended to be very certain that it alone had the complete explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly. In non-democratic societies it was easy to impose dominion of ideologies through political control of life. But from the XVIIth century a process of democratization of societies was set in motion accompanied by revolutions in understanding the limitedness of all statements about the meaning of things. So now different religions, cultures and ideologies are drawn into dialogue with each other. As the globe

becomes more and more a small village there is an additional need for a new unifying tendency toward universally accepted rational premises. A first step in this direction would be the formulation of a universal declaration of global ethics. It seems that declaration of global ethics in every detail is impossible—but what is possible is the consensus on fundamental attitudes toward good and evil in terms of basic and middle principles. This consensus must be arrived at through a dialogue.

Leonard Swidler⁵ even proposes a plan of action in drafting this universal declaration of global ethics which would serve as a minimal ethical standard for humankind to live up to much as the United Nations' 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. It would serve as a complementary document. The guidelines for drafting such a Declaration should include:

1. The language should be acceptable to major religious and ethical groups, and therefore it ought to be anthropo-cosmo-centric.
2. The affirmation must be susceptible to being reinterpreted in a larger framework.
3. The declaration should set an inviolable minimum and open-ended maximum.
4. The declaration should be focused first on the self and then expanded to the family, friends, community, nations, world and cosmos.
5. Human beings should be always treated as ends not mere means i.e., as subjects, never as objects.
6. The declaration should be a kind of constitutional set of basic and middle ethical principles from which more detailed applications could be drawn.
7. The starting point and the practical basis for evaluation of oral statement could be the anthropic universal principle known as the Golden Rule.⁶ It was popularized in the western world in the Judean culture ("Do to no one what you would not want done to you," Leviticus 19:18; Tobit 4:16) but is found empirically in all cultures and religions of the world: from Zoroastrianism through Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism, New Testamental Christianity and Islam, to modern religious and secular ethical systems. Its rational basis was discovered by Kant as the universal moral law. Though Kant did not recognize this rule as a universal law in the strict sense, he most certainly would agree on its practical value. The golden rule has advantages over the Kantian imperative: It is accepted in all cultures

and religions, is practical and easy to understand. Moreover, it was the underlying fundamental principle for morals in the theistic ideologies before they became corrupted by the secondary doctrines.

Universal Declaration of Global Ethics

The Universal Declaration, though proposed for the first time by a Roman Catholic, was promulgated in the ecumenical spirit to unite religious and non-religious positions, thus it is fundamentally a humanist endeavor. The following text is based on the Declaration published by Swidler.⁵

Preamble

All women and men from various ethical and religious traditions recognize common convictions: support of universal human rights—freedom and equality before the law—a call to work for justice and peace, support of democracy and concern for conservation of the earth.

The conditions of the global order demand that the mankind should look beyond the divisions of particular groups and build a global ethic based on the universally recognized norms and principles. Therefore the Universal Declaration of a Global Ethics is proposed as a document standing in conjunction with the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. This document takes for granted several fundamental presumptions:

1. Every human possesses an inalienable and inviolable dignity.
2. No person or social institution exists beyond the scope of moral order.
3. Humans as beings endowed with reason and conscience should act rationally.
4. Humans are an inextricable part of the universe and as such should act in harmony with nature.

Basic Rule

The basic rational principle of morals is the axiom of moral law formulated in the principles: of universality, of humanity and of the autonomy of the human will.

This principle, as the supreme criterion of moral acts, was recognized, accepted, and empirically formulated in all cultures, religious and secular ethical traditions as a practical precept of the Golden Rule

What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others

Basic Principles

1. Every person is free to experience and develop every capacity as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others or does not disrupt the harmony with the rest of the universe.
2. All humans should treat each others as ends, never as means, respecting their intrinsic dignity. This respect should be extended to the community, nation, world and cosmos—to all living creatures and non-living parts of the universe according to their intrinsic values.
3. All humans should be granted a right to hold their own beliefs and strive to achieve explanations for meaningful life. A rational dialogue is the only method of arriving at a consensus whereby people can live together.

Middle Principles

1. Legal Responsibilities

All individuals and communities should be treated equally before the law. They should follow all just laws arrived at through a democratic process and consensus.

2. Responsibilities Concerning Conscience

All individuals and communities should have the right to freedom of thought, inquiry, conscience and a belief. At the same the exercise of these freedoms should respect the rights of others.

3. Responsibilities Concerning Speech and Information

Individuals and communities should be granted the right to free expression and information. At the same time this right should be exercised with a sense of responsibility avoiding distortions, falsifications or manipulations of others.

4. Responsibilities Concerning Participation in the Political Process and Self-Governance

All individuals and communities should have a right to free participation in all aspects of the political process and self-governance. They should at the same time exercise their right responsibly for the benefit of all involved.

5. Responsibilities Concerning the Relations between Women and Men

All humans, women and men, should have equal civil rights and the opportunity to develop fully their talents. Marriage, as an institution, should be a partnership of equal individuals with mutual respect of each other's dignity, equality and freedom.

6. Responsibilities Concerning Property

All individuals and communities should have the right to own property of various kinds. At the same time society should be organized in such a way that the property would be used to benefit not only the owners, but also their fellow humans and the world at large.

7. Responsibilities Concerning Work and Leisure

All individuals and communities should strive to organize society as to provide meaningful work and recreative leisure for authentic human life. At the same time it is the responsibility of the individuals to work appropriately with their obligations and duties.

8. Responsibilities Concerning Children and Education

All individuals and communities have an obligation to strive to provide the most humane care possible, physical, mental and social to children. They should strive to provide education directed to full development of the human person.

9. Responsibilities Concerning Peace

All individuals and communities should respect the need for justice and peace, and should strive to further their growth.

10. Responsibilities Concerning the Preservation of the Environment

All individuals and communities should respect the ecosphere within which they live, preventing its destruction and replacing materials that were used.

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