

General Information on Moral Theories

- I. **Normative Ethics:** That branch of moral theory that is concerned about justifying why an individual action is right or wrong or establishing the criteria for judging why a person is good or bad.
- II. **Meta-Ethics:** That branch of moral theory that is interested in establishing the nature of moral language and the structure of moral arguments. Meta is the Greek term meaning “beyond” or “about.” Hence, Meta-ethics is about the issues discussed in Normative Ethics.
- III. **Theories of Normative Ethics:**
 - A. Teleological Theories: The criterion for a right or a wrong action is *determined solely* by the effects of the action.
 - B. Several Versions of Teleological Theories, depending on how wide the range is over which the effects cover.
 1. **Utilitarianism:** An Act is right if it produces the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. John Stuart Mill
 2. **Egoist Theories:** An act is right if it pertains to the individual agent in some way or other. Epicurus, Hugh Hefner
 - C. Deontological Theories: The criteria for a right or a wrong action are determined by something other than just the effects of the action.
 - D. Several Versions of Deontological Theories.
 1. **Formalist:** The criterion for judging a moral action is determined solely by the intention of the agent. Kant, Peter Abelard
 2. **Mixed Theory:** The criterion is a combination of intention and something other, usually effects. Carl Rogers
 3. **Act Deontology:** There is something about certain acts that is such that it alone determines the moral justification of the action. Pacifist, Strict Pro-Life Position, Libertarian on Freedom.
 4. **Virtue Ethics:** Moral Theory is determined by the acquisition of virtues. Alasdair MacIntyre; Aristotle, Aquinas.