Teleology and Deontology

When evaluating morality, there are two principals of ethical theories that can be contrasted. These theories are deontological ethics and teleological ethics. While teleological ethics focuses on moral acts in order to achieve some sort of end, deontological ethics argues that morality is an obligation and is not reducible to a creation of good consequences. Given these distinctively opposite characteristics, it is obvious that when viewing morally relevant situations that the methods of approaching them will conflict as well. Not only will these differences depend on the deontological or the teleological ethicist point of view, but opinions will also vary when surreptitiously observing the egoist, the altruist, and the universalist.

Teleological ethics (coming from the Greek word "telos" meaning "goal or orientation), states that all morality is simply reducible to the creation of either the good or the best consequences. For example, given the moral issue of killing, a teleological ethicist would claim that killing for a promotion at work or for revenge on an in-law is wrong or immoral, whereas killing in self-defense would be condoned and considered as moral. It is a decision made based on the best consequences, not a universal law.

Aristotle was one of the philosophers who used teleological explanations, which he called "final causes". For example, he would say that an acorn is there to grow into an oak tree, and a human being is born in order to become a rational animal, etc. This concept was later taken over to Christianity as divine purpose, but while Aristotle and Christians would easily accept the question 'What are armadillos for?' (They would argue that everything has a purpose based on the belief that there is a Creator and he had a purpose for everything he created), modern biology would totally reject the question and argue that "Armadillos are not *for* anything; they just evolved along with countless other species of living things and managed to survive against competitors in the struggle for existence." [1]

Deontological ethics (the Greek word "deon" meaning "duty") states that moral rules and principals have a unique moral meaning, content, and cannot be reduced to a calculation of production (or the best consequences). A deontologist would believe that "some kinds of acts are wrong even if they do sometimes have good consequences. Deontologists do not always agree on which kinds of acts are bad in spite of having good consequences, but only that there are such acts."[2] Deontology focuses on and insists that *how* people accomplish their goals is usually (or always) more important than *what* they accomplish.

Immanual Kant was a deontological ethicist and believed that there was a principle of human conduct that is universal and applicable to all rational beings, without any exceptions. For example, Kant would argue that telling the truth is a universal principle and that one should never lie. If telling the truth was not universal, everyone would lie and no agreements could be made or taken

seriously. Kant insists that “The consequences of our actions are to a large extent out of our hands, and we can never be sure what they will be. The general wrongness of lying is more certain than what the consequences of this particular act of lying will be.” [3] Clearly, Kant’s ethics is not based on consequences, contrary to the belief of the teleological ethicist.

When comparing teleological and deontological ethics, it is obvious that each method opposes the other, and can possibly be argued that each embraces their own unique flaws. In the example of killing, a teleological approach to morality could be said to be a little too far on the flexible side. For if all people were able to make decisions based on their own evaluation of different circumstances, a question would arise as to who decides when exceptions can be made and when they can’t.

On the contrary, when debating the views of the deontological ethicist, one might say that this approach is too extreme. Going back to the example of killing, it is highly unlikely that a rational being would view killing in self-defense as immoral. For if you were being held hostage by a renowned serial killer whom you knew had no family or friends to miss him and that he himself did not even value his own life (and you could conclude this one hundred percent), could one rationally argue that killing him before he takes your life would be wrong and immoral? Depending on which view you approach this moral dilemma with will determine your standpoint.

An altruist (one who looks out for the welfare of others) approach would also be categorized into the teleological view because of its flexibility. If the altruist believed that killing his captor would save others lives then he would most likely not have any trouble shooting him. However if the altruist could see that killing his captor would in no way benefit the lives and well being of others, he would probably be completely selfless and allow the murderer to kill him.

When examining both the teleological and deontological ethics, it can become difficult to determine which approach to follow. Certainly the teleological approach seems to be the most appealing among the two because it allows for flexibility and qualified morals, but what if everyone were to live by these flexible morals? Would we all be able to live orderly together going off what we each individually thought to be the moral thing to do? What justifies killing or cheating in my mind could be completely different from the mind of a psychopath. Who or what determines what is acceptable? And what is crossing the line in each unique scenario? It is moral dilemmas like these that people often turn to the belief in a Creator.

Ethics of ends

1. Main idea: Acts are right or wrong based on their consequences. A general consequentialist (who is not a utilitarian) does not reduce ethical evaluation to one overall balance of benefit vs. harm, or brings other considerations and principles into play
2. A specific interpretation, and the most well-known: utilitarianism, which holds that the one and only one principle in ethics is that one should produce the greatest possible balance of welfare over harm, value over disvalue. This is the "principle of utility."
3. Utility has been variously interpreted. Hedonists (like Jeremy Bentham, the first advocate of utilitarianism) say it is mere pleasure over pain. John Stuart Mill and most later utilitarians say it is the aggregate of many intrinsic values, things most or all persons want (e.g. health, freedom from pain, beauty) — this is the pluralist version. (Their central texts are Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* and Mill's *Utilitarianism* and *Essay on Bentham*.)
4. Act- (direct-) utilitarianism applies the weighing to every action. Rule- (indirect-) utilitarianism uses the theory to support moral rules that tend to produce good consequences. Rules are always provisional.
5. Strives for impartiality. Often takes into account animals, since as sentient creatures they can experience welfare and harm, pleasure and pain.
6. "Teleological ethics" in some contexts refers to a concept much broader than consequentialist ethics. Rather, it can mean acting for general ends that are proper to human beings. In this sense, natural law theory (discussed under B) and eudaemonist ethics in Greek philosophy (discussed under C) have been classified as teleological.
7. Evaluation: Positive aspects of the theory
    a. Its impartiality.
    b. Its usefulness in simplifying macro-decisions through cost-benefit analysis.
    c. It might make it easier to avoid conflicting values, because you put all the values involved on the same scale.
8. Evaluation: Criticisms of the theory
    a. Difficult to know how to estimate and weigh consequences
    b. How to give all a fair hearing? Does not always protect interests of marginal groups.
    c. Benefits and sacrifices of a course of action are not necessarily shared equally.
    d. It doesn't generally give scope for special obligations to one's "nearest and dearest."
    e. Its determinations may violate moral intuitions and well-accepted social standards, such as suggesting that one person could be sacrificed against his will for the good of many or, less dramatically, that it is acceptable to lie if that would make several people happier.

Ethics of duty

1. From the Greek for "duty" (*deontos*). Main idea: an ethic based in duty and one that reasons from foundational principles which tell us what our duties are. Hence, actions are right and wrong for reasons other than their consequences.

2. There are many possible grounds for knowing duty: natural laws, the social contract, reason. In theological arguments, appeals to God's laws/commands in scripture and to natural law are often deontological.
3. Contrary to common opinion, this theory is not inherently "absolutist."
4. The most famous version is Immanuel Kant's ethics. Kant said morality is based in a rational respect for persons (moral agents) as the foundation of value. Kant's Categorical Imperative: *Act only on the basis of a rule you could will for all people in similar circumstances to follow.* The Categorical Imperative thus shows how important consistency and universality is to deontological ethics. Kant's second formulation of the Imperative is somewhat easier to grasp and use in ethical argument: *Treat other persons always as ends in themselves and never simply as means to an end.* From both perspectives he thought, for example, that lying is always wrong. (Kant's key texts on this are *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals* and *The Metaphysic of Morals.*)
5. Acting against duty; acting in accordance with duty; acting from duty
6. There are many ethical principles; it depends on the field and philosopher in question as to whether some principles take priority over others. For instance, some Kantians take autonomy of moral agents to be the fundamental principle, while Pope John Paul II based his ethics around an inviolable principle of the sanctity of human life. The late 19th century British philosophy Henry Sidgwick (*The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed., 1907) developed his ethics around several principles, each of which was "prima facie" binding, but could give way to a competing principle. In the tradition of Sidgwick, a very influential textbook of medical ethics structures the field according to four prima facie principles: autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice (Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 5th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
7. A note on *natural law theory*. Natural law theory is an ethical method most associated with Catholicism, although there are secular and other religious versions. Natural law theory is a combination of deontological and teleological methods (see A.6 above). It is mentioned here because natural law theorists make ethical judgments that reflect fundamental principles (dignity of life, human rights) but do so from within a teleological approach. *Natural law* is an ethical framework that does and should guide human conduct, based on goals that are derived from *the order of natural inclinations* and the participation of human reason in God's reason. The order of inclinations refer to the tendencies of created/natural things to act in a way that fulfills their nature and that perfects them. The theory does not say that humans should be driven by natural instinct; rather, they have to use their reason to understand and properly act on their inclinations.
8. Evaluation: Positive aspects of the theory
    a. Avoids the problems of consequentialism — by protecting individuals against group, establishing minimal fairness, etc.
    b. Respects our intuition that some actions are wrong no matter how good the consequences (e.g. slavery, forcibly removing an organ
    c. Fits well with standards of professional responsibility.

9. Evaluation: Criticisms of the theory
    a. Entails dubious assumptions about rationality and downplays our social context
    b. What's wrong with mixed motives?
    c. Respects for persons is an admirable principle, but the meaning of "personhood" is contested in borderline cases (fetuses, severely impaired newborns, comatose, animals)
    d. Having a single, overriding principle is counterintuitive and too inflexible, but having multiple, prima facie principles makes it difficult to know how to weigh principles against each other.

Ethics of character

1. This theory says that morality is less about determining what do to than what kind of person to be. This theory considers the *external* purposes that persons have in their roles and relationships, and the *internal* purposes they have for moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth. After looking at what we are trying to become (and much of what we are trying to become is generic to all human persons), we must discern the courses of action and qualities of acting that will help us achieve those purposes. The Greeks described the goal of human activity as *eudaemonia*, "happiness," or better "human flourishing." The ultimate goal of acting virtuously is to be happy in this robust, integral sense of "flourishing." Therefore, character ethics can be considered teleological as discussed in A.6 above.
2. Virtues are central to this theory. The non-moral definition of a virtue is: the power to accomplish an end. The moral definition is: the distinctively human power to accomplish human excellence. Also: A habit that leads to good actions. Also: The "golden mean" between extremes of action.
3. The Western tradition following Greek philosophy identifies four cardinal virtues — prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude — and several subsidiary virtues. Medieval Catholic theologians appropriated the Greek tradition and added the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. (Key sources: Plato, *The Symposium*; Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part II-II)
4. Contemporary revival and connections. This approach is celebrated as an alternative to the first two. The 1980s saw a revival of virtue theory and related concerns, such as:
    - Moral development; psychological studies and theories
    - Emotions as sources of moral knowledge; appeals to experience
    - An ethic of care
    - Interest in narrative: we are shaped by the stories of our communities
    - Communitarian philosophy
    - Crosscultural studies (e.g. Confucian ethics)
5. Evaluation: Positive aspects of the theory
    a. Puts ethics into the context of our everyday lives. Makes ethics more grounded and less abstract.
    b. Sees ethics as a holistic enterprise; considers the entire person, including emotions and relationships.

c. We can draw on communities for guidance and support in our ethical deliberation.
d. This approach makes ethics more inviting and less moralizing.

6. Evaluation: Criticisms of the theory
   a. Being virtuous doesn't tell one want to do. One may need guidance in difficult situations, but giving that guidance may slide us back into act-based ethics.
   b. Not everyone thinks that seeing our whole lives as a unity is a good thing: we want the distinction of roles and public/private life that modernity allows.
   c. Character ethics often goes hand-in-glove with support for a religious or cultural tradition. But these traditions can be inflexible, even oppressive. How does character ethics gain a footing for criticizing traditions when they are flawed?[1]

In *Physics* 2.8 Aristotle puts forward a 'difficulty' concerning causality in nature. Aristotle there examines a 'materialist' explanation of natural processes. This viewpoint claimed that rain does not fall for the sake of crop growth. Commentators are divided on the issue of whether or not Aristotle agreed with this claim. I will argue that he did not think that rain occurs for the sake of man's crops. Aristotle did, however, believe that rain takes place for the sake of something. It will be the position of this paper that Aristotle considered the only final cause of rainfall to be water's natural tendency to move towards its proper place.

The idea that water moves upwards with its natural motion for the sake of reaching its proper place is consistent with an 'elemental teleology'. Though Aristotle nowhere explicitly says that elemental motion has a final cause[2], the extensive textual support for 'elemental teleology' within the Aristotelian corpus validates this position. However, the context of the rainfall example lends itself to multiple interpretations. In the text Aristotle presents a viewpoint which claims that processes in nature are not caused by the purpose they serve just as rain does not fall in order to make crops grow. Because Aristotle rejects the central materialist thesis, the denial of final causality in nature, it is often said that the entire text expresses a viewpoint antithetical to Aristotle's own. The purpose of this paper is to argue that though Aristotle did believe that rain falls for the sake of something, he did not disagree with the materialists' rejection of crop growth as the final cause of rain.

Though referring to the opposing viewpoint as 'materialist' is anachronistic it is still an appropriate label. Susan Suave Meyer describes the viewpoint:

> The opponents whom Aristotle has in mind are the Presocratic natural philosophers (phusiologoi) – especially Democritus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras. He here homogenizes their views and attributes to them generally the thesis that natural phenomena result of necessity from the activities of the material elements.[3]

These thinkers neglected the final cause and gave their focused attention to the material and efficient causes. Though such terminology was not available to these thinkers their thought can nonetheless be understood in terms of Aristotle's classification of causes. It is because they gave primary causal power to the material cause that the title 'materialist' is acceptable.

The Teleological Argument compares the organization of the things we see in nature to the organization in the things built by man. It then states that since the

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[1] Rev. 10/06. The main resource for the positives and criticisms of the theories is Drew E. Hinderer and Sara R. Hinderer, *A Multidisciplinary Approach to Health Care Ethics* (New York McGraw-Hill, 2001).
[2] Robert Wardy, 'Aristotelian Rainfall or the Lore of Averages', p. 20.
[3] 'Aristotle, Teleology, and Reduction', p. 792.

organization of the things built by man required a creator (man), then the things in nature showing organization must have required a creator (God). Therefore, God exists.

The Teleological Argument for the existence of God as articulated by David Hume is *a posteriori*; in that, it requires experiencing the world we live in. You must experience the organization of man's creation and the organization in nature in order to be able to understand the premises of this argument. It is an argument by analogy because it compares organization of man-made machines to organization of things found in nature.

The Teleological Argument for the existence of God is an inductive argument. This means that if you believe the premises are true; it is highly probable that the conclusion is true. There is no guarantee that the conclusion is true as in the deductive argument.

Today we take many of man's creations for granted. We have to stop and think about things as everyday yet as complex as the internal combustion engine, or the airplane, or the television set. And while these creations have been mass produced to the point that it doesn't take a genius to build them today, when you think of the first one ever built, whether through collaboration or a single persons accomplishment, they were truly ingenious inventions.

Man's creations all exhibit organization. Even if the original idea may have come from a failed experiment or with little understanding of what the end creation would be, they all exhibit organization.

Teleological Argument is a strong argument for the existence of God for two reasons. The first reason is because the alternative seems unfathomable to me. The alternative to God having created the organization of nature is that the organization of nature happened by accident or on its own. The idea that this organization happened without design seems as likely as throwing pieces of chalk against the blackboard without looking and having it spell Meg Wallace.

The earth is a complex place with interactive ecosystems, complex living organisms, and laws of nature that are consistent and reliable. Take for example the complexity of a river's ecosystem. Over simplified the smallest plants grow from the river bottom, the smallest fish eat the smallest plants, bigger fish and animals eat the smaller fish, and all their remains enrich the river bottom so the smallest plants can survive, and it all happens under water. It is not conceivable to me that all this complexity could have happened without an intelligent being designing and implementing it.

The strongest argument against the Teleological Argument comes from *The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, also from David Hume. The argument says that the claim of natural organization must apply to the universe not just the earth and then claims that we don't know enough about the entire universe to claim it has organization. This opposing argument further says that the Teleological Argument commits the Fallacy of Composition. The Fallacy of Composition says that you can't claim to know the composition of something from only knowing a small portion of its parts.

The analogy that we used to demonstrate the Fallacy of Composition in Philosophy 134 was the supposition that a person had lived in the desert on sand their entire life. They had not traveled anywhere; and thus, they had never experienced water, trees, etc. The person would believe that the whole world was made of sand, which of course is false. This would be an example of the Fallacy of Composition.

This is a valid inductive argument; in that, if you agree that the premises are true, you can reasonably deduce that the conclusion is true. In fact, this argument can be used against any argument that discusses the universe as an entity just by changing Premise 1 and the second half of the conclusion. For example, if Premise 1 said that "black holes exist throughout the universe," then the conclusion would say, "until we know the properties of the entire universe, we cannot claim that black holes exist throughout the universe."

Using this opposing argument you could challenge many ideas that we consider to be scientific facts. Scientists say that water is made of 2 hydrogen atoms and 1 oxygen atom. This opposing argument would start by saying that scientists can't define water by the water we have on earth, they must declare that water is made of H2O in the entire universe. Next the opposing argument would say that since we only know a small portion of the universe, the scientist commits the fallacy of composition. This would be another valid inductive argument with true premises and a reasonable conclusion. Thus either science is flawed or the opposing argument is flawed. In my opinion the opposing argument doesn't stand the test of reasonableness.

Of course, if we knew the properties of the entire universe, (organized or not organized) we wouldn't need the Teleological Argument. The Teleological Argument seeks to explain one of the many things we don't know about the universe; specifically, was it created by God. If we knew all there was to know about the entire universe, we'd know that God exists and wouldn't have to argue about it.