Theories of Ethics
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Within human history and continuing into present times, we find many theories of ethics and the good. Such theories arise in religion, spiritual traditions, philosophy, social-political-historical systems, literature and the humanities, social and cultural movements, and pop psychologies. It is important to get a sense of these different theories as a foundation for thinking about and determining the nature of the good and the good future; the theories will help us to see the territory of ethical consciousness—the main themes, issues, and points of disagreement. In formulating a philosophically sound and historically informed approach to ethics, it is critical to understand what has been thought and what has been said regarding the nature of the good. I introduce and describe these various theories in terms of contrasting pairs, but we should keep in mind that many of these theories are not mutually exclusive and can be combined and synthesized in numerous and varied configurations (Thiroux and Krasemann, 2009).

This list of ethical theories focuses on the question of the source or foundation of ethics, the means by which we determine what is good, and certain general qualities regarding the nature of the good. I do not fully address the question of what specific qualities (values, virtues, principles, standards) make up the good. See my book *Future Consciousness* for a more in depth review on this latter issue.

In introducing these theories, I not only describe them but also evaluate them, noting basic weaknesses and strengths, relative to varied criteria for determining their validity and value.

Here is the list of contrasting pairs of ethical theories:

• Ethical dualism	Anti-Dualist Theories
• Positive	Negative
• Absolutism	Rationalism
• Divine Command/Obedience	Self-Determination
• Universalism	Relativism
• Theistic	Secular/Naturalistic
• Egocentric (Egoistic)	Caring/Social
• Present Hedonism	Future Hedonism
• Consequentialism	Intrinsic Value (Deontological)
• Objectivism (Realism)	Subjectivism
• Empiricism	Nativism
• Anthropocentric	Ecocentric or Cosmo-centric
• Emotional/Intuitive	Rationalism
• Eternalism	Evolutionism
• Abstract	Particular
• Values	Virtues

To begin at the top of the list, there is the general thesis that ethics involves a fundamental distinction or polarity between what is good and what is bad. *Ethical dualism*, which comes in many forms, asserts that there is a right way and an opposing wrong way regarding values and morals. In the West, historically we have the notions of good and evil, which are diametrical opposites to each other. Good and evil have been personified in the West, in the form of God and Satan—two spiritual personae of opposite moral qualities.

Within ethical dualism, the goal of ethics—of leading the good life—is to pursue what is good and avoid (or even fight against) what is evil or bad. From an ethical dualist perspective, the good is seen as a forced choice, if not confrontation between the polarities of right versus wrong—between the darkness and the light—a metaphor to be found in religious, spiritual, and even philosophical views of ethics. Ethical dualism depicts ethics as an either-or situation: One is on the side of good, or on the side of evil—with us or against us—with no in between. Analogously, the distinction between virtue and vice, as good versus bad character traits, is a form of ethical dualism. Within a dualistic mindset, do we lead a life of virtue, or lead a life of vice?

Counter-arguments and perspectives against ethical dualism include:

- Good and evil are not totally independent or separate realities, but each, in some sense, requires the other—you can't have the good without the bad; perhaps everything and everyone in reality is a mixture of the good and the bad, necessarily so; at the very least, the concept of good cannot be understood without the concept of evil.
- The good versus evil distinction sets up social oppositions that frequently support and justify "us versus them" thinking, creating feelings of self-righteous superiority and antagonism; "good versus evil" thinking leads to oppression, war, and even genocide (that is, evil results). Thinking in terms of good versus evil is often self-serving; it is the "other" who is invariably evil.
- "Good versus evil" sets up internal personal conflicts as well, creating fragmented, distressed, guilty, and anxious minds, that is, unhappy results inconsistent with psychological well being. As humanity is fragmented and dichotomized through the good versus evil distinction, so is the individual conscious human mind.
- There is no real evil or wrong in the world at all (or in humans)—everything (everyone) is good—but due to our ignorance and limited perspective, we can't see this, especially in others.
- There is neither good nor evil in the world (or in people). The polarity is a mental invention we impose on reality. Good versus evil is subjective rather than objective.
- Instead of thinking of ethics in the simplistic terms of a basic polarity, it is more realistic to think in terms of degrees or levels of what is good. There is no ultimate good and we can always improve upon the ethics of our thinking and behavior. Ethics is a journey and progression rather than a simple clean-cut oppositional choice. (Lombardo, 2011b, Chapters Four and Nine).

Yet, in support of ethical dualism, doesn't it (at least sometimes) seem that an act is ethically good, whereas other times an act seems just plain immoral or wrong? Don't we observe clear examples of the polarity of good and evil in the world? Moreover, what is ethically good possesses qualities that are the opposite of those qualities found in what is ethically evil, and this existential contrast would support ethical dualism.

Further, ethical dualism provides a psychologically natural framework for understanding the ethics of life; perhaps we are predisposed to create conceptual contrasts and think and act in such terms? We need the oppositional contrast or polarity to clarify and make sense out of the ethical dimension of life, and to set motivational directions for what to pursue and what to avoid. Psychologically, perhaps we can not have good without evil, or right without wrong.

Related to the dualist conception of ethics, there is also the distinction between *positive* and *negative ethics*. An ethics can be expressed and practiced putting the emphasis on what a person *should do* in order to be ethical. Conversely, an ethics can put the emphasis on what a person *shouldn't do* in order to avoid being unethical. Of course, an ethics can have both do's and don'ts, even presented in a balanced fashion, but there does seem to be relative degrees of emphasis placed in different ethical approaches, or theories. Is the ethical argument or predicted consequences of actions framed in terms of the "carrot" or the "stick"?We can argue that putting emphasis on the don'ts (or evil) tends to be counter-productive, producing feelings of guilt and personal oppression, if not obsession over evil, whereas emphasizing the positive pathways in life has more of an overall beneficial effect, producing feelings of hope and inspiration. Perhaps focusing on "evil" draws us toward it?

An analogous dichotomy shows up in the psychology of mental health and mental illness. Positive psychologists have argued that traditional personality psychology has highlighted what can go wrong with people (depression, psychosis, neurosis, addiction) and did not investigate, highlight, and publicize sufficiently the positive dimensions of humans. Indeed, telling people what they shouldn't do (what is bad or psychologically destructive, the lack of psychological well being) may actually amplify those very qualities, by calling attention to them. Talking and thinking about craziness brings out the worst in us; talking and thinking about the nature of mental health (mental well being) brings out the best within us (Seligman, 2002, 2005, 2011).

Next, consider the polarity: We can believe that what is good is absolute and self-evident without any need for discussion, deliberation, qualification, or thought, or we can believe that what is good can only be determined through inquiry, reason, evidence, dialogue, and thinking.

An *absolutist* view of ethics (the first view) can be found in many major religions; God or some type of supreme being has laid down the rules of right and wrong and individual humans do not need to question them (in fact shouldn't question them). This indeed is a *"Divine Command"* absolutist theory of ethics (Thiroux and Krasemann, 2009).

On the other hand, a *rationalist ethics* argues that we can only determine what is good by thinking it out—weighing the pros and cons, comparing arguments, examining evidence and the logic behind ethical beliefs, and considering the consequences. Determining what is good (or bad) requires thought; it can not simply be "given."

Absolutists often see rationalists as "playing God," as heretics and without any ethical anchor; rationalists frequently see absolutists as unthinking, closed-minded, irrational, and dogmatic. Indeed, a rationalist can see an absolutist as "playing God," in so far as the absolutist appears to be proposing that he or she knows the word of God (or has access to some indubitable self-evident insight into the good).

A related ethical polarity is what Erich Fromm referred to as *authoritarian* versus *humanistic ethics*: Is ethics a question of following the directives of an authority (an *obedience ethics*), or should ethics involve coming to decisions based upon individual and independent deliberation (a *self-determination ethics*)? (Fromm, 1947) The deliberation can be either collective or solitary, or a combination of the two. Collective deliberation is the foundation of the political philosophy of democracy as opposed to tyranny or authoritarianism; individual deliberation is the foundation of individualism and a philosophy of freedom, as opposed to collectivism and conformity.

One key problem with all forms of absolutist ethics is that there are different absolutist statements regarding what is the good. How are we to choose among alternative statements? Wouldn't this require thought? But also, there are different and often conflicting theories of the presumed foundation or source of such absolutist ethics. How are we to determine which postulated source, among the many, indeed is the correct one? How are we to determine what presumed authority we should trust in regarding our ethics? But if we open up the question of ethics to inquiry, comparative evaluation, and deliberation than we no longer are practicing an absolutist ethics. Even if we propose God as the ultimate authority, which definition of God do we accept? Again, we are back to thinking and deliberation. The theory of ethics based on faith comes back to which authority figure we accept as the object of our faith. But pure faith (if such a thing actually even exists) in one view over others is arbitrary, and yet, it is frequently the absolutists who attempt to force their ethical views on others.

It seems, at the very least, that in so far as ethical philosophies depend on theories of reality (in the absolutist case involving theories of absolute authorities or foundations), any absolutist view is open to deliberation and evaluation relative to the theory of reality assumed in the ethics. Consequently, we can judge an absolutist theory of ethics as flawed if it is grounded in a faulty theory of reality. Hence, it seems to me that absolutist theories of ethics are all inherently flawed; ethics requires thoughtful evaluation, at least regarding underlying theories of reality.

Another major polarity in ethical theories is *universalism* versus *relativism*. Are there rules and values of ethics that universally apply to all humans, across all of history and all cultures? Is the good universal? Or is ethics and the good relative to individual perspectives, historical periods, or cultural ways of life? For the relativist, what is good

for one person may not be good for another; what is good in one age, may not be good in another; and what is good in one culture may actually be considered bad in another.

Universalists see relativists as wishy-washy, if not facilitating evil under the guise of tolerance; relativists see universalists as authoritarians, elitists, and oblivious to the diversity of human ways of life. Each can accuse the other of being egocentric. The universalist (from the perspective of the relativist) confuses their unique and subjective viewpoint with something universal; the relativist (from the perspective of the universalist) can only see the egocentric.

As a noteworthy example of a universalist ethics, the highly influential eighteenth century philosopher, Immanuel Kant, proposed in his famous "*categorical imperative*" that we should think in universal terms when making individual ethical decisions. As he argued, we should consider whether the action we are about to commit would be ethically permissible for all people to commit. If I am allowed do it, then everyone should be allowed to do it. If the action does not satisfy this universal criteria, then it is wrong for me to do it.

It seems that relativists and universalists are both correct, at a descriptive level, each to a degree. Human individuals, cultures, and historical time periods are recognizably different. People in different times and places, and even a group within similar environmental conditions show at least some variability in their values. Yet, equally so, we can identify innumerable commonalities across individuals, cultures, and time periods: The basic architecture and functioning of our human brains and bodies are similar for all of us; the challenges of the human condition and the basic environmental constraints in which these challenges are faced are relatively constant across space and time. Contrary to the cultural or historical relativists, our values and basic concepts concerning reality show significant levels of agreement. In reality, we are both all the same (to degrees) and all different (to degrees) (Kidder, 1994; Pinker, 2002; Bell, 2002, 2004).

Hence, given this combination of similarities and differences, our ethics, being constrained by the nature of human reality, will show both a dimension of relative variability and a dimension of relative invariance.

But we should make the distinction between universalism versus relativism as a *descriptive controversy* over whether people across space, time, and personality actually share or do not share the same values, and universalism versus relativism as a *normative controversy* over whether people across space, time, and personality should or should not agree on (and advocate and practice) the same values. There are ethical arguments why people should agree on the same values (for reasons of cooperation, social order, and peace for example), and conversely ethical arguments why people should not agree on the same values (for reasons of diversity, openness of dialogue, and the fostering of evolution and creativity).

All things considered, in so far as ethics needs to be grounded in human reality, if there are universal and distinctive qualities to human nature, then there will be some level of universality in a realistic theory of human ethics.

The above polarities of absolutism versus rationalism and universalism versus relativism point to another basic disagreement among ethical theories. Is the source of ethics something divine or theistic (a God), or is the source of ethics a set of facts or principles that can be ascertained within or derived from nature, without recourse to a divine source such as God? I will refer to this polarity as *theism* versus *naturalism/ secularism*. It is a common belief among theists that if one abandons belief in God than it is impossible to formulate or practice an ethics; as Dostoyevsky stated through the mouth of one of his fictional characters, "If there is no God, everything is permitted." Secular thinkers argue that belief in God is not necessary for ethics; in fact, according to some secularists, belief in God gets in the way of a rational, realistic, or humane ethics (Harris, 2004, 2010; Hitchens, 2007).

The theistic view is often (though not necessarily) both absolutist and authoritarian in so far as a divine supernatural deity is usually viewed as an ultimate authority that is not to be questioned. The divine source theory of ethics though suffers from the same problem as the absolutist and authoritarian theories: Specifically in this case, which view of God is the correct one, since there are a variety of different theories of God? (My mostly Western students in philosophy classes had a lot of trouble in seeing this point; they invariably conflated their Christian view of God with the only conceivable notion of God.) Moreover, divine source theories of ethics, assume, as do all theories of ethics, a particular view of reality: In this case, that there exists a supreme being possessing such and such qualities that is the source or foundation of what is good. If we are to thoughtfully evaluate any divine source theory of ethics then we need to thoughtfully evaluate its foundational theory of reality regarding the presumed nature of God.

Secularists, to varying degrees, will argue that the whole idea of God is unrealistic, and hence, basing a theory of ethics on God is unrealistic.

Egocentric (or egoistic) ethics identifies the good with what best serves the individual; we should do what is good for us. What is ethically wrong is to do something or believe something that does not serve our best interests or help us. Being unethical is harming or depriving ourselves; being unethical is not serving ourselves.

Conversely, *caring* or *social* ethics is the view that what is good is what helps others, and to act only to benefit oneself is the epitome of unethical action—indeed psychopathic or evil behavior. In fact, sometimes ethics is entirely equated with how we behave toward others—a social theory of ethics (Gilligan, 1982).

One popular contemporary ethical theory that combines these apparent opposite viewpoints is the "*win-win*" approach to decision making. Search for decisions and actions that benefit both oneself and others. To see ethics as either serving oneself or others, but not both, is to adopt a "*win-lose*" mentality; if I gain, you lose; if you gain, I

lose. Rather it is best to look for "win-win" scenarios (Eisler, 1987, 1995, 2007; Henderson, 1991, 1996; Wright, 2000).

Another classical ethical viewpoint which attempts to synthesize egocentric and social ethics rests upon the principle of "*enlightened self-interest.*" We best serve ourselves by helping others, for what goes round come round—the principle of karma, for example. Do good unto others and they will do good to you in return.

Assuming a reciprocal theory of human reality, benefiting ourselves is inextricably tied up with benefiting others, and vice versa. In improving myself, I can more efficaciously contribute to the well being of others; in doing good unto others I improve the social environment in which I exist, thus supporting my own betterment. Well being and the good is jeopardized when we adopt one-sided "win-lose" mindsets running in either direction.

The next contrasting pair of ethical theories deals with the *present* versus the *future*. Is the good that which brings, for example, pleasure, happiness, or some type of benefit in the moment, or is the good that which has the most beneficial consequences in the long run? Is the good present-relative or future-relative?

A way to examine this contrast is through describing different versions of the *hedonistic* theory of ethics. A hedonistic theory of ethics identifies the good with what brings pleasure. But we can adopt either a *hedonism of the present*, or a *hedonism of the future*. In the former case, the good is the pleasure of the moment; in the latter case we should postpone momentary pleasure for a greater amount of anticipated pleasure later.

A hedonist of the future can argue that it is often the case that what feels good in the moment may produce misery in the long run. Indeed, living a life of hedonism of the present (impulsive and thoughtless regarding future consequences) is often seen as at the core of vice, evil, or foolishness. Christian ethics, offering the ultimate reward of eternal happiness in heaven, while rejecting the momentary and short-lived pleasures of mortal life, can be seen as a hedonism of the future.

From another angle, we can reject all forms of hedonism—present or future—on the grounds that pleasure is not a very good criterion for determining the good. In fact, it is the pursuit of pleasure that often leads to unethical behavior. Just because it feels good doesn't make it right. At times, pursuing the good is not pleasurable at all but difficult and painful.

Still, if well being is connected with the good, then since well being without any pleasure does not seem to make sense, the good without pleasure also doesn't make any sense. It seems oxymoronic to say that you are doing well or doing good but feeling miserable now and will continue to feel the same into the future. If pleasure is broadly defined as a subjective state of well being—of feeling good—equating it perhaps with the psychological state of happiness, then one can see the truth in hedonism. In achieving well being and pursuing the good we realize happiness. Or even more simply, well

being and the good is subjectively experienced as happiness, as long as we include both our happiness and the happiness of others, and both happiness now and happiness in the longer run.

The idea that doing what is good does not always feel pleasurable can be accounted for in a hedonism of the future, whereby an individual is pursuing long term pleasure rather than short term pleasure in the moment, and this approach to life may entail periods in the present that subjectively do not feel very pleasurable at all. Suffering, in fact, may be a necessary part of a hedonism of the future. This is what Christian ethics argues.

Looking at the future consequences of our present actions, as a criterion for determining the good, is referred to as "*consequentialism.*" As one popular version of consequentialism, associated with nineteenth century philosophical *utilitarianism*, the good is simply what produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people in the long run. In this formulation we still have to define what the good is, but the focus is on the future rather than the present, and the collective future rather than the individual (egoistic) future.

Consequentialism can be contrasted with *deontological ethics*, the latter approach associated with Immanuel Kant. Is the good to be determined in terms of its consequences, or, as Kant argued, is the good something inherent in the action itself, regardless of its consequences? If, for example, the intention of the act was good, then even if the consequences did not turn out good, the act would still be good. What is good, is good in and of itself; what is bad, is intrinsically bad.

In summary and conclusion, on the contrast of present versus future oriented ethics, it does seem to be the case that whenever we act with purpose (having a goal we wish to achieve) we are future-oriented, to lessor or greater degrees (due to the anticipated temporal distance of the goal being achieved). There is a future intent. Moreover, when we deliberate among choices before acting we are decidedly future oriented, weighing the pros and cons of the various actions. Whenever we think about what we are going to do regarding the best ethical pathway we are future oriented in our ethical consciousness. We may, at times, simply do what "feels right or good" at the moment, but all thoughtful, decision-making, and purposeful behavior, in so far as it concerns ethics, is future-oriented. At a more abstract level, in considering the varied ethical theories presented in this article, more often than not, the theory identifies appropriate methods and mindsets for creating a preferable future. It seems that the great bulk of ethical consciousness, both in actual practice and action, and in terms of overarching theory, depends upon the capacity for future consciousness.

Next, consider the opposing ethical views of *subjectivism* versus *objectivism*. Is ethics a subjective phenomenon—perhaps simply a matter of personal preference? Is dishonesty or stealing wrong because we don't like it—that we feel or think that it is wrong? Is the good something that is just in the eyes of the beholder? This is subjectivism.

Or is the good something objective—inherent in the reality of things? Is the good an intrinsic property to things or human actions? Is something good in and of itself, whether we feel or think it is, or not? Perhaps we perceive or recognize the "good" or "bad" in things—it is not simply a creation of our minds (or culture). This is the philosophy of *ethical realism.* The good is similar to facts about the world; we recognize the good rather than psychologically invent it (Nagel, 2012).

Ethical subjectivism and relativism come together in the philosophy of *perspectivalism.* As the argument goes, all human beliefs, either about truth or the good, reflect individual or collective perspectives—that is distinctive points of view. All human beliefs are consequently limited and subjective; we can not realize or apprehend objectivity in the absolute sense, either in our factual knowledge, or in our ethical beliefs. And since, we would expect that points of view vary across individuals and cultures, the best we can realize is a relativistic and subjective, as opposed to a universalist and objective, ethics (Best and Kellner, 1997).

Counter-arguments against perspectivalism, inclusive of both subjectivism and relativism, include the following:

There are commonalities biologically, psychologically, and socially among humans; humans to significant degrees agree in their individual perspectives, either regarding factual knowledge or ethical beliefs; even if all knowledge and beliefs are perspectival, we can progressively approximate toward the objective through comparisons and integrations of points of view and the evaluation of our ideas through self-reflection, critical thinking, and empirical evidence; and finally, specifically regarding ethics, given our biological, psychological, and social commonalities, there may be conditions in human life that universally foster well being, and hence serve as a foundation for determining what is good.

Such objective and universal conditions concerning human reality make life better (foster well being), whether all people recognize and pursue these conditions or not. People can be mistaken about things, and not everyone, by far, appears to be leading a life that generates well being or the good. Many people seem unhappy or unfulfilled, and in such cases, it could be due to mistaken beliefs about their psycho-social-naturalistic reality.

There is considerable room for growth relative to understanding general (objective and universal) standards of what is good and what supports human well being and pursuing such standards in practice. Even though we can not realize absolute objectivity (or an absolute good, whatever that would mean), we can realize degrees of universality and objectivity in our beliefs and ethical standards, and work at, through our behavior and thinking, moving closer toward these ideals in life (Brown, 1991; Kidder, 1994; Pinker, 2002).

One issue throughout the history of ethics is whether ethics are learned through culture and experience—the philosophy of *ethical empiricism,* or whether ethics is innate within

humans—*ethical nativism*. For ethical empiricism, we are born amoral or even immoral and need to be shaped or guided by adult humans. Sigmund Freud took this position, arguing that the innate biological-based "id" (at the core of our psyche) is amoral (without morals) and a socially learned (injected) "super-ego" needs to develop for there to be an ethical dimension to humans. (Otherwise we are savage, impulsive, selfish, and pleasure seeking brutes.)

The opposing view is that we are born with a sense of right and wrong; it is wired into our brain. Perhaps we even begin with a "good and pure soul" and are only corrupted through learning, bad social influences, and the evils of modern society? This is the philosopher Rousseau's "nobel savage" vision of humanity.

Of course, we can argue that ethics is a combination of inheritance and learning. Yet, if ethics is, to whatever degree innate (inherited), then it becomes a difficult challenge to modify or change it (perhaps only through genetic engineering?). What if, by nature, we are not ethically good? (Relative to some theory of ethics.) Perhaps we are doomed (due to our bodies, brains, and genes) to be immoral, violent, and selfish? On the other hand, if ethics is learned, than what is learned can be unlearned, thus making ethics a more fluid system of values, thought, and behavior and the possibilities of improvement seem more realistically achievable (Pinker, 2002; Hauser, 2006; Hall, 2010).

Based on an evolutionary theory of human nature, it is unrealistic to argue that the human mind (inclusive of our ethical dimension) is intractably innate. Indeed, as our distinctive psychological capacity, we are geared toward self-transformation (self-improvement). It seems that part of what is "innate" within us (a difficult concept to clearly delineate) is the capacity to understand and influence our nature and modify or evolve it. Even if we possessed some innate set of ethical preferences, due to our genes, we possess a higher capacity for self-reflective understanding and purposeful improvement (evolution) of our conscious minds and behavior. In humans, thought reflects back upon the body and begins to modify or enhance it.

An ethical issue that has become especially pronounced in environmental ethics is whether humans should apply ethical considerations only to human beings, or whether the "circle of concern" should be broadened to include our treatment and behavior toward other living forms, and even collections of living organisms, such as ecosystems. Indeed we might want to extend ethics to how we treat entire geologies, planets (including the earth), or stellar systems (Stapledon, 1937; Robinson, 1991, 1994, 1996). Hence, the contrasts can be drawn between *anthropocentric* versus *ecological (ecocentric) ethics*, and even *bio-centric* versus *cosmo-centric* theories of ethics. Should we frame our ethics in the context of a bigger whole than simply humanity, or our collective self-interest? (Boylan, 2001) This issue clearly bears upon our notions of well being; what are the holistic boundaries of well being?

There is some evidence to indicate that humans possess two different ethical systems within their minds and brains. One system is quick, visceral, intuitive, and emotion based. The other system is slower, deliberative, thoughtful, and rationally based

(Hauser, 2006; Hall, 2010). This modern view of the psycho-physiology of ethics aligns with the more classical theoretical contrasts between *emotional* and *rational* theories of ethics, and *intuitive* versus *deliberative* theories of ethics.

Do we determine what is ethical through our gut feelings? This is the emotional view of ethics. Or do we determine what is ethical through deliberative thinking? This is the rationalist view.

Moreover, does the good become apparent in an intuitive flash of insight, or does the good only reveal itself through a sequence of connected and self-reflective thoughts?

These questions have already been introduced above, in the content of other contrasting pairs of ethical theories, such as present versus future perspectives, and intrinsic versus consequentialist theories of ethics.

This last ethical contrast between emotional and/or insightful versus rational views of ethics has direct relevance regarding the good future. Any comprehensive theory of the human mind and the human condition, in which well being and the good is realized, needs to include both rationality and thinking, and intuition and emotion. People do not attempt to realize the good future simply through thinking, but just as importantly, through emotion and intuition. If we ask how we should determine what is ethical and what is the good future, our theory needs to identify both cognitive (rational and intuitive) and emotional factors, both as constitutive components of the goal we are pursuing (well being), as well as regarding the means by which we pursue these goals (our ethics). Experiencing the good life and realizing the good future requires a synthesis of all of our basic psychological capacities and dimensions.

The next distinction between *eternalism* and *evolutionary ethics* overlaps to a degree with the distinction between universalism versus relativism. Eternalism contends that what is good is good now and forever; it doesn't change over time. Evolutionary ethics proposes that the good evolves and hence changes over time. What may have been considered good in the past, given the level of knowledge and nature of circumstances of the time, may no longer be good today, or at some point in the future. For example, is it still good for human well being, as it was in the past, to be fruitful and multiply? (Bell, 1997, Vol. Two) More generally, do we require new ethical capacities and character traits to successfully cope with the world today, or realize a good future, over and above those traits revered by our ancestors? Do these changes require changes in our basic values? Perhaps even in contradiction to our older values? Do these changes in circumstances require changes in our capacities for determining the good or realizing it in life?

Eternalism as a theory of reality asserts that there exist timeless and constant principles or entities; evolutionism as a theory of reality asserts that existence is dynamic and there are no independent timeless or static principles or entities. If there are constancies and regularities, these constancies are embedded within change, or are lawful principles of change. Given its theory of reality, eternalism asserts that within the

timeless and unchanging realm there are unchanging ethical principles or ideals. Evolutionism would assert that whatever is the good must be understood and realized within a dynamic reality; if nothing else, the good would need to be a principle of change, rather than a principle independent of change. Is the good a stable reality to be achieved and maintained versus is the good dynamic, involving the facilitation of evolution and change.

One final ethical distinction is between the *abstract* and the *particular*. A system of ethics can be presented as a list of general rules or principles, such as the *Ten Commandments*. This is an abstract ethics. The goal of abstraction is to achieve simplicity, universality, and objectivity. But, as a counter view, an ethics might be better conveyed or represented through the personal, that is, through individual examples of ethical people. It may be counterproductive and psychologically oppressive to present ethics in the abstract, and much better to teach and illustrate ethics through personal role models, that is, specific individuals with their idiosyncrasies and unique personalities in distinctive environmental situations (O'Hara and Lyon, 2014).

Relatedly, narratives (even fictional ones), with various individual characters encountering specific life challenges, may do a better job of expressing and communicating ethical ideas than abstract theories. Life is filled with nuances, ambiguities, messy and unanticipated complications, and an ongoing, dynamic flow of events; it is better to present ethics in the individualized transforming workspace of ethics than in a set of atemporal stone tablets. One theory of ethics is to abandon theories of ethics in favor of stories of specific ethical people.

Connected with the distinction between the abstract and the particular is the distinction between *values* and *virtues*. Plato, for example, believed that the "good" existed as an eternal and abstract form (so did justice; so did truth, etc.). People were good if they aspired toward, or "tuned into" these abstract ideals, in their lives and their thinking. Yet, as noted above, it might be more appropriate and realistic to describe the ethical as embodied within individual human beings. In fact, it simply may not be the case (contrary to Plato) that values exist independent of the people who believe in and practice them. Rather we should understand ethics personified in terms of character virtues embodied in flesh and blood people.

If a value (such as truth or justice) is an abstract quality, then a virtue (honesty and fairness) would be that value lived and embodied in the character of human beings. Virtue theories of ethics, such as in Aristotle and Confucius, attempt to describe the good as a set of character traits or virtues within human beings (Marinoff , 2007; Thiroux and Krasemann, 2009; Solomon and Higgins, 2010). Is there really a good independent of virtuous people? Although I agree that there are certain general principles that capture the nature of the good and well being, I also think that the way to realize these values is through the cultivation of character virtues, in the personal actions and states of mind of the individual.

From the above review of theories of ethics, one can see that there is significant diversity in points of view regarding ethics and the good. One can wonder if there is any way that an integrative and convincing theory of ethics can be formulated given the complexities of the territory. Perhaps the relativists and subjectivists are correct by default, since it seems that we can't agree on fundamentals regarding a theory of ethics. But as I have begun to describe within the above review, a convincing general theory of ethics may be possible—a theory that integrates what seems valid within the diverse perspectives yet achieves some level of realism and universality. See *Future Consciousness*.

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