

Unit E 3: Basics of ethics

1. Summary

All ethics is based on perception. Ethics is first of all a system of values that guides action and sets norms of behavior. We can understand value as something that is considered "good" or "desirable." There are absolute values that stand alone and relative values that are related to other values. In terms of Kant's "categorical imperative," we should always act as we would want others to treat us. Ethics and related behaviors (norms) can be justified in very different ways.

2. Basics of ethics

The term "ethics" goes back to the two Greek terms "ēthos", dwelling place, habit, custom and usage, but also to "éthos" in the sense of habit and habituation (cf. Müller 2001:13). Ethics, then, denotes that which is "habitual," "custom," or "customary"-this is why Kant, for example, speaks of the "moral." In contrast, "moral" is originally only the Latin translation of "ethos". That is why there are still ethicists today who use "ethics" and "morals" congruently (cf. e.g. Hausmanninger 2004:51). In school science, on the other hand, it has become common that morality is used for the concrete, practical norms of behavior, while ethics is understood as the "scientific theoretical preoccupation with morality" (Hausmanninger 2004:51) or as the "scientific reflection of human action" (Mieth 2015:113) and the norms of action.

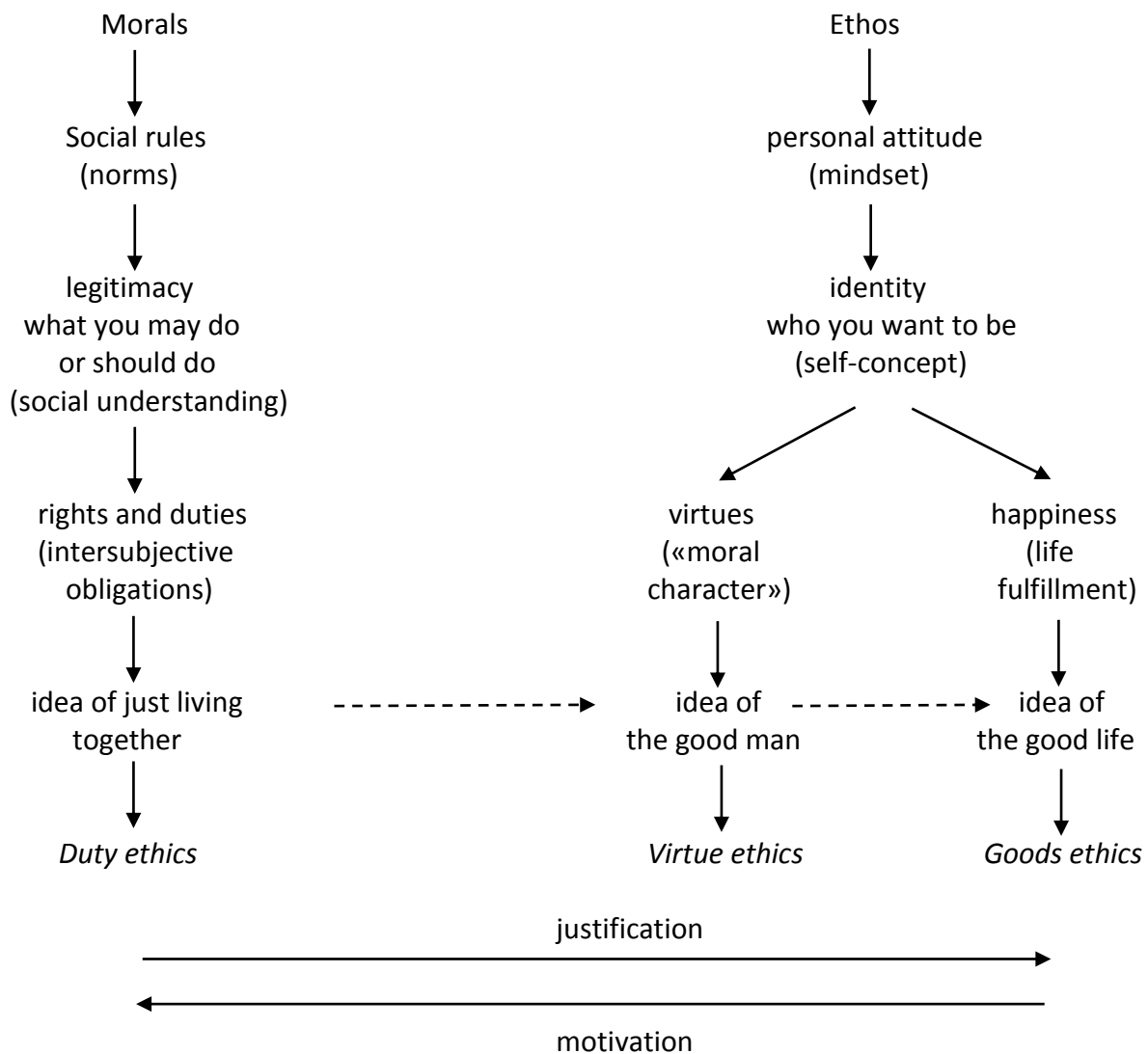
"There is ... in a truly modern society ultimately no morality worthy of recognition without ethical-critical reflection. Such reflection, however, first creates an **awareness of the cultural relativity of moral traditions and convictions of conscience: it all depends.**"

Source: Ulrich 2016:39.

Today, in everyday usage, "morality" often has something of the stable odor of "hypocritical," "sanctimonious," etc., which can be seen, for example, in the terms "double standards" or "moralizing. For this reason - and because we are concerned here with a reflection on "good" and "evil", or "good" and "bad" - we use the term "ethics" or "ethical"

in the following in the overarching, general sense for evaluations, while "morality" or "moral" always refers to concrete norms of behavior, ways of acting, or complex buildings of ethical values. However, critical readers will quickly notice that this distinction cannot always be fully sustained (on the distinction between ethics and morality in the economic environment, see also ► Unit E 6: "Ethical criteria for a just economy").

Peter Ulrich (2016:37) has a somewhat different view of ethics and morality:



Source: Ulrich 2016:37.

Ulrich sees ethics less as a scientific reflection of moral norms than as a personal basic attitude and life design of personal virtues and a happy life. Ulrich is thus close to the ancient Greek concept of ethics. However, this excludes all that is today often summarized under "applied ethics" - e.g. the "hyphen ethics such as medical ethics, economic ethics, scientific

ethics, etc.". Therefore, I do not adopt Ulrich's terminology of ethics and morality in what follows. However, in contrast to this basic conceptualization, Ulrich's "integrative business ethics" is extremely fruitful and stands out pleasantly from other concepts of business ethics (cf. in detail Jäggi 2018c:21ff.).

2.1 Different types of ethics

It has become common to distinguish between different types of ethics. A number of ethicists - such as Wilfried Härle (2011:12-15) or Julian Nida-Rümelin (2005:4) - distinguish **three types of ethics, or three ethical sub-disciplines**: Descriptive ethics - which deals with ethical and moral norms, and with the question of their occurrence and reflection. This ethics also deals with the history of ethical concept formation (Härle 2011:13). In contrast to **descriptive ethics, normative ethics** does not ask what ethical or moral norms there are, but what there should be. It is concerned with "which moral norms can be represented as valid and which ethical theories deserve approval" (Härle 2011:14). The third sub-discipline, **metaethics** - which only emerged as an independent sub-discipline in the 20th century, asks about the concepts, methods, and forms of argumentation with which ethics works.

As another distinction, the differentiation into **first-order ethics** and **second-order ethics** has become common. As Nida-Rümelin (2005:4) writes, "First-order ethics develops criteria of moral judgment, while second-order ethics deals with questions about the status and justifiability of first-order theories. Within the realm of second-order ethics fall epistemological questions, as well as the meaning analysis of moral expressions and ontological problems."

Jochen Sautermeister (2009:50) has pointed out that ethics is heavily dependent on perception. As we know, our perceptual processes are neither objective nor error-free. Therefore, the following question arises: "How is an ethics that aims at rationality, argumentativity, discursivity, and plausibility possible if already perceptions can no longer naturally function as a guarantor of a simple, unbroken experience of reality shared by all, because they do not provide an intersubjectively problem-free shared basis for reflection?"

How, in view of the subject relativity of perception ... an ethical discourse, ethical compromise, or even consensus possible?" (Sautermeister 2009:50).

In ethical discourse, one must beware of a frequently encountered misconception: the so-called naturalistic fallacy. Behind this is a confusion between what is and what ought to be. Or in the words of Peter Ulrich (2016:190), "The naturalistic fallacy lies in the equation of 'what we shall do' (empirical hypothesis) and 'what we ought to do' (normative demand). In it, not a deliberate error of thought, but the old natural law philosophical identification of the 'natural' with the ethically 'good' comes to light." Or in other words: We conclude from what happens in general or **will happen** on the basis of experience to what **should happen**. Especially in ethical reflection, it is of primary importance to always distinguish between descriptive - that is, descriptive - ethics and normative ethics, that is, what should happen.

2.2 Values

The starting point of ethical considerations are values. Ethics does not examine all kinds of values. Not part of the subject of ethics are - according to Hiorth (2009:15) - aesthetic, but also economic values. According to Hiorth (2009), political, social, and religious values also "either have no place at all within ethics or, if at all, only a peripheral role" (Hiorth 2009:15). Of a total of 17 meanings for "value" listed in the unabridged edition of the Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1967), the following definition is most likely to possess ethical significance: value is "any object or quality that is desirable, as a meaning or purpose in itself" (quoted from Hiorth 2009:22). Or in slightly different words: Value is "that quality of anything which makes it desirable or useful" (cited in Hiorth 2009:23).

Hiorth (2009:22, slightly edited by CJ) distinguishes the following important meanings of value:

1. Relative value, merit, or importance, e.g., the value of a college education, the great value of a queen at chess.
2. Monetary or material value, as in business and commerce, e.g., this piece of land has greatly increased in value.

3. The value of something in relation to other things for which it can be exchanged (exchange value).
4. Meaning, sense, e.g., the value of a word.
5. Affection, love".

Furthermore, "values" - according to Hiorth 2009:22 - can mean the following in different fields:

6. Value in the sense of logic and mathematics, e.g. values of different symbols.
7. Values in painting, in music and in phonetics.
8. Values in sociology, e.g. for ideals, customs, institutions.

2.2.1 Qualitative und quantitative Werte

Leaving aside the fact that this list of values is neither conceptually well thought out nor are the types of values systematically thought through and distinguished from one another, the following is striking:

On the one hand, there are obviously **values** that are **unique and cannot be compared with other values**. They are ultimately indivisible. We call such values **qualitative or absolute values** in the following. They include: Love, peace, life. These values stand for themselves and have a unique and ultimately incomparable character. There is not more or less life, but only life and non-life (death). There is not more or less love, but only love and non-love. Values in art, in philosophy, but also in aesthetics are absolute values in themselves, their meaning is revealed by themselves. A Greek statue expresses an absolute value, the physical harmony in itself. It cannot be reduced to the body mass index - although this has been tried again and again. The same is true for a painting by Picasso or for a piece of classical music. I am of the opinion that art - true art - always has to do with absolute, i.e. qualitative values.

Experienced spirituality or transcendence is also a qualitative or absolute value: that's why enlightened people can't talk about their enlightenment experience at all, or only metaphorically and in a veiled way. If they do, they translate their absolute experience into relative values, into a (linguistic) socio-cultural code (cf. ► Unit K15: "Socio-cultural code:

resources" and Jäggi 2009). Thus, the uniqueness and also the quality of the experience is lost.

On the other hand, there are values - we call them **quantitative or relative values** - which always **acquire meaning only in comparison to other values**. Quantitative, relative values are usually related to other values and can be expressed in terms of "more or less." Monetary value or material value can always be expressed in terms of more or less dollars, euros, or francs. The same is true for any exchange value, because other monetary values can always be used as a reference quantity.

A queen in chess is a quantitative value because it has "more" value compared to a pawn, among other things because, according to the rules of the game, it can make a greater number of moves than the pawns. In general, game rule values are relative values. Whenever a value arises in the context of a code system, it is a relative value: a mathematical sign expressing a value always refers to other mathematical signs. Sociological values always express relative values that arise out of a socio-cultural code. Their meaning emerges only in a web of innumerable choices, some of which are accepted and others rejected. They culminate in institutions and are continually recoded and transmitted to other members of the socio-cultural context. There is thus a reciprocal relationship between socio-cultural code, actors, and institutions: All three interact with each other through values and especially through norms of action.

Hiorth (2009:24) believes that the value of a thing is expressed in the fact that it is coveted or valued. According to Hiorth, the rarity of a thing - gold, for example - increases its value. Here Hiorth slips unawares into the realm of relative values. An absolute value, such as love, does not become more valuable when it is coveted. Love, to stay with this example, can also not be desired at all, and still remain an absolute value.

2.2.2 A Twofold Ethics: Ethics of Absolute and Relative Values

From the point of view of ethics, qualitative and quantitative values raise completely different questions:

Qualitative values: Here questions arise about the assessability, valuation and implementation of qualitative, absolute values in a human, socio-cultural context. Last but not least, it is also about the linguistic and thus inter- and transcultural comprehensibility and communicability of absolute values. To what extent can experienced or sought absolute values be communicated to third parties? A particular problem lies in assessing the claim of individuals or groups - e.g., religious revelators or gurus - to embody and express absolute values.

Quantitative values: This involves questions of "more or less," comparability, comparability, and the balancing of competing values. Quantitative values arise in the intercultural context primarily as a problem of comparability of socio-cultural codes and boundary crossing between socio-cultural contexts.

But it gets more complicated: we can also understand socio-cultural codes as contextualized and systematized attempts to translate absolute values into relative values and norms of behavior. Or, to put it another way, relative values are often-though not always-the result of innumerable attempts to make absolute values compatible with human interactions and behaviors, that is, to translate absolute values into, via relative values and norms, human behaviors. This was precisely the function of countless religions and ancient philosophies, such as the Greek virtues, Plato's discussion of justice in his "Politeia," Cicero's late treatise "On Right Action," etc. The same is true of the doctrine of happiness among the Cynics, fate and providence among the Stoics. Qualitative values and virtues - such as "humanity," charity and kindness in Confucius, or universal love and its "utilitarian" implementation (Hiorth 2009:66) in Mo Tzu (470-391 BCE) - also found center stage in the Chinese tradition.

In the same field lies the problem of religions to make their absolute and partly antagonistic, i.e. presented in the form of irreconcilable opposites, contents understandable and comprehensible. The mediation and communicability of the divine, the absolute to limited people represents an - almost - insoluble problem.

In normative ethics there are - according to Nida-Rümelin 2005:43 - four types of everyday moral (or everyday ethical) justifications:

- Justifications with reference to ascribed individual rights, such as human rights, civil rights, etc.;
- Justifications by means of obligations entered into, for instance by preceding actions of the obligated person (e.g., contracts, promises, etc.);
- Justifications based on obligations, such as social roles (occupation, parenthood, etc.); and
- Justification by reference to principles, e.g., Kant's golden rule (treat others as one would want to be treated), helping those weaker in need, etc.

As can be seen, values and norms are one thing, but their justification can be very different.

2.3 Ethics and action

As Peter Ulrich (2016:30) has rightly pointed out, there is such a thing as an invested inner attitude with regard to morality: "If our sociocultural educational process has been somewhat 'healthy,' it will initially be the - more or less strongly pronounced - 'inner voice' that we tend to call our conscience, to which we listen or with which we at least confront ourselves in situations of inner conflict. Which moral feelings and judgments shape our conscience in detail depends largely on the sociocultural context in which our personality has been formed, especially during our childhood" (Ulrich 2016:30/31).

Johannes Fischer (1999:109) has pointed out that ethics cannot be thought without human action, or more precisely, without moral action. This gives the concept of action "an importance for ethics that can hardly be surpassed" (Fischer 1999:109). Yet - according to Fischer (1999:109) - ethical treatises usually lack reflections on action theory. At the same time, recent action theory "has emancipated itself from ethics. It sees its task not, like ethics, in the orientation of action, but in its analysis" (Fischer 1999:109).

Hahn and Kliemt (2017:148) have established the following schema on the different ethics approaches, into which each approach can be appropriately classified:

	Basic orientation		
Claim	Duties	Rights	Goals
universalistic	Kantian approach	Human rights-based approaches	Utilitarian and welfare ethical approaches
particularistic	Claims of loyalty (e.g. towards nations, groups)	Constitutional approaches	e.g. Hume

What is problematic about this scheme, however, is that rights are basically always also duties towards others - this has been shown, for example, by the discussion about Küng's concept of human rights and human duties.

Closely connected to the concept of action is the question of the acting subject, who must decide and thus assume responsibility. "The question of the acting subject can be understood transcendentally, lifeworldly, or historically" (Frey 2014:45). However, there are ethical theories that do not (any longer) pose or acknowledge the question of the subject (cf. Frey 2014:46). For example, in Luhmann's systems theory, the human being as an acting and responsible subject dissolves, so to speak, and the social system appears as an acting - if not self-responsible - subject. Regarding this problem, Frey (2014:47) writes: "The concept of the subject cannot be dispensed with, because otherwise the instance of responsibility would be lost. This statement is especially true vis-à-vis an extreme form of systems theory that speaks of the 'autopoietic system'" (Frey 2014:47).

In this context, ethical theories that do not focus on action are at least questionable.

In 1785, Immanuel Kant (2004) addressed questions of moral philosophy in his 70-page paper, "Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten." Kant believed in a fundamental principle of morality, which he called the "categorical imperative." This is the ultimate standard of morality in Kant's eyes. Kant recorded three formulations - individual authors even name four, cf. Hiorth 2009:90 - of the categorical imperative:

- Action as the expression of a universal law: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (quoted from Hiorth 2009:90). This means: in similar situations, similar actions should be taken.

- Respect for the autonomy and independence of the individual person: "Act in such a way that you use humanity, both in your person and in the person of everyone else, at all times simultaneously as an end, never merely as a means" (quoted from Hiorth 2009:90). This formulation was later often taken to mean that Kant was emphasizing human dignity here.
- Formula of the realm of ends: It is to be acted in such a way "that all maxims from their own legislation should harmonize to a possible realm of ends, as a realm of nature" (quoted after Hiorth 2009:91). Hiorth rightly thinks that this third formulation seems rather old-fashioned and not very practical, which is why the first two formulations are more important today.
- Formula of Natural Law: Kant uses as the fourth formula of the categorical imperative the injunction "that maxims must be chosen as if they should apply like general laws of nature" (quoted from Hiorth 2009:91). Hiorth suggests forgetting this formulation because it would confuse moral and natural laws.

Kant's categorical imperative thus places the emphasis on action. **Ethics always has a pragmatic, i.e. action-oriented side.** Ethics in the sense of (non-binding) values has just as little validity as ethics as an (unreflected) instruction for action. Ethics consists of both: the weighing of values and the corresponding action (on Kant's concept of human dignity, see also ► Unit I 6: "Human rights - universal or culturally relativistic?", chapter 2.1).

At this point, reference must be made to a special variety of ethical theory: utilitarianism. "Utilitarianism can be characterized as an ethical theory that emphasizes **utility** and the **greatest happiness for the greatest number** as its main values. It can also be defined as an ethical theory in which we must judge actions by their **consequences**. If these are good, then so are the actions, if not, then not. Goodness is judged by the amount of happiness that actions produce" (Hiorth 2009:96). In other words, the greatest possible benefit for the greatest possible number of people affected.

An important exponent of utilitarian ethics was John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). In his essay "Utilitarianism," which appeared in 1861 (cf. Mill 2006), he presents the essence of the utilitarian approach in about 80 pages. In it he writes: "The belief that accepts 'utility' or the

'principle of greatest happiness' as the basis of morality assumes that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong if they tend to produce the opposite of happiness. By happiness there is intended pleasure and absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and deprivation of pleasure" (quoted from Mill 1957:10). Mill traced utilitarianism back to Socrates and Epicurus. The criterion is the quality and quantity of pleasure provided by an action. Mill saw the "Golden Rule"-namely, "love your neighbor as yourself" and "act as it serves you"-as the "complete spirit of utilitarianism" (Hiorth 2009:105). John Stuart Mill's influential treatise "On Liberty" is a radical plea for the broadest possible personal freedom, which only reaches its limit where it harms other fellow human beings (cf. Kaufhold 2013:201).

The problem of utilitarianism quickly becomes clear when one asks how to judge an action that benefits some people and harms others. If a company makes maximum profit by producing at the expense of the environment and discharging chemical residues untreated into wastewater, then in the narrow sense - i.e., in the interest of shareholders - it is acting utilitarian, i.e., well, but in the broader sense - from the perspective of the general public or the biosphere - it is acting irresponsibly, i.e., badly. The following quotation from Mill (1957:23-25) itself draws attention to a problem and a common misunderstanding of utilitarianism: "It is a misunderstanding to take the utilitarian way of thinking to imply that men should direct their thinking to a large generality such as the world or society in general. The great majority of good actions are not intended for the good of the world, but for the individual of whom the good of the world consists; and the thoughts of the most virtuous man need not, on these occasions, go beyond those concerned, except so far as it is necessary to convince himself that, in doing them good, he is not violating the rights of others, that is, the legitimate and authorized rights.... The amount of attention to public interest implied in this insight is no greater than it is in any other moral system, for they all make it obligatory to refrain from doing what is recognizably harmful to society." So utilitarianism is egoism as far as possible, which is to refrain from anything that is harmful to the community. However, individual preferences are not necessarily oriented towards the greatest possible well-being. Or as Julian Nida-Rümelin (2005:10) put it: Conceptual problems arise from the fact that "obviously numerous preferences of individuals are not directed toward an improvement of their own well-being. There are many goals that

determine our actions, and only some of these goals are directed toward improving one's own well-being."

But it would also be wrong to equate egoistic action with un-morality and altruistic action with morality: "This implies that exclusively altruistic motives are to be regarded as so-called 'ethical standards', while all egoistic standards are at the same time excluded as unethical" (Wühle 3015:99). This is for two reasons: On the one hand, from the perspective of action theory, it is doubtful whether true altruism can exist at all - for all action pursues an action goal of some kind. And altruism can simply also be understood as a kind of "collective egoism", i.e. as a way of acting expected by a community or socio-cultural group. And as a "reward", so to speak, the person acting in this way experiences positive feelings - e.g. sympathy, acceptance, prestige, self-affirmation, etc. - which in a broader, psychological sense can certainly be understood as "egoistic". Thus - and this is the other side - the common concept of altruism runs the risk of becoming a pure "ought moralism" or "neuro-biologism", which disqualifies individual needs - e.g. for social affirmation - as "bad" or "useless" and only takes social or species-related goals as "good" or "evolutionary-biologically desirable".

Further, the following objections to utilitarianism are raised:

- A purely hedonistic interpretation of utility,
- the utility calculus is in practice multi-layered (maximum utility versus maximum number of affected beneficiaries),
- needs are very different (up to addictions),
- the problem of justice remains unconsidered,
- human rights and human dignity are not of importance,
- justification of all means.

It should be clear that this cannot work out - especially in the complex, modern society with its manifold and contradictory partial interests: Utilitarianism thus appears as a struggle of all against all, which is subject to a certain restraint only because of the possible harm to the general public. In addition, utilitarianism can only with difficulty - if at all - grasp absolute

values, because these are intrinsic and not based on the "utility" of any kind for an individual.

In the ethical tradition, "good" or "moral" action has been judged from two angles: Either the goal of an action is placed in the center (and judged), or the reasons or motives of the agent (cf. Fischer 1999:110). Behind this lie two fundamentally different perspectives on action:

Two perspectives on ethical action

"Talk of reasons for action, motives for action, and causes of action conceives of 'action' from the perspective of understanding the why of actions. This is precisely what is reflected in the terms 'reason,' 'motive,' and 'cause.' This is the perspective in which the freedom-determinism problem in particular arises, which, as can be seen in Kant, contains some pitfalls for ethical theorizing. In contrast, the conception of action from its goal is tied to the perspective of understanding the why of actions. The common point of both conceptions of action lies in the ... insight that the structure of action, as ethics takes it in view, namely having reasons, motives, and causes on the one hand, and goals on the other, is not inherent in the event in question itself, but rather derives from the structure of understanding about actions and reflects the question-answer structure of our understanding. The different ways of understanding about action provide perspectives under which ethics takes a look at action."

Source: Fischer 1999:110/111.

According to Bernhard Emunds (2009: 59), a person acts "justly if he or she does not decide arbitrarily in favor of a certain course of action with regard to his or her current interaction partner, but proceeds in accordance with a general rule which those affected by it can also accept as well-founded". An institution can then be called just "if its rules are accepted by all those affected for good reasons" (Emunds 2009:59). The only problem is that different groups of people can accept or reject rules of an institution. A tax system that burdens the lower and middle classes more than the wealthiest groups of the population - which is only incidentally the case in most countries today in two forms: on the one hand, the progression remains constant or even decreases above a certain income level, and on the other hand, indirect taxes, such as the value added tax, burden small and middle incomes relatively much more than large incomes - can never be accepted by all people "for good reasons", unless these people know nothing else. But whether not knowing anything else can be considered as "good reasons" is very doubtful.

In addition, there is another problem: It is known from history that people have always accepted rules which were diametrically opposed to their own interests: Most Germans accepted the laws about "racial purity" of the Nazi regime, although even then very few people even fulfilled the conditions formulated therein - namely no blood relationship of the ancestors with other "races" or ethnic groups. Under Stalinism, millions of people identified with the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" even though they neither belonged to it nor shared its interests - for example, former members of the bourgeoisie or the nobility. The point is - and the Milgram experiments, for example, have shown this in a frightening way - that people can very easily be influenced to act contrary to their interests and - even worse - contrary to their innermost convictions.

2.4 Ethics of Mind and Ethics of Responsibility

As we have seen, in the sense of Kant's categorical imperative, the individual human being should act in such a way "that the maxim of your will may at the same time at all times be regarded as the principle of a general legislation". In doing so, the person who acts under this motto must educate himself throughout his life. He thus encounters us in the form of the ought, so to speak, permanently the "moral law": "According to Kant, therefore, moral is the disposition which obeys the rule of the categorical imperative in its individual actions out of duty - and thus out of the feeling of respect. Moral autonomy proves and proves itself in such individual acts to which man decides by virtue of this moral disposition" (Stock 2011:329). According to Stock (2011:329), this concept of ethics of mind-which goes back to Kant's theory of the moral and his interpretation of Christianity and stands for his view of the relationship between religion and morality-fails in those cases where an actual situation involves a right decision and its intended and unintended consequences.

Max Weber, in his effective writing "The Call to Politics" (1992), contrasted ethics of mind with another ethics, namely ethics of responsibility. Whereas ethics of mind is oriented toward asking for the correspondence between a decision and a moral norm in a current (decision-making) situation, ethics of responsibility is guided by the question of what consequences a decision will have (cf. Weber 1973:175). In this context, the decision maker

is called upon to answer for the consequences of his decision. Furthermore, if one combines individual ethical aspects with social ethical questions, the following levels of reflection arise:

	Individual Ethics	Social ethics or institutional ethics
Should ethics or normative ethics	Subject: Action of individuals or small groups	Subject: Practices, rules and goals of a society and its institutions.
Claim to validity: Universalizability; obligatory	Target: Moral rightness of actions	Objective: Moral rightness of practices, rules, and laws.
Ethics of aspiration or evaluative ethics	Subject: Individual life	Subject: Social coexistence
Validity claim: Particularity; recommendatory, advisory	Target: Success of life, good life management	Ziel: Gutes Zusammenleben

Source: Bobbert 2012:173.

Lüpke (2011:15), following Dietrich Bonhoeffer, points out that ethics exists "only in the execution of the deed" (Bonhoeffer 1986-1999:333), i.e. as "ethics of freedom" (Bonhoeffer 1986-1999:332). From a Christian point of view, someone acts ethically who "enters into the ... world and in it, and that means in the particular relationships to other people, asks for the will of God and allows himself to be determined by it. Before God it is a matter of standing up for one's neighbor in love, whereby the doing of love is by no means exempt from the contradictions of historical reality" (Lüpke 2011:15/16). But because the will of God is by no means unambiguous, a decision can be made not only between "good" and "evil," but between "evil and evil." For example, if a regime - such as National Socialism - is so corrupt that it can only be fought by violence and, at most, by killing people, killing opponents may appear to be the lesser evil, even though killing is still bad.

Basically, then, ethics or moral philosophy considers either the motive of an action or the sentiment behind an action (cf. Wiater 2009:23). However - according to a justified objection of Bogner (2009:24) - today the focus of ethics on individual action or on the individualization issue is no longer sufficient - today systems, organizations and collective actions increasingly come into the focus of ethics as well.

In addition to this fundamental distinction, however, there are other ethical approaches or perspectives. On the level of concrete action and the goal of action, Köck (2002:96) distinguishes seven patterns:

Ethical action pattern	Action goal	Assessment criterion
Eudaemonic/utilitarian pattern of action (1)	Individual happiness or general welfare (empirically ascertainable and describable)	Individual or social benefit, judged by the consequences
Value-oriented/axiological action pattern (2)	Value recognition and optimization in action (intuitively experienceable through empathy)	Extent of conformity of action with materially existing values.
Duty-oriented/deontological pattern of action (3)	Action according to practical reason, out of duty for the sake of the law.	Categorical imperative with claim to autonomy and universalization
Contract-oriented/contractualistic action pattern (4)	State community secured by contractual agreement	Social justice
Discourse-ethical action pattern (5)	Acting according to norms on the basis of agreement based on understanding	Moral argumentation in practical discourse
Virtue-ethical action pattern (6)	Individual and/or social happiness as or through virtuous behavior.	Naturalness = reasonableness of action

Source: Wiater 2009:19.

Because so-called virtue ethics falls somewhat outside the scope of the other ethical approaches to action, this approach will be briefly discussed here. According to Joseph Kotva (1996:17), virtue ethics is about the transition between what we are and what we ought to be. In other words, virtue ethics helps us become a particular person (cf. Lee 2010:34). Classical virtues include modesty/humility, magnanimity/big-heartedness (cf. Lee 2010:34-39).

Various ethicists see something like a "contemporary renaissance of classical virtue ethics" (Nida-Rümelin 2005:36). Virtue ethics, unlike its competitors, utilitarianism, Kantianism, and contractualism, for instance, refrains from developing a systematic theory of normative decisions (cf. Nida-Rümelin 2005:36). Contemporary concepts of virtue ethics are

characterized by the following four points:

- Virtue is given priority over moral principles. Moral judgments are based less on individual actions than on "character," i.e., on the totality of the person's ethical ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.
- Moral decisions do not have to be made anew each time, but follow the characteristic dispositions of the person in each case.
- The acquisition of virtues happens through practice and imitation and not through insight into moral principles.
- In general, moral decisions focus on "the good life" especially in distinction to utilitarian and deontological moral theology (according to Nida-Rümelin 2005:36), whereby utilitarian ethics is understood as an ethics of utility maximization and deontological ethics is usually understood as a "duty ethics according to principles" (Lienemann 2008:37).

In teaching and research, i.e. at universities, a distinction is often made between general and applied ethics.

2.5 Conclusion

According to Droesser/Lutz/Sautermeister (2009:299) formulate the task of ethics as follows: "Ethics is representation of practice with practical intent. Behind all the things it negotiates, the concrete human being as a counterpart shows up as its guiding principle: The individual who must come to terms with himself, who must gain his own identity. The perception of the chance to become an essential self is a fundamentally religious, a decision-making process hitting the center of existence and cannot be taken from anyone by others. For this reason, ethics does not instruct; but it does offer friendly and attentive advice and accompaniment". In doing so, the way of acting must be accepted by the persons concerned, "for good reasons". To me, the first half of this understanding of ethics seems problematic: either there are - relative - criteria for recognizing something as "better", "more desirable" than something else, or there are not. It is less a matter of finding personal identity than of negotiating or recognizing generally valid or acceptable values, norms and rules of the game. On the other hand, it seems central to me to say that the recognition of - I would say

qualitative - values and norms that strike at the heart of existence cannot be delegated, for any of us.

For all ethical questions and ethical reasoning, Dagmar Fenner (2008:18-11) has suggested five steps that can be applied in almost all situations:

1. Situation analysis, in which primarily the external situation or problem is circumscribed.
2. Analysis of interests and conflicts: only when the interests are clarified can solutions be found.
3. Analysis of alternative courses of action: Especially utilitarian approaches, which focus on maximizing benefits - e.g. shooting an assassin to save 20 people - often suffer from losing sight of possible alternative courses of action.
4. Analysis of values and norms: These are examined for their justifiability (e.g. anthropocentric or biocentric argumentation, e.g. in the question: is human life to be protected above all, or all life?)
5. Conclusions from 1 - 4.

3. **Control Questions**

1. Why do ethics always have to do with perception? 2.
2. What are values?
3. Explain the difference between absolute and relative values.
4. List the three main formulations of Kant's categorical imperative.
5. Why is utilitarianism problematic as a basis for ethics?
6. Why is ethics problematic if it is based on rules "that even those affected by them can accept as well-founded"?
7. Explain the difference between ethics of conscience and ethics of responsibility.
8. What types of questions belong to general ethics and what areas of questions belong to applied ethics?
9. Explain the five steps of ethical reasoning according to Fenner.

4. Links

Was ist Ethik?

<http://www.philolex.de/ethik.htm>

Zentrale Kommission zur Wahrung ethischer Grundsätze in der Medizin und ihren Grenzgebieten: „Zentrale Ethikkommission“

<http://www.zentrale-ethikkommission.de/>

Einführung in die Grundlagen der Ethik

<https://asset.klett.de/assets/28eb7975/5bc967ff2feadff44c8afacdd592cfb2d7f882af.pdf>

Ethikgrundlagen: Ethik, was ist das?

<http://www.drjost.ch/ethik-grundlagen.html>

Grundlage der Ethik – Grundlagen der Ethik. Eine altsprachliche Lektüre zur Grundlegung der Ethik. Von Jörg Büchli.

<http://www.swisseduc.ch/altphilo/griech/gintlekt/docs/ethik.pdf>.

Franz von Kutschera: Grundlagen der Ethik (Buchauszug)

http://epub.uni-regensburg.de/12573/1/ubr05429_ocr.pdf

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