**5. Ethical Theories and Principles: Utilitarianism, Kant’s Ethics of Duty Theory, Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics Theory, Gilligan’s Ethics of Care, theory of Right, Theory of Justice & Rawls’s Egalitarian/Justice Theory.**

Ethics is concerned with what is good or right in human interaction and it deals with justice and right issues. It is the study of action and how man should act. For a person to make an ethical judgement, he must have ethical knowledge and the understanding of how ethics is developed.

Ethics is a branch of philosophy and it is concerned about the study of action based on the question of “what should I do?” The philosophy of ethics is divided into two branches: meta-ethics and normative ethics.

* Meta-ethics is about the origin and meaning of ethics. Meta-ethics is further subdivided into:

 (i) Moral Ethical Relativism where right or wrong is dependent on human judgement, culture and environment (e.g. Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics Theory); and

 (ii) Moral Ethical Objectivism where the question of right or wrong is dependent on a set of rules or law and must be followed. (e.g. Gilligan’s Ethics of Care Theory)

* Normative ethics is concerned with principles that guide what is morally right or wrong as accepted by a society. Normative theory is again subdivided into two types:

 (i) Teleological theory where the right of an action is determined by the amount of good consequences (e.g. utilitarianism); and

 (ii) Deontological theory where the right or wrong of an action is dependent on a set of rules e.g. code of ethics or divine law. It is based on the question of duty (e.g. Kant’s Ethics of Duty Theory).

A. **Utilitarian Theory of Ethics**

This is the most influential and prominent ethical theory that has existed through the centuries and is widely applied by economists to make economic decisions. The theory originated from Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and his student John Mill (1806-1873).

According to Mill: “An action is right to the extent that it inclines to promote the greatest good for the greatest number”.

This theory looks at the consequence or outcome of an action. It focuses on the consequences or results to determine the rightness of an action.

For an organisation, it is possible to apply cost-benefit analysis to determine the utility (level of satisfaction) of the consequence of an action.

B. **Kant’s Ethics of Duty Theory**

* According to Kant, “an action is morally right if and only if the actor is motivated by good will.”

“Good will” refers to “a duty to others”. Only an action that is done for rational, principled reasons from a sense of duty to others has moral value. However, if the purpose of an act is to achieve a business goal then such an act is not to promote goodwill to help fellow humans then it has no moral value. Similarly an act to gain self-interest is of no moral value.

* It has nothing to do with consequences as seen in the utilitarian theory.
* Kant pointed out two reasons/categorised imperatives for his ethical concept based on goodwill out of a sense of duty.
* First categorical imperative states that others would act based on the same reasons used by the actor. This criteria is known as *universalizability*.

It makes it clear that one must wear the shoes of the receiving party before acting. If the action is going to cause pain rather than happiness, then the action is not ethical. It calls for us to put aside our self-interests. It also requires us to reason out and assess whether the act is *universally accepted* as good. The acts of favouritism, discrimination and lying under all circumstances are wrongful acts.

* The *second criteria* is based on the concept of *reversibility* where it means that others would use the same reasons to treat the actor i.e. do unto others as you have them do unto you.
* Kant’s *second categorical im*perative indicates that an action is morally right for a person if and only if in performing the action, the person does not use others merely as a means for advancing his/her interest but also respects and develops their capacity to choose freely for themselves. It means never misused others and they should be treated with respect.
* The strength of Kant’s ethics is that importance must be given towards motivation and acting on principles based on the sense of duty towards fellow human beings rather than fulfilling one’s self-interest.
* Two important findings in Kant’s Ethics:
1. It introduced the principle of universalizability and emphasizes respect for any human being. This principle of universalizability states that we must be consistent in the judgements we make. There should not be double standards in our actions for it may lead to bias and disrespect towards others.
2. It provides a strong foundation for rights. Individual human rights must acknowledged and is inviolable.

C. **Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics Theory**

His ethics theory is based on the virtues of human beings, developed sometime in the 4th century BC.

Virtues refer to honesty, courage, self-control and respect for humans and non-humans, sincerity, reliability, trustworthiness, dependability, patience, prudence, benevolence, compassion, courage, courtesy, friendliness, moderation , self-control, tolerance, pride as well as shame. These are needed for a person to lead a rewarding life. People who compromise morality are degrading themselves and to have missed their goal in life. In order to live a rewarding life, a person must:

1. Live in a society which promotes justice;
2. Individuals need to engage themselves with good friends to support them to achieve ultimate happiness.
3. Individuals need material or physical provisions for a good life.
4. Individuals need to develop and cultivate their potential (internal aspect).

An individual is responsible for his own development, independent of the external conditions. He believed that self-love is a precondition for a virtuous person as it provides the catalyst to develop human potential to the fullest.

According to Aristotle, moral virtues are habits that enable a person to live according to reason. Prudence is the virtue that enable one to know what is reasonable in a given situation.

A virtuous person is someone who has taken rational control of his life, cultivated his natural disposition into moral virtues and has always through his lifetime found happiness, pleasure or satisfaction in his action based on these developed virtues.

Strengths of Virtue Ethics Theory:

1. The theory offers harmony between human intellect and desire.
2. Virtues can be developed and enhanced through training.
3. That wrongful acts are due to natural disposition.
4. Existence of virtues provides a useful criterion to evaluate social institutions and practices.
5. It offers a more holistic understanding of life within business.

Weaknesses of Virtue Ethics Theory:

1. It is inadequate to deal with big issues.
2. Aristotle’s ethics principle does not easily apply to all virtues.
3. It is more related to individual development.
4. It is found that a person’s behaviour is determined by external situation, not by his moral character.

Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics theory is still applicable in the business world today.

D. **Gilligan’s Ethics of Care Theory**

This theory developed by Carol Gilligan emphasizes caring for the concrete well-being of those near us while preserving and nurturing concrete valuable relationships. We should care for those who are dependent and related to us.

In organisations an ethics of care should permeate throughout the organisation for success to be attained. A human being does not live in isolation; throughout his/her life there is always being cared for by someone e.g. parent, teacher, lecturer, employer and friends and the community.

The Model of Ethics of Care Theory is based on two moral demands:

1. We exist in a web of relationships and we should preserve and nurture those concrete and valuable relationships.
2. Each one of us must execise special care for those with whom we are concretely related by attending to their needs, values, desires and concrete well-being.

However there are two important issues to note:

1. Not all relationships have value and not all would result in the duties of care towards others.
2. The demand for caring sometimes can be in conflict with the need to uphold justice. E.g. offering a job to a relative instead of giving it to a more eligible person.

Strengths of the theory:

1. It directs us to focus on the moral value of being partial towards those concrete persons with whom we have special and valuable relationships e.g. parents, family members, neighbours and colleagues.
2. It reminds us of the moral obligation to care for those people who are special to us in all ways.

Weaknesses of the theory:

1. Ethics of care can degenerate into unjust favouritism.
2. It can lead to stress and burnout.
3. People may sacrifice own needs and desires to care for the well-being of others.

Aristotle’s virtue ethics theory provides three important features about the development of the moral character of an individual:

1. A person is responsible for his own moral character.
2. That a rewarding life of a person is based on having the virtues of life.
3. The disposition of a person must be controlled by rational thinking and prudence.

**E. Theory of Rights**

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 set out the basic human rights for all people.

The types of human rights are:

1. Legal and Moral Rights
* legal rights refer to those provided by the legal system e.g. employers are to protect workers from being exploited or employees have the rights to be treated justly and fairly
* Moral rights are those entitlements based on ethical rules or principles e.g. the right to be treated with respect by others.
1. Specific and General Rights
* Specific rights related to contracts or agreements
* General rights refer to freedom of speech, the right for survival, the right to be respected as a person, right to ownership of property and others.
1. Negative and Positive Rights
* Negative rights refer to the obligation of others not to interfere with a person’s personal life e.g. right to property and wealth, accumulation, one’s choice of religion and beliefs, freedom from injury or the right for survival and the right to individual privacy.
* Positive rights impose obligations of others to provide us with some good or service and thereby act positively on our behalf e.g. right health care, provision of education for children, a right to a decent standard of living, to enjoy social benefits like water and electricity supplies and roads and drainage.

**F. Theory of Justice**

Justice is related to fairness or rights.

Today justice is listed as universally good moral value to be internalized by everyone. It is used to evaluate not only individual actions but also society as a whole.

Justice is related to integrity and virtue, legality and the exercise of processes serving the administration of rights, rewards and punishments. To uphold justices, the good must be recognised and rewarded while the bad ones must be punished.

Justice as a Social Process

It involves dealings with others in a righteous, fair and equitable way. One’s self-interest is balanced with the concern for needs and feelings of others above one’s own.

It is a moral right to treat all individuals as free and equal and in like manner benefits and costs (punishments) must be distributed equally.

***Rawls’s Egalitarian/Justice Theory/Justice and the Market System***

John Rawls’s theory is about the distribution of society’s benefits and burdens within a competitive free market system environment. It recognised that conflict and unequal distributions of wealth, power and income occurred in such a system. He proposed two principles to resolve conflicts in such a society:

1. The Principle of Equal Liberty - that everyone has the basic rights to liberty i.e. right to life, right to property and right to happiness and that each citizen’s liberties must be protected from invasion by others.
2. The Principle of Justice – that social and economic inequalities can be improved:
3. By taking steps to improve the position of the most needy/unprivileged members of the society.
4. Everyone should be given an equal opportunity to qualify for the more privileged position in society’s institutions i.e. based on talent and competence.

Note

Different concepts and theories of ethics are introduced. This is because no one single theory is comprehensive enough to be applied in all situations and circumstances. Each theory has its strengths and limitations.

Review Questions

1. Explain the ethical theories of Utilitarianism, Kant’s ethics of duty theory, Gilligan’s ethics of care theory and Rawls’s egalitarian/justice theory
2. Identify three features of Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics Theory with regard to the development of the moral character of a person.
3. Identify the three types of Human Rights according to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

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**5. Reality TV: Temptation Island Controversy**

In January 2001, religious and conservative pressure groups in America, Europe, Australia and Asia protested strongly against the siring of Temptation Island, a reality TV show produced by American media Fox TV.

Designed as a test of fidelity, Temptation Island’s producers place four unmarried but committed couples with 26 singles on an island. The couples’ fidelity is put to the test, as the singles try to entice them into being unfaithful to their partners. At the end of the series, whoever succeeds in remaining faithful is then declared the winner.

Worldwide critics of the show demanded a ban on the grounds that it endangered the relationship between the participating couples and promoted illicit sex. ‘Even the trailers for the show were enough to upset conservative organisations and various religious groups,’ remarked Randall Murphree, a spokesman for the American Family Association. Activists campaigned, publicising the advertisers’ identity in their campaigns and encouraged the public to compel the advertisers to boycott the show.

The authorities of Fox TV argued that the focus of Temptation Island was on exploring the dynamics of serious relationships, not sex. However, the fact that Fox TV screened all participating contestants of the show for sexually transmitted diseases weakened its arguments. Many family associations accused Fox TV of capitalizing on the entertainment value of infidelity and sex. The controversy escalated when it was discovered that one of the four couples were parents to an infant son.

Fox TV authorities pleaded ignorance and removed the couple from the series, but protesters argued that they could have broken up a family. Melissa Caldwell of Parents Television Council, a division of Media Research Centre, said, ‘I think a lot of people are appalled at the concept of trying to break relationships for the purpose of entertaining millions of viewers.’ Brent Bozell, founder of the Parents Television Council pressure group, said the show was a new low for the American entertainment industry.

Temptation Island attracted similar reactions in other countries, especially in conservative countries such as Japan, Taiwan and India. In Taiwan, the show was scrapped even before a single episode was aired. In India, although the show was aired, it faced severe opposition and the STAR TV network had to cancel the idea of making an Indian version of the show.

Questions:

1. Highlight any three ethical issues in the above case.
2. Several Asian countries decided to ban Temptation Island from being shown on television. Apply the Utilitarian, Kantian and Virtue Ethics theories to evaluate and justify whether the act of banning is a rightful action.
3. In Question 2, is the act of banning justified from theperspective of Theory of Justice and Rights principles? Discuss.
4. Is Temptation Island promoting social justice? Justify your answer.