

# An Attempt at a Universal Ethic V: Integrating Alternatives



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An Attempt at a Universal Ethic I: Introduction

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic II: Subjective Identification

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic III: Moral Outrage

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic IV: Universality

Having presented my ethic and used it to make sense of the seemingly subjective nature of morality, the phenomenon of moral outrage, and demonstrated its universality, I thought I would look at a few alternative approaches to ethics. My goal in this part is to determine and demonstrate their integratability with my ethic. It should be noted, that I take only a superficial look at each alternative, summarized as accurately as possible according to my current understanding. As well, I do not claim that this is a complete list of alternative approaches to ethics, these are just the ones of which I am most familiar.

## Moral Nihilism

I claimed in part one that my ethic forms a nihilistic moral philosophy. *Moral nihilism* is the view that no behavior is intrinsically ethical or unethical. I agree with this. The ethic as presented does not contradict this. Rather, it defines ethical behavior objectively, as that which maintains or strengthens the society between individuals. Because it requires individuals to make a subjective identification of a given behavior *before* its moral standing can be determined, no particular instance of behavior is intrinsically ethical or unethical. This does not preclude the possibility of determining the likelihood that a particular instance of behavior will be identified in a certain way by a certain group of people, and thereby having its moral standing determined in *arguendo*, so therefore it would not be a contradiction of moral nihilism to speak as if particular instances of behaviors are intrinsically ethical or unethical within this pre-defined context. For example, when observing a group of thugs clearly terrorizing others, we may say something along the lines of “Look at that moral degeneracy!” It is obvious that the society between the thugs and

their victims is being diminished or destroyed. As such, it is a reasonable assumption that the individuals involved, including ourselves, identify the behavior as that which is unethical (vandalism, battery, threats).

## **Golden Rule**

The *Golden Rule* has been around for ages, and seems to guide the interpersonal relations of most people. There are a number of formulations of the Golden Rule. My two favorites are, 1) "Do unto others as you want them to do to you," and 2) "Do unto others as they want you to do to them." Arguably, the second is more powerful as it considers the standards of the person receiving the behavior. In any event, when the Golden Rule is followed, the society between individuals will be maintained or strengthened. Therefore, we may say that following the Golden Rule is ethical behavior.

## **Virtue Ethics**

*Virtue Ethics* "emphasizes the role of one's character and the virtues that one's character embodies for determining or evaluating ethical behavior." Virtues, both in common conception and in light of my ethic, are the character traits that lead to the maintenance or strengthening of the society between individuals. The venerable "seven virtues" each seem to qualify, which are chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility. I would also add traits like compassion, empathy, honesty, and benevolence.

## **Intrinsic Value**

In the context of our ethic, behaviors will have either positive or negative *intrinsic value* as it concerns the maintenance of the society between individuals. The virtues above, as well as other ethical behaviors have positive intrinsic value toward the maintenance of the society between individuals. Likewise, unethical behaviors, such as murder, rape and theft, have negative intrinsic value toward the maintenance of the society between individuals. This is obvious as we consider the effects of each type of behavior on the society between individuals, as has been examined throughout this series.

## **Ethical Intuitionism**

*Intuitionism* "teaches three main things: 1) There are real objective moral truths that are independent of human beings, 2) These are fundamental truths that can't be broken down into parts or defined by reference to anything except other moral truths; 3) Human beings can discover these truths by using their minds in a particular, intuitive way." Each of these points integrates well into my ethic. On 1) the moral truth, or moral standing, of behaviors in the abstract is discoverable via logic and reason. It would also be accurate to say that the moral standing of many behaviors is self-evident. 2) While discovering the moral standing of each behavior is dependant on it being defined as clearly and precisely as possible, that

moral standing is a fundamental truth that only needs to be determined on the basis of my ethic. 3) Human beings instinctually seek out society with other human beings. I think we could say that society with others meets an evolutionary need. As such, using our evolved intuitions will cause us to identify particular instances of behavior similarly compared to one another. Having thus identified a particular instance of behavior, for example, as that which is unethical, the society between each of us and the one behaving unethically will be diminished or destroyed. In other words, we intuitively know that some behaviors are ethical, and others unethical, and once identified as that which is either, the consequences to the society between individuals always results.

### **Discourse / Argumentation Ethics**

*Discourse or Argumentation Ethics* “attempts to establish normative or ethical truths by examining the presuppositions” of a given behavior (discourse, argumentation, etc.). For example, when people are engaged in discourse, there is a presupposition made by each person thus engaged that his audience understands his basic language, and that they are intelligent. If these were not presupposed, the behavior would not be occurring. That it is occurring proves that whatever presuppositions there are, are true for those engaged in the behavior. It is claimed that these presuppositions include ethical truths. In the context of my ethic, I would say that the identification of particular instances of behavior, and thus their moral standing, are among these presuppositions. People engaged in discourse presuppose that what they are doing *is discourse*. They are not presupposing that what they are doing is murder. Therefore, their behavior proves that they value society, as that is a prerequisite for discourse, and if they wish to remain in discourse, they are obligated to behave ethically toward one another.

### **Objectivism**

Ayn Rand, the founder of Objectivist ethics, defined morality as “a code of values to guide man’s choices and actions – the choices and actions that determine the purpose and the course of his life. Ethics, as a science, deals with discovering and defining such a code.” She proceeded to argue for an objective reason for why people need a code of morality. And that reason, it is my understanding, is that people require the Objectivist code of morality in order to survive. Without it, they would not. Leaving the particulars of her code aside, I think it is true that if one desires to survive while in society with others – and I accept that such may not be desired – then one must engage primarily in ethical behavior, and avoid unethical behavior. The question that one who desires survival must continually ask themselves is, “Will my behavior maintain or strengthen the society between myself and others, or will it diminish or destroy it?” And choose from there according to one’s values.

### **Universally Preferable Behavior**

Stefan Molyneux formulated a set of twelve principles that compose his theory of morality. I will admit that I do not fully understand UPB, but from what I do understand, some of it is similar to Discourse or Argumentation Ethics (see principles 7 and 8, he calls it “debate”), some of it is similar to Objectivism (see principles 1-6 and 9), and some of it is similar to the ethic as presented in this series (see 11 and 12). Let me just say that, I agree with Molyneux that engaging in behavior makes certain presuppositions, some of which are the values and preferences that those thus engaged hold, such is life and survival. And I also agree that determining the moral standing of behaviors requires the use of logic (murder is unethical, rape is unethical), and that the determination of how people have identified particular instances of behavior requires empirical evidence (“We can see that those people have identified the behavior as rape, and the society between them and the rapist has been destroyed.”). But beyond that, I don’t understand UPB well enough to fully integrate it with my ethic. I’ll leave that task for a time when I do fully understand UPB.

## **Final Thoughts**

Many popular or well-standing ethical theories integrate quite well with my ethic, as I expect they would if they are based on sound logic and application, which many of the above seem to be. As my ethic is universal as demonstrated in the previous part, any alternative approach to ethics needs to make account for it in order to be complete. In the next and final part, I will answer what are sure to be challenging objections to the ethic as presented and defended throughout this series.

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic VI: Answering Objections

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