Ethical Theories Pt. 2: Rights & Character

- Moral Reasoning
  - Rights-based reasoning: does it conform to rules of interaction?
    - Front door v back door hiring morally fair?
    - Negative rights v positive rights

Key questions:

1. What moral rights do we have?
2. What is the philosophical grounding for those rights?
By nature we have moral rights, or fundamental rights

- John Locke – life, liberty, property
- Social contracts
- Some natural rights no society may ask people to give up – z.b. Right to life
John Rawls – Original Position

- Principles of justice
  - are not discovered in nature
  - Not grounded on utilitarianism
  - Decide on ground rules for society
  - Principles must be considered without partiality to self or family/friends
We do not know who we are
We do not know what position we will have in society (rich, poor, religious or non, young, old, healthy, unhealthy)
We are all equals = no social status or privileges that might be used for personal benefit
Under this guise we will agree on principles for minimal bad outcomes = justice
2 fundamental principles of moral justice:

1. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others

2. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage and attached to positions and offices open to all
Original Position v Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism = promotes general happiness
- Original Position = basic liberties for all, possibly foregoing maximization of happiness

- Rights of the individual cannot be violated or overridden to promote the happiness of others more effectively, no matter what his or her station in life.
- Inequalities are allowed only as they benefit the least well off
Pros of Rights Theory

Pros:
- Provides the moral rights of individual apart from societal whims
- Rights are not dependent on the promotion of society’s happiness
- Founded on the inherent nature of things that all rational people would accept
May promote an adversarial contest
  ◦ Rights v societal interests
  ◦ Rights v rights

May somehow lower morality
  ◦ Behavioral ground rules rather than humanity’s aspect

More a matter of following rules rather than taking into account who we are as individual and social beings
Believe moral reasoning is mistaken
  ◦ Universal principles are not reliable decision procedures for attaining the morally correct answer
  ◦ The perspective taken toward morality directs attention away from the character of the agent
None of the moral theories have been accepted universally.
  ◦ None based on universal principles can yield a wholly satisfactory result

Society cannot be reduced to universal principles

The true substance of morality is the virtues of the moral agent
It is the virtuous character of the moral agent

- Courage
- Justice
- Patience
- Benevolence
- Trustworthiness

The focus should be on developing the right kind of character traits, then we can better see and do what is morally requisite in any given situation.
If one’s character does not lend itself toward morally right actions, the result can be disastrous.

Pan Am/KLM 1977
Virtue & Action

- Virtues are acquired through teaching and practice.
- Those with moral virtues ingrained in their character will know what to do in a situation and perform appropriately.
- Once part of a person’s character they become directing and determining forces in how a person acts.
- One is able to both perceive the morality of the situation and act upon that perception.
Virtue & Action

- Thomas Aquinas – “factors in individual cases are indeterminately variable. Judgment concerning individual cases must be left to the wisdom of each person…”

- Prudentia or Wisdom = the most important virtue

- What are some virtues necessary in aviation?
What counts as a virtue?
One’s virtue may be another’s vice
When faced with disagreement virtue theory only tells us to leave the judgment with the virtuous person
Difficult to know hot to translate virtuous traits into morally correct actions = leaves us in a moral quandary
How does virtue ethics help when we are very unsure of what we ought to do?
Pros of Virtue Ethics

- Redirects attention to the particularity of moral situations
- Ethics based solely on universal principles – such as utilitarianism and deontology sometimes do not help when dealing with awkward details of peculiar situations
- Central importance of moral character is lost in principle-based theories
- Moral integrity and moral conscience is important to our moral experience
7–Step Reasoning Process

1. How would you describe the moral problem? Why is it a moral problem?
2. What are your available choices/options?
3. Who would each of those choices affect and how would they be affected?
4. Would you be willing to “universalize” your choice?
5. Are there moral rights at issue? How might those rights create an obligation for you?
6. If those persons closest to you know what you were doing, would you be proud of your choice or ashamed?
7. All things considered, then, what will you do?