



"WAYS OF THINKING MORALLY"

or

MORAL "INSTINCTS"

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PRINCIPLES

- General normative standards of conduct
- Arise from understanding of *prima facie* duties
- Understood to exist in one of two ways:
 - a) commonly intuited and consensually agreed upon: part of common morality
 - b) grounded in human nature (either naturally or divinely)

Problem: No commonly agreed-upon means to resolve conflicts between principles, and no guarantee of consensus in how best to apply agreed-upon principles

CONSEQUENCES

- Weighing of, and choosing from among, valued ends
- Essentially subjective process, though choice of valued ends may be highly defensible and commonly agreed to

Problems: No commonly agreed-upon means for evaluation of valued ends, and choices may violate principles

VIRTUE/CHARACTER

- Judgment of the person
- Focus on person's intentions, dispositions, motives; their character or habitual disposition to act in certain ways
- Standards of good or noble conduct in a role or in society which others ought to emulate

Problem: Presumes professional and/or societal agreement on the characteristics of a good professional or a good person

MORAL SENTIMENT

- Natural feelings of approval for virtue, of disapproval for wrongdoing
- Natural feelings of benevolence, caring, and justice which is common to all people
- The moral judgment is integral to the feeling itself

Problem: Essentially subjective process with lack of agreement on the feelings claimed to be natural and universal

Key Points:

1. All four of these ways of approaching ethical decision-making are valid, and each is supported by extensive literature in ethics.
2. Almost all of us use all four of these ways of ethical decision-making. We utilize different approaches in different roles and at different times in our life. Yet we do so unreflectively and almost always without conscious choice. Some of us use one way predominantly, a second way less often, and so forth; others vary their approach to ethical decision-making depending on a variety of factors. Yet again, this occurs naturally or subconsciously, and normally not deliberately or with specific intent.
3. One source of potentially irresolvable moral conflict occurs when two parties argue or negotiate their positions from different moral approaches. Agreement or consensus often may occur only when discussion ensues from within the same moral approach.
4. When presenting one's moral position or recommendation, it is helpful to substantiate or justify it with four arguments - a principled argument, a consequence argument, a virtue/character argument, and a moral sentiment argument. In this way, you have a better assurance that you have addressed the moral perspectives and concerns of all in your audience.