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ETHICS

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What is Ethics?

Ethics is the branch of study dealing with what is the proper course of action for man. It answers the question, "What do I do?" It is the study of right and wrong in human endeavors. At a more fundamental level, it is the method by which we categorize our values and pursue them. Do we pursue our own happiness, or do we sacrifice ourselves to a greater cause? Is that foundation of ethics based on the Bible, or on the very nature of man himself, or neither?

Why is Ethics important?

Ethics is a requirement for human life. It is our means of deciding a course of action. Without it, our actions would be random and aimless. There would be no way to work towards a goal because there would be no way to pick between a limitless number of goals. Even with an ethical standard, we may be unable to pursue our goals with the possibility of success. To the degree which a rational ethical standard is taken, we are able to correctly organize our goals and actions to accomplish our most important values. Any flaw in our ethics will reduce our ability to be successful in our endeavors.

What are the key elements of a proper Ethics?

A proper foundation of ethics requires a standard of value to which all goals and actions can be compared to. This standard is our own lives, and the happiness which makes them livable. This is our ultimate standard of value, the goal in which an ethical man must always aim. It is arrived at by an examination of man's nature, and recognizing his peculiar needs. A system of ethics must further consist of not only emergency situations, but the day to day choices we make constantly. It must include our relations to others, and recognize their importance not only to our physical survival, but to our well-being and happiness. It must recognize that our lives are an end in themselves, and that sacrifice is not only not necessary, but destructive.

Major areas of study in ethics include:

- Meta-ethics, about the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions and how their truth values (if any) may be determined;
- Normative ethics, about the practical means of determining a moral course of action;
- Applied ethics, about how moral outcomes can be achieved in specific situations;

Modern ethics

In the current era, ethical theories are often divided between the consequentialist theories of utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and deontological ethics as epitomized by the work of Immanuel Kant. The late 19th Century also saw the origin of pragmatic ethics in the United States, especially in the work of John Dewey.