Moral and Ethical Principles

Morals, ethics, and values are fundamental components when critically analyzing viewpoints, behaviors, and facts. These components lay down the foundations of how a person should behave and act and are even the precursor to knowing right from wrong. People learn these components consciously and subconsciously as they grow into society. Society prescribes a set of rules for how people conduct themselves, and it is each person's responsibility to refrain from negative or unethical behaviors. Some of these influences stem from people's parents and religious upbringings, and some people form these themselves. Either way, it is each person's individual duty to form good characters and good judgments on how they conduct themselves. How can someone achieve a good character and good judgments and live a good life?

Regarding moral character, there are several specific moral and ethical principles. Deontologists (formalism-Kantianism) believed that you should act with a solid understanding of moral principles; this brings forth moral actions. You have an obligation to act in a way that promotes positive conduct; you should behave this way because it is right (categorical imperative). Otherwise, you are not making a sound universal rule for all to follow. Likewise, it is not appropriate to act differently for one person from how you would act for someone else. You are supposed to treat everyone the same, no matter who they are (practical imperative). Kant believed in universal rules that should apply to everyone. However, one must never use someone else to achieve this, no matter the outcome. You should not hurt or harm someone to protect or save someone else, unlike the golden rule (Albanese, 2008).

Consequentialism (utilitarian or teleological—Mills and Bentham) states that good results stem from good action. Consequences are the root of this ethical approach, in which the motivating factor is the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain (hedonism). Of course, there are differences in how one would judge happiness; this would not be equal for all. Personal versus social happiness (utilitarianism) and selfishness are not options because happiness cannot be achieved if someone is selfish by nature. In this case, consequentialists believe in self-sacrifice for the good of others as prescribed in the golden rule. Moral virtue of educating oneself in what would allow for your happiness and the happiness of others is one of the distinct characteristics of consequentialism. What motivates a person is unimportant; it is more important to choose between acting in a manner that will bring forth a reward or positive consequence and acting in one that inflicts harm on a person. The decision should be beneficial to all parties (Albanese, 2008).

Lastly, virtue ethics (Aristotelianism) centers on the notion of learning through experience and obtaining what is good—basically, the elements of life that people need, not want. For example, people need shelter, clothes, food, good
health, knowledge, and civil liberties (apparent goods). To Artistotelians, happiness is the ultimate goal. To pursue happiness, a person must possess moral virtue and may only be achieved by virtuous actions. Moral virtue is the internal process of being a good person, through positive means, to develop natural intellect and morality. You have and will continue to learn from experience, whether it is through education or through others; the difference will be what you take away from those experiences. You may learn courage, ambition, truthfulness, or even cowardice or vanity. You may be good, or you may be less than good; either way, you are building your moral character. What have you seen before in others that you find yourself doing now? What have you seen that you would never do for some reason? Through this knowledge and practice or avoidance, you have built your moral character (Albanese, 2008).

Reference