

## COMMON LD VALUES (from Debate Central)

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### EQUALITY

Equality generally refers to the idea that people are or ought to be the same in terms of political, economic, legal, or cultural status. Equality has a close connection with morality and justice, since most theories of distributive justice recognize the importance of equality, and egalitarianism is the moral doctrine that people should be treated as equals. The fundamental ethical argument of equality is that there is no morally relevant distinction between people, so everyone deserves equal moral consideration. Stoics hold equality to mean that people are equally entitled to human worth, regardless of one's nation, ethnicity, or gender. Modern secular cosmopolitans, such as Martha Nussbaum, also hold this view. This view also forms the basis of much of Kant's work. Similarly, Christian egalitarianism says that all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status based on the notion that humankind were created in the living image of God and that God loves all human beings equally. (Although Christianity is far from the only religion advocating the notion of equal human worth.) It most commonly appears as a political ideal after its usage in the French Revolution. The United States Declaration of Independence includes moral and legal egalitarianism in the phrase "all men are created equal," which implies that each person is to be treated equally under the law. Culturally, egalitarian theories have gained prominence in the past 200 years, and many caste-oriented or otherwise heavily classist societies have recently come under fire. Doctrines advocating racial supremacy and ethnic destiny have been increasingly isolated and radicalized. Rigid and restrictive gender norms are being rearticulated in dynamic ways, and women's rights can no longer be ignored. Egalitarian ideals have been politically accepted in the past two hundred years in the form of the socialism, communism, anarchism, democracy, and human rights movements, which promote various degrees of economic, political, and legal egalitarianism. Nietzsche argues against equality, because the presence of egalitarian values tends to thwart the flourishing of truly extraordinary individuals (extremely gifted artists, very intelligent scientists, those who transcend some social mores, etc.).

### JUSTICE

Aristotle defined justice in his *Ethics* as giving each man what he is due. The source of justice has been attributed to divine command, natural law, or human creation. Distributive justice involves maximizing benefit to the worst off. This theory of justice can be closely related to egalitarianism, such as in socialism. In this sense, distributive justice might conflict with property rights and other liberties. It should be noted that distributive justice, in other contexts, can mean maximizing aggregate social welfare. In matters of criminal justice, this sense of distributive justice would advocate punishing the criminal if and only if such would deter future such crimes. On the other hand, retributive justice regards the proper response to wrong-doing as that which proportionately punishes the wrong-doing. Retributive justice says that impunity is almost always unjust.

## **SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORIES**

Social contract describes the implied agreement by which people form nations and maintain a social order. Social contract theory maintains that the authority of the government must always derive from the consent of the governed. Here, moral norms are established not from a perfectionist ideal of human nature or divine will but instead from the contract agreed upon by those that govern and those that are governed. Government only as a contract in which people conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to better ensure the more stable enjoyment of their lives, liberty, and property. Common to all of social contract theories is the notion of a sovereign will which all members of a society are bound by the social contract to respect. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are the most famous philosophers of social contract theory.

## **CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE**

The categorical imperative is the central philosophical concept of the moral philosophy of Kant, and of modern deontological ethics. Kant recognized the need for a system of “pure morality,” one that was truly rational and did not interject personal or subjective adulterants. The categorical imperative acts as a test to determine whether an action is moral, regardless of who is acting. The categorical imperative is an absolute, unconditional requirement for moral conduct. It is best known in its first formulation: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” This resembles the golden rule (Do only that which you would wish upon yourself.), but is slightly different. Kant’s central focus is rationality. It distinguishes humans from mere beasts, and gives us access to pure morality. When Kant says “you can at the same time *will*,” he has in mind a rational will. If the behavior is universalized, and still rationally acceptable, then it is moral. It is not moral to specific people or cultures, because this determination comes from the rational will. If one rational person accepts an action by the categorical imperative, then Kant would say that everyone would accept that action as moral, since everyone is equally rational. Thus, the categorical imperative differs from the golden rule, because the golden rule allows for non-rational considerations. The categorical imperative attempts to identify what is inherent to morality, and it holds that rationality is the only way to know the moral. Since we’re all equally rational, we can all come to the same rational conclusions about moral behavior. Nietzsche sharply disagrees with this notion.

## **DEONTOLOGY**

Deontology is the theory of duty or moral obligation derived from Kant’s categorical imperative. Deontologists argue the rightness or wrongness of an action does not depend on the goodness or badness of its consequences, as consequentialists believe. The most famous deontological theory is that of Kant. In his theory, Kant claimed that various actions are morally wrong if they are inconsistent with the status of a person as a free and rational being, and that only those acts that further the status of people as free and rational beings are morally right. Therefore, Kant concluded that we all have an absolute duty to avoid acts that treat people as a means to some other end and to perform acts that affirm the rationally autonomous individual. This framework can be more strategic, because it makes it much harder for your opponent to

outweigh you. If an action violates deontological constraints (in Nozick's terms, "side-constraints"), the action is irremediably unjust. Your opponent cannot claim that you violate some other deontological principle and outweigh you, so long as you've established that your opponent has the positive burden to prove that their side is actively consistent with justice.

## **UTILITARIANISM**

Utilitarianism is the consequentialist ethical doctrine that the moral worth of an action is determined solely by its contribution to overall utility, which can be defined broadly as happiness or pleasure. Jeremy Bentham is generally credited with the development of utilitarianism. Bentham believed that pain and pleasure were the only intrinsic values in the world and thus derived the rule of utility, that the good is whatever brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. He influenced John Stuart Mill, who wrote in his *On Liberty* that utilitarianism is beneficial for politics and requires that political arrangements satisfy the "liberty principle" which states that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."