

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Alex N. Hadduck for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Biochemistry and Biophysics presented on May 21, 2009. Title: Separating Morality From Worldview: Studying Ethics Throughout Time and Across Cultures.

Abstract approved:

Courtney Campbell

Seven schools of thought, varying in cosmology and age, were studied in order to glean the ethical precepts and virtues to which each school of thought adhered. These injunctions were put in list-form and compared with respect to both semantics and content. The purpose of this investigation was to look for evidence of a consistent set of injunctions that humans have valued regardless of cultural upbringing, in an attempt to discuss a common morality without discussing various worldviews, which often conflict with each other.

The method employed by this thesis provides a way of discussing a common morality without discussing worldview, although the specifics of what a common, or universal, morality may contain were not determined.

Key Words: common morality, metaethics

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Separating Morality From Worldview: Studying Ethics Throughout Time and Across
Cultures

by

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Separating Morality From Worldview: Studying Ethics Throughout Time and Across Cultures

Chapter 1

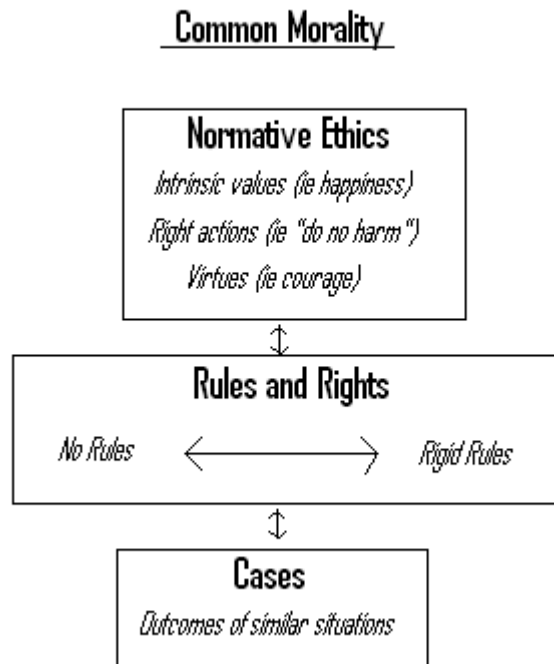
Introduction

Observing a Problem

Walking down the street, you come across a panhandler who asks for your spare change. How do you decide what to do? Most of us reflexively give or withhold our change without examining the reason for our actions – it's just what we do. This particular decision is probably the same as it has been when asked for spare change in the past. But what happens when something about the panhandler gives you pause, and makes you reconsider taking the same action you have in the past? You may find yourself wondering what made you act the way you have previously. If you simply set up a rule allowing or disallowing the giving of handouts, you may wonder just how strictly that rule needs to be followed. Or you may have been raised a certain way where concepts of altruism, frugality, respect for the disenfranchised, and the judgment of others all coalesce to form your general reaction to a panhandler's request. What if, after considering these things, you still can't decide whether to part with your spare change?

Common Morality

A well-known ethicist, Robert Veatch, published a schematic outlining four different levels of moral discourse. This chart serves as a guide one could follow when the morality of an action was in question – for instance, if a person was unsure of how to ethically respond to a panhandler. As the decision-making process progresses, the scope of moral discourse expands as the situation in question becomes more complex. Veatch's chart begins with concern for cases similar to the action in question, such as coming to the assistance of the needy. Biblical stories or precedent court cases would be examples of this level of ethical deliberation. Most ethical decisions are made intuitively and can thus be made at this first level. Yet increasingly complex decisions require increasingly complex deliberation. By the time the schematic has been followed to the conclusion of the third level of moral discourse, assessing similar cases has been supplemented by examining not only common moral themes spanning intrinsic values, principles, and virtues; but the relative weight each ethical maxim carries has also been fitted to the problem at hand. The figure on the next page outlines the first three levels of moral discourse, as presented by Veatch¹.

Figure 1. Common Morality

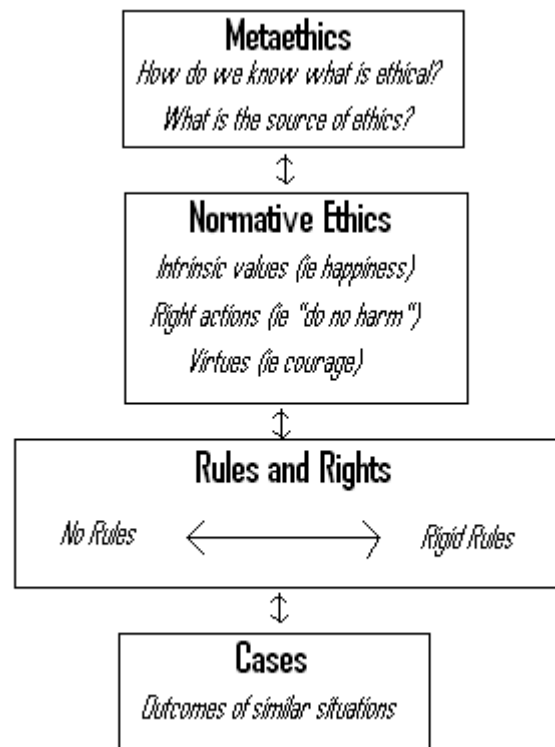
The first three levels of moral discourse can be considered to encompass a “common morality.” They concern “right actions,” such as prohibitions on killing, and virtues, such as honesty, which most people would confirm as being morally correct. According to Veatch, common morality cuts across cultures, religions, politics, and time periods². A common morality is essentially the sum of all moral precepts and virtues that we can agree upon regardless of our personal beliefs.

Metaethics

If after this strenuous three-level process, the choice between types of action has not been reached, the final level of moral discourse is to be explored – metaethics. The very existence of this fourth level of moral discourse prompted me to write this thesis. Metaethics, commonly referred to as a “worldview,” is the consideration of where our concepts of morality spring from at the most fundamental level. According to the diagram, metaethical considerations revolve around two questions – how we know something is ethical, and the ultimate source of these ethical teachings. Metaethics is the realm of Divine Law versus Natural Law, of cultural relativism versus pure logic. Yet this category seemed out of place to me in a schematic which is supposed to guide us towards an ethical decision.

If Veatch’s schematic is meant to be a roadmap that we can all follow when confronted with a difficult question, does it really make sense to place metaethics as the ultimate moral source? Could a hospital ethics committee composed of humanists and Muslims really decide if it is ethical to take a Hindu off of life support if the decision had to be made at the fourth level of moral discourse? The very fact that metaethics is composed of so many seemingly incompatible theories makes me wonder why it is placed above all else in the flow chart; why, in essence, it is the ultimate appeal for decision making.

Figure 2. Veatch's Levels of Ethical Discourse¹



Looking at the flow chart, the first three levels of moral discourse all have some basic compatibility. It can be said that these levels are, in general, parts of the common morality, a view corroborated by Veatch.² By working through these levels the clarity of the situation improves. This cohesiveness disintegrates on the fourth level, the level at which the greatest amount of clarity is needed, the level where we should have to look no further to find the answers we seek. Instead, as it currently stands, the metaethical level seems to be nothing more than a place where mankind's greatest dichotomies clash without hope of ever reaching consensus.

What good is this fourth level of discourse, if it doesn't provide any new information, if it is nothing more than a fresh set of opposing thoughts which will lead to moral gridlock? Ideological wars, polarized political climates, social injustices, and widening economic gaps the world over are proof that this gridlock has yet to be mediated in any way. We do not simply argue over what is right and wrong, but we argue over *why* it is right and wrong. Some invoke God, some logic, some both, some neither. Yet on Veatch's account, these core convictions concerning the fourth level of moral discourse are the things we are supposed to turn to, when all else fails, to make moral decisions.

The Need for an Anchor

Despite the obvious dissimilarity between the first three levels and the fourth, it is quite obvious that something, whether it is metaethics or not, needs to occupy that fourth level of moral discourse. Everyone, on reflection, has *something* acting as the anchor to their beliefs and values. Even an agnostic, stalwartly refusing to make any kind of conjecture as to the true nature of the universe, has their belief in mankind's infinite ignorance to ground their thoughts. Without this grounding force, this anchor, ethics would be in freefall. No method of labeling an action "good" or "bad" would ultimately exist and as a people we would have no justification for affirming or abhorring anything we may do to each other. It is important to understand that if this were the case, right and wrong would be merely arbitrary. Furthermore, this kind of arbitrary morality would be different for every single person, and could fluctuate as often as a person saw fit. There

would be no overarching principles on which to base laws, or professional codes, or international treaties. There would simply be an entire globe of people who had no tangible reason to care for anyone else, on any level, for any amount of time. As globalization continues to make our societies increasingly heterogeneous it is necessary that we agree upon right and wrong without necessarily agreeing upon *why* it is right or wrong.

It is possible, of course, that we really cannot rectify the chaos of the fourth level of moral discourse; that it is impossible to ground our thoughts in anything other than the worldviews we grew up learning. This seems to be the position affirmed in post-modern ethics; and certainly that may be the route we must ultimately accept. It is entirely possible that we are destined to know no great truths besides those with which we are raised, that atheism and religion really are incompatible on that fourth level of moral discourse. But I don't think that is the case, and the conclusion will suggest a modified role for metaethics.

Hypothesis

This thesis aims to identify a universal core of moral values, with respect to *only* how humans should treat each other. It will attempt to show that, regardless of the metaethical views we may hold, a common morality exists within mankind that spans time, geography, and culture; and that this core suggests that a universal rightness and wrongness exists which humanity simply acknowledges, through different worldviews, in many different ways. This thesis will attempt to generate a universal code of ethics and

virtues from this common morality. It will suggest that the fourth metaethical level of moral discourse is not strictly necessary as an anchor to the other three levels; whose clarity is enhanced by metaethics' absence. This will be done as a "proof of concept" project, meaning that while specific results will be sought after and discussed, the primary focus will be assessing if the method employed by this thesis makes a non-metaethical discussion of morality possible.

Methods

I will study primary and secondary documents containing ethical precepts and virtues from selected nonreligious and religious schools of thought, to list out *only* what they say about how to treat others. The inclusion of virtues in this thesis is not an attempt to categorize what makes a person good or bad, but it is an attempt to understand what character traits are supposed to be universally manifested through actions. For instance, it may be a common ethical precept to abstain from murder. Yet that precept, without any virtuous context, would not explicitly bar someone from horribly wounding another person. A common virtue, such as temperance or love, would further flesh out "do not kill" by adding a context of patience and nonviolence.

The primary documents will be from as many different times and geographies as possible in order to provide a broad cross-section (see table below). The point of this is to make the list of primary documents extremely dissimilar, so that any universal precepts found are truly interesting phenomena and not simply the result of cultural similarity. For instance, if only Western secular philosophers were studied, it could be said that any

universal precepts found would simply be carryover of a popular precept from thinker to thinker – not the simultaneous acknowledgement of the precept from two unrelated sources. This type of carryover is also present in religions such as Judaism and Christianity, which both acknowledge the Ten Commandments.

The general criteria for inclusion in this thesis are the school of thought's familiarity, representativeness, and relevance. All of the documents listed below should seem somewhat familiar to most people with a general knowledge of different worldviews. Perhaps James Rachels or the Navaho don't seem explicitly familiar, but the idea of secular thought and of indigenous thought shouldn't be a new concept. Compare this to the Vietnamese religion Cao Dai,³ which has four million followers yet is hardly a household name in ethical discussions.

Since this thesis is attempting to label certain elements of morality as “universal,” it is important that its source material covers the beliefs of a large number of people. Representativeness is a term I define as signifying that a school of thought represents a large fraction of the human population. I could carry out a comparative analysis of fifteen religions that have two thousand followers each, yet any universal precepts or virtues I would find would only be universal in reference to thirty thousand people – roughly 0.004% of the world's population. The Abrahamic traditions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, on the other hand, have over three and a half billion adherents,³ encompassing more than half of the world's population.

The final criteria for inclusion, relevance, has to do with the material's usefulness with respect to this thesis' goals. It encompasses considerations of the school of thought's history and contemporary standing. The Abrahamic traditions date past 1300

BCE,⁴ yet are still central to humanity's ethical discourse. It would be nothing short of incomplete to attempt a discussion of common morality which did not account for such an influential group of religions. Yet relevance also includes considering which passages to include and exclude within a certain religion. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt an in-depth analysis of the entire Bible – obviously some decisions have to be made. The Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule were chosen, not because of their representativeness or familiarity, both of which are the same for all parts of the Bible, but because of their relevance. This is to say, these passages include specific precepts which one must follow in order to be an ethical person – precisely the focus of this thesis.

Finally, relevance includes a school of thought's ability to fulfill a specific criteria of this thesis. For instance, the writings of Thomas Aquinas were chosen as a representation of Christianity and logic not because it is necessarily the best possible source of Christian ethics, or logic-based ethics, but because Aquinas represents those things during a time period which was otherwise unrepresented in this thesis.

From the primary documents, a list of ethical maxims and virtues will be created. The separate lists of injunctions will then be compared and analyzed with respect to their semantic structure and content. Semantic structure will be analyzed first, and this analysis will serve as the starting point for the analysis and discussion of the content within each precept and virtue. After the semantic analysis, a straightforward content comparison will be done, wherein precepts and virtues with obvious shared themes will be grouped together – it is at this point that a discussion on a universal core of moral values will take place. Following this analysis, the notion of “ranking” injunctions based on their *frequency* amongst the various schools of thought will be discussed, leading to a

final interpretive analysis of the injunctions and a discussion on what generating a code of ethics within this methodology may look like.

School of Thought

Justification

The Elements of Moral Philosophy, by James Rachels

Rachels serves as a representation of secular moral philosophy

The laws of Manu

Part of the religious canon of Hinduism

The Ten Commandments

The Commandments, issued in the Old Testament, will represent Abrahamic religions

The Five Precepts and Ethics for the New Millennium

The basic code of Buddhist ethics, studied from the contemporary standpoint of the 14th Dalai Lama.

The structure of a moral code; a philosophical analysis of ethical discourse applied to the ethics of the Navaho Indians, by John Ladd

The Navaho exemplify the ethics of an indigenous and oral moral community

Tao Te Ching, by Lao Tzu

Part of the Taoist canon

The Summa Theologica, by Thomas Aquinas

A thirteenth century synthesis of both logic and faith

With the exception of the Ten Commandments, these documents do not convey their ethical precepts in list form. The precepts are interspersed amongst the various writings within each text. Hence, while the ethical precepts for all of the above

documents will be notated in list form, the lists are compilations which arise from examining the texts, and not explicitly stated lists within the texts.

They are also representative of several different time periods. James Rachels, a prominent secular philosopher, while not attempting to actually write out the explicit tenets of such a morality, outlined several traits he felt such a moral code would need. He made special note that the moral community is not limited by place or time – that any universal morality would necessarily treat those coming after us with the same consideration as those along side us.⁵ The prohibition of nuclear war illustrates this sentiment nicely – the morality of mass casualties aside, it would be immoral simply because of the lingering harm the blasts would cause those that came after us. With regards to time, this thesis will act retrospectively as well, considering the thoughts of those that came before us as a legitimate source of material for compiling the core moral values. The documents from Taoism, Hinduism, and Judaism are all representative of thinking founded before the common era. Thomas Aquinas represents the Enlightenment, while the Navaho represent a school of thought from the third century as understood by Navaho living in the 1950's. Finally, the Buddhist and secular documents examined in this thesis are representative of contemporary thought.

Limitations

Establishing that humanity, despite its myriad beliefs and ways of life, shares a universal core conception of morality is a task that can never, by its very nature of open-endedness with respect to time, be completed. This thesis is only an attempt to begin that task by providing evidence that a universal morality exists, or to show that a common morality probably doesn't exist. As such, it presents a brief sampling of well-known schools of thought. This sampling itself, and the selection criteria stated in the methods section, present the largest limitation of what this thesis can say. Things stated as "universal" are nothing more than things gleaned from a cross-section of schools of thought which, to the best of my ability, represent the most widespread and influential thinking humanity has offered itself. The schools of thought not included in this thesis are no less important than those that are, they just represent thinking which was outside of this thesis' scope of examination. As such, the "universals" obtained from the following analyses would be more accurately described as "things which, to the best of this thesis' abilities to discern, may be universal." This limitation also applies to the studied documents themselves, as I will not be reading the Old Testament or the entire Hindu canon cover-to-cover. This means that even within the schools of thought represented herein, the representation is truncated to the relatively small portion of each document I examine.

Even within these few samples, decisions will have to be made with respect to things such as lay versus strict interpretations – or how to properly integrate sexist

documents into a moral code which treats both sexes as equal. Any decisions of this nature will be documented as the thesis progresses.

Another limitation is the problem of translation. Many of the documents studied in this thesis were not written in English, and as such a degree of translational error must be accounted for. To combine one school of thought's "do not lie" with another's "always tell the truth," without first explicitly recognizing them as distinct, just adds a degree of error to this thesis. Strictly accounting for the precepts, in their original wording as read in English, serves as a baseline for all the interpretation that will follow.

The whole idea of a broad-based study is to minimize bias in order to obtain truth. It is the goal of this thesis to put forward a universal code of ethics not grounded in metaethics per se; but in what humanity has, whether visible or not, shared all along. Yet my personal bias must be acknowledged, I would like nothing more than to see this hypothesis supported. As an extension of this personal bias, it is also necessary to acknowledge my own place within the schools of thought this thesis will examine. It would be fair to call myself thoroughly Western in upbringing and general worldview. I was raised in a Christian household, and a portion of this thesis' comparative methodology is grounded in the links I see between the worldviews I've experienced as a young man and the religious tenants I remember from my childhood. In college I have been inundated, as a science major, with an empirical "cause-and-effect" understanding of the world. Thus, the question that this thesis is asking, and the empirical nature of its methods, are thoroughly Western in origin, as I am Western in origin.

Finally, as this thesis will be only one piece of work at a particular point in time it is folly to assume that any results found herein are universal in the truest sense, as the next billion years after its completion may very well prove it wrong.

Possible Outcomes and Their Significance

Despite the vast limitations of the thesis, I believe that the results will lead to some worthwhile knowledge. Let us say that the hypothesis is disproven. That, in terms of the fourth level of moral discourse, metaethics is as good as it gets. That if a decision about some action really must be considered on a metaethical scale Christians will never be able to agree with atheists. This would still be useful to know. It would speak to our understanding of what ultimate right and wrong really are, and give weight to the idea that relative truth *is* ultimate truth – or that either just one, or none, of the current schools of thought is correct.

What would a proven hypothesis accomplish? It would provide some kind of replacement for the tumultuous metaethics as defined by Veatch. The universal code would suggest, due to its very nature of collaborative assembly, that humanity shares an ethical bond that goes beyond what we hear in church or read in essays; yet what we hear in church or read in essays would still mesh with this code. It would provide a way to agree upon right and wrong without agreeing upon the metaethical *why*, which would still be left up to the individual. It would replace metaethics as the anchor of our ethical discussions, without requiring that we give up our cultural beliefs.

The next three chapters of this thesis examine ethics in selected world religions and philosophies. The second chapter will examine Western traditions, the third will examine Eastern traditions, and the fourth will examine the indigenous traditions of the Navaho. Within the next two chapters, the schools of thought examined are analyzed in chronological order of their earliest documented practices. For instance, in chapter three Hinduism is examined first, as it is the oldest religion, and is then followed by the younger Taoism and a contemporary Buddhist perspective. The ethical precepts and virtues of the individual traditions will be listed. Following this study, the fifth chapter will analyze semantically common and disparate themes. The sixth and seventh chapters will deal with content similarity and what it may say about a universal morality. The eighth chapter is comprised of concluding reflections.

Endnotes

1. Veatch, Robert M. *The Basics of Bioethics*, 2nd ed. Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey. 2003. Pages 2-9
2. Veatch, page 9
3. [Http://www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com). Accessed May 10th, 2009
4. Van Voorst, Robert E. *Anthology of World Scriptures*. Wadsworth Publishing Company. Belmont, California. 1993. Page 213
5. Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd ed. McGraw-Hill Humanities. 2006. Chapter 14

Chapter 2

Examining Western Thought – Judaism, Thomas Aquinas, and Secular Philosophy

Western thought is generally defined as the traditions originating from Greek reasoning and the Abrahamic religions. As such it encompasses Islam, Judaism, and Christianity as well as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the legacy of philosophy built upon these founding thinkers and schools of thought. Trying to accurately summarize all of western thought is far beyond the scope of this thesis, and three documents were chosen as a representation of the type of thinking western thought encompasses.

The first representation of Western thought I will examine are selections from the Books of Exodus and Leviticus, parts of the Old Testament of the Bible. Exodus and Leviticus are also known as two of the five books of the Torah, a part of the Jewish canon, alongside Genesis, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Ten Commandments are enumerated within Exodus, and have become the primary source of the ethical precepts associated with Judaism. Leviticus is known for containing the Golden Rule – “love your fellow as yourself.” It is important to note that while the beatitudes of the New Testament list the ethical precepts unique to Christianity, Christians also accept the Old Testament as part of their ethical code. This is useful insofar as it means that a slightly larger portion of Abrahamic traditions can be covered by the study of Exodus and Leviticus.

Much more religious teaching is contained within Exodus and Leviticus than the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. However, concentrating on only these selections is justified by their long standing influence upon Western thought. The writings of Bernard Gert, the author of *Common Morality* and a contemporary secular philosopher, illustrate the pervasiveness of the Ten Commandments. Gert's moral philosophy is based on ten rules, many of which directly correspond to precepts stated in the Ten Commandments. Even though Gert does not acknowledge any kind of divine basis for his philosophy, the form and substance of his moral code so closely resembles the Ten Commandments that the similarities are impossible to ignore.

The Golden Rule, even more than the Ten Commandments, is an influential moral precept which continues to mold ethical thinking. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), an enormously influential philosopher of the Enlightenment, puts forth his categorical imperative "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."¹ This is to say, we must treat each other as if the treatment would apply to all people all the time, including ourselves. This sentiment is echoed in Confucianism, Jainism, the New Testament, and the Bahá'í Faith as well.²

My second representation of Western thought is constituted by the teachings on natural law in the *Summa Theologica*, by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas was a 13th century Roman Catholic monk and philosopher. Fifty years after his death he was proclaimed a saint by Pope John XXII. The *Summa* is Aquinas' primary moral work, and synthesizes both logic in the mold of Aristotle and the Christian faith in a way that greatly influenced many thinkers who came after him. It was meant to explain Christian theology and mankind's place in it.³ Including Aquinas in this thesis broadens its examination of both

the Abrahamic religions and classical philosophies based in reason rather than revelation. Furthermore, Aquinas represents moral thinking at a place in time later than the Old Testament, yet markedly earlier than our era.

My third representation of Western thought is contained in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, by James Rachels. Rachels is a contemporary secular philosopher who focuses on morality. In *The Elements*, Rachels concerns himself with not only the definition of morality, but with investigating various types of moral thinking. The drive behind this book is to understand how different philosophical systems can be compared to yield an understanding of what a universal ethical system might look like.

It bears repeating that these three documents are a small portion of the available literature pertaining to Western thought. However, as representations they accomplish an important balance between religious and secular thought. As stated previously, the Old Testament is a part of both the Jewish and Christian canon. If only Western religions were studied, myriad similarities like this would be present, skewing any results towards the Abrahamic traditions. Likewise, it would be hard to discuss only secular philosophers without realizing that they are not entirely independent, but rather an ever evolving chain of thought based upon religious thinkers which had come before. To study only texts which share a common origin would not yield results which could be argued as universal. Thus these three documents are an attempt to provide a balance between the secular and the religious during the examination of Western thought.

The Old Testament

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all referred to as Abrahamic traditions due to their monotheistic faith in the god of Abraham. Historically, Judaism was the first of these three religions, dating back past 1300 BCE.⁴ These books acted as the founding documents of both faith and social conduct for early Israel and helped guide the Jewish community through the ordeals enumerated throughout the Old Testament.

As previously mentioned, these passages from the Old Testament were not only important to the early Israelites both as articles of faith and as rules for how to treat fellow citizens, but they remain relevant today. In the last decade there have been numerous legal battles over the placement of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, signifying both their continuing prevalence in modern society and their increasingly inflammatory role in the proverbial melting pot. In order to further illustrate the Ten Commandments' influence on thinkers as removed from Judaism as secular philosophy, a (G) after one of the commandments will signify a direct correlation to one of Bernard Gert's ten ethical maxims.⁵

The Ten Commandments⁶

1. I am the Lord your God.
2. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol.
3. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother (G).
6. You shall not kill. (G)
7. You shall not commit adultery. (G)
8. You shall not steal. (G)
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (G)

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor (G).

The Golden Rule⁷

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the LORD.

While this list is probably the most self-explanatory of the ethical codes studied in this thesis, a few things are worth pointing out. The first is that these are phrased in an interpersonal way, meaning that they are directed towards actions and not necessarily inner virtues. Yet some general observations can be made concerning virtues. Examining the forbidden actions of lying, killing, stealing, and adultery, it can be said that many of these actions are directly tied to virtues such as reverence for human life, and treating other people's property or marital vows as sacred. Honoring parents speaks to the virtue of cherishing familial bonds, and the golden rule speaks to the virtues of temperance and forgiveness as well as its popular message of fairness.

It is also of note that Gert's ten ethical maxims are all present within the Ten Commandments, with the exception of those which deal specifically with God.

The Summa Theologica

The influence of classical Greek philosophy is clearly present within Aquinas' enumeration of the four cardinal virtues – prudence, justice, temperance, courage. These four virtues were originally listed by Plato,⁸ and are an example of how Aquinas' thoughts were shaped by secular reason, even when dealing with religion. A further example of Aquinas' rationalism lies within his description of natural law – moral law

that applies to all mankind and is deduced by reason.⁹ The moral actions listed below are what Aquinas deems to be the core requirements of natural law. Aquinas separates natural law from external and divine law, which is law forged by God and given to mankind via divine revelation.¹⁰ Three theological virtues stem from the supernatural: charity, faith, and hope. The seven vices listed are commonly referred to as the “seven deadly sins,” a well-known list of egregious personal traits which predate Aquinas yet still have relevance today.

Virtues

1. Prudence¹¹
2. Justice¹¹
3. Temperance¹¹
4. Courage¹¹
5. Charity¹²
6. Hope¹²
7. Faith¹²
8. Avoid covetousness,¹³ sloth,¹⁴ envy,¹⁵ gluttony,¹⁶ lust,¹⁷ anger,¹⁸ and pride.¹⁹

*Actions*²⁰

1. Good is to be done, evil is to be avoided. All following precepts are based upon this, and are necessarily good.
2. All actions that preserve human life, and ward off its obstacles. This comes from the powerful and natural inclination towards self-preservation.
3. Sexual intercourse and the education of offspring.
4. Whatever encompasses being able to live in a society, such as avoiding causing offense to a neighbor and educating oneself.

The Elements of Moral Philosophy

In *Elements* Rachels attempts to rationally define what a “minimum conception” of morality would look like. This is to say, he wants to understand the moral precepts absolutely necessary in order for a society to exist. Out of his reasoning come three moral precepts – telling the truth, a prohibition against murder, and caring for our children. Rachels argues that without these three precepts, we could never meaningfully interact with each other, our lives would constantly be in danger, and the future of our society would never be able to flourish. Rachels builds upon these three precepts to form what he calls a “satisfactory moral theory,” a set of ethical precepts which meet the conditions of being both rationally derived and universally applicable.²¹

*Virtues*²²

1. Humility in the face of our small place in the universe.
2. Respect for persons as rational decision-makers.
3. Understand individual passions regardless of their universal merit.
4. Courage
5. Generosity
6. Honesty
7. Loyalty to and love of friends and family.

*Actions*²²

1. Any kind of doctrine which divides humanity based on cosmetics – gender, race, nation of origin, even egoism – must be avoided. Impartiality must be maintained with respect to such things, otherwise we enter the realm of the irrational, wherein we lose any way to categorize right and wrong.
2. Fairness in treatment should be maintained. Those who treat others well should be treated well. We have no moral responsibility to treat well those who do not treat others well.
3. Using weapons of mass destruction, and eroding the natural environment, is to be avoided – for the sake of future generations.
4. Take care of your children. Ensure that they fully develop to the best of your ability.

5. Do not murder.
6. Tell the truth.

Summation

In this chapter I have identified three schools of Western thought which provide a balance between classical and modern, religious and secular. Their constitutive values were listed in terms of both actions and virtues. I will adopt a similar approach in chapter three, which focuses on Eastern thought.

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Chapter 3

Examining Eastern Thought – Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism

Eastern thought, like Western thought, is a broad term used to define a large number of worldviews; it is not easily boiled down to a singular essence. In very general terms, it can be described as the schools of thought originating in Asia. This includes the myriad traditions originating from Japan, India, China, Iran, and Iraq. There is not always a clear distinction between Western and Eastern philosophies, especially in contemporary society where they are frequently interwoven. Even in antiquity there is crossover between East and West – for example, tracing Hinduism to its roots, its sky god Dyaus Pitar was simultaneously called Zeus by the Greeks.¹ Yet for the purposes of this thesis the distinction will be retained. It is clear that the Eastern schools of thought chosen for examination originated from, and are practiced by a greater number of people in Asia. Hinduism predominates in India, Buddhism is widely practiced in the nations of the Asian Pacific Rim, and Taoism is the second most influential religion amongst the Chinese.²

As in the chapter on Western thought, this chapter is only meant to provide a representative cross section of the different types of thinking that Eastern thought embodies.

The texts I've chosen to examine are *The Laws of Manu*, *The Tao Te Ching*, and *Ethics for the New Millennium*. The first representation of Eastern thought used in this chapter will be *The Laws of Manu*, a part of the Dharmaśāstra tradition of Hinduism.

While Hinduism itself dates back past 1200 BCE,³ the Laws of Manu were written around 200 CE, and are taken to be the words of the god of creation as spoken by Manu, a sage believed to belong to the Brahmin caste in northern India. The document takes the form of a treatise on ethical behavior, prompted by a group of men who asked Manu which sacred laws apply to all castes.⁴ While the Laws of Manu are strict and detailed enough to derail most Hindus from fully carrying them out, they continue to be a primary source for ethical behavior.

The Tao Te Ching, Taoism's namesake and the "first and most important work" of the Taoist canon, is the most frequently translated work to come out of China. It is dated to around the first century BCE, and is generally believed to contain the thoughts of Lao Tzu, a contemporary of Confucius in the sixth century BCE, as written down by his disciples following his death.⁵ Taoism possesses a vibrant intellectual tradition, and is a thoroughly Eastern religion, providing ethical precepts from a school of thought far removed from the Western world.

Buddhism is attributed with having roughly 350 million practitioners worldwide.⁶ Thus, its inclusion in this thesis is both a function of its global influence and its ability to provide another viewpoint from which Eastern thought can be understood. The reasons for choosing Ethics for the New Millennium as a representation of Buddhism are fairly straightforward. First, the other two religions studied in this chapter were investigated in the context of their founding documents. This thesis is attempting to be neutral to time as well as culture, and as such a contemporary piece of Buddhism is a valuable shift from the other documents studied. Secondly, both *Ethics* and the Dalai Lama himself are widely influential in modern society. The book has spent over three months on the *New*

York Times Bestseller list, the Dalai Lama is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and he continues to be a integral part of trying to negotiate an end to the Chinese-Tibetan conflict. *Ethics for the New Millennium* is not only representative of Buddhism, but is representative of modern society's recognition of the need for spirituality, regardless of individual beliefs, and of the contemporary political landscape from the eyes of a world leader.

The Laws of Manu

Within the Laws, Manu describes the four stages of life a man goes through on his path to “bliss after death.”⁷ The stage of studentship and of being a householder will be largely ignored in this chapter, as they deal with specific duties such as how to properly respect your teacher, and how many women of which caste a man can marry. While these are indeed an important part of Hindu ethics, since the goal of this thesis is to examine ethics on a global, interpersonal scale, specific doctrines involving student-teacher relationships and methods of acquiring suitable wives are not strictly relevant. The stage of asceticism, however, contains a list of ethical precepts that are the best fit for this thesis. Asceticism is the last stage of life covered in the Laws – it is the stage at which, if the ethical precepts are carried out, “bliss awaits after death.” As such, it is compatible with the ethical precepts discussed in the previous chapter – precepts which are required of all people in order to be seen as “good” in the eyes of whatever judges us upon death. Asceticism represents a divergence from the typical notions of a caste system. Castes are defined by dharma, law, but at the stage of asceticism dharma has been left behind, and thus asceticism is beyond social structuring. This departure from

the rigid caste system is the justification behind including the ascetic stage of life as a representation of universal Hindu ethics.

It is important to note that within the Laws there are several passages on the role of women, most of which would be considered extremely sexist by contemporary standards. These verses contain statements barring women from doing anything independent of an overseeing male, requiring women to worship their husbands as gods regardless of the husband's conduct, and requiring careful and thrifty management of household chores.⁸ These passages will be ignored, as this type of strict male/female power schism is no longer present in contemporary ethical thinking.

Virtues

The main virtue of the Laws, with respect to asceticism, is what can be described as maintaining a serene indifference to everything⁷. The idea of asceticism is to be completely detached from the physical world. As such, having things like property, sexual or platonic companions, or unnecessary possessions will only hinder your ability to remain detached. Keeping this virtue in mind also informs some of the action precepts listed above, such as refraining from anger and speaking the truth. As an indifferent observer, you wouldn't care enough about things to become angry, and you would have no reason to speak anything but the truth which lies before you. The ascetic keeps an even keel in all things.

Actions⁷

1. Do not kill anything. This includes animals and even the tiny organisms living in non-purified water (which must be strained with a cloth before drinking).
2. Have no possessions other than coarse worn garments and an alms pot.
3. Only speak the truth.
4. Do not insult anybody.
5. Be patient in the face of harsh words
6. Do not show anger.

The Tao Te Ching

Taoism is attributed with having approximately fifty million adherents across the globe.⁶ It is documented that Confucianists and Taoists were often at odds with each other. A biography of Confucius tells the tale of a hermit named Lao Tzu who made fun of Confucius.⁹ The two founders of two major Chinese religions are actually reported to have verbally assaulted one another in person. While this account is in no way completely verified, its existence speaks to the interrelation and conflict of ideas which exist throughout the Eastern canons.

The Tao Te Ching itself is divided into two books, and covers topics ranging from the nature and formation of the universe, to the proper conduct of rulers who wish to lead well, to precepts for the individual wishing to live as well as possible. During the time the Tao Te Ching was written, survival itself was the main problem facing the masses.

As such, many of the precepts found within Lao Tzu's thinking are not specifically aimed at doing good and avoiding evil in terms of some personal salvation; but they are aimed at ensuring survival.¹⁰

Virtues

- 1) Do not desire more than what is needed¹¹
- 2) Be submissive¹²
- 3) Avoid ambition¹¹

Actions

It should be noted that all of these precepts are an extension of *wu-wei* – taking no action. It is a central theme of Taoism that a person should be submissive, like water, taking the path of least resistance and allowing what will be to be¹³. Also within these precepts are the “three treasures” of compassion, frugality, and purposeful avoidance of becoming well-known or prominent.¹⁴

- 1) Avoid extremes, excess should be taken away in order to bolster deficiency.¹⁴
- 2) Do not be covetous.¹⁵
- 3) Do not partake in violence.¹⁶
- 4) Be modest, avoid taking credit for actions, do not brag or boast.¹⁴
- 5) Treat others well, regardless of their actions, never show favoritism.¹⁷
- 6) Be compassionate¹⁴.

Buddhism – Ethics for the New Millennium

Siddhartha Gotama, on whose life and teachings Buddhism is based, lived circa 539-476 BCE. Siddhartha was born as a prince in what is present day Nepal, and at the age of 29 left the palace ground for the first time to meet his people. This led to his exposure to death, disease, aging and asceticism. Based on this experience, he dedicated his life to eradicating suffering, which in his view sprang from attachment to anything material in nature. After Gotama's death, his disciples gathered to formalize his teachings, which then became the foundation of all Buddhist canonical work which came afterwards.¹⁸

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the title given to a line of religious leaders of Tibetan Buddhism dating back to the 1300's.¹⁹ Only one Dalai Lama lives at any given time, and they are believed to be the incarnations of a long line of Buddhist masters. These Buddhist masters, while achieving nirvana (release from the cycle of reincarnation), voluntarily chose to be reborn in order to lead others towards enlightenment.

The current Dalai Lama, the 14th, is also the head of the Tibetan government-in-exile. His book, *Ethics for the New Millenium*, is a contemporary Buddhist treatise on universal morality. It is based on the simple notion that goodness consists in being happy and avoiding suffering, so that an ethical act is one that “does not harm other's experience or expectation of happiness.”

While *Ethics for the New Millennium* is a contemporary document, and is worded as a moral treatise, the Dalai Lama retains a focus on certain ethical precepts which have

served as the backbone of Buddhist morality since its inception. The Five Precepts, being as central to Buddhism as the Ten Commandments are to Judaism, are prohibitions against taking all life (including nonhuman), stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication.²⁰ These precepts are clearly present in the Dalai Lama's book, and will be noted in the following list as the prohibited action in parenthesis.

Virtues

- 1) Compassion – love, affection, kindness, generosity, and warm-heartedness – is the supreme emotion.²¹
- 2) Satisfaction cannot be gained from the senses alone. Do not attach too much worth to material possessions.²²
- 3) Avoid hatred, anger, pride, lust, greed, and envy.²³
- 4) Recognize that genuine happiness arises out of our love and concern for others.²⁴

Actions

- 1) Love, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, forbearance, courage, and humility are conducive to compassion.²⁵
- 2) Any action made out of concern for others, without condescension or ulterior motive, is automatically positive.²⁶
- 3) Do not be aggressive, violent or inconsiderate (killing and stealing).²⁷

- 4) Avoid extremes, including eating, emotions, and even the virtues. For instance, too much courage becomes foolhardiness (intoxication).²⁸
- 5) Do not adulterate (sexual misconduct).²⁹
- 6) Do not discriminate against faith, language, customs, culture, or skin color.³⁰
- 7) Be honest (lying).³¹
- 8) Speak out against injustice.³²

Summation

This chapter, like chapter two, focused on listing constitutive virtues and precepts from schools of thought balanced in cosmology and date of origin. The next chapter will similarly list the precepts and virtues of the Navaho Native Americans.

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Chapter 4

Examining Indigenous Thought – the Navaho

Indigenous is defined as “native, inherent, or natural.” Thus when speaking of indigenous peoples, we are speaking of cultures which, to the best of our knowledge, were the first to reside in any geographical area. This definition includes Australian aboriginals, Pelasgians (predecessors to the ancient Greeks), the Aztecs of Mexico, the Bushmen of Africa, and Native Americans.

Inclusion of at least one indigenous culture in this thesis is imperative to its attempts at breadth. As previously discussed, individual schools of both Eastern and Western thought sometimes overlap and inform each other. They are representations of thinking which originated mostly from Europe, Asia, and the United States. This begs the question of how this thesis can possibly attempt to speak of universal morality if entire continents are not represented.

Answering this question involves balancing scope and relevance. The Eastern and Western documents examined in this thesis all contain thoughts and practices which have overwhelmingly shaped what one may call the modern world. These documents represent moral customs and attitudes that have weathered the storm of globalization and continue to be relevant to contemporary ethical discourse. This is not the case with indigenous thought. When compared to the Eastern and Western schools of thought examined thus far, indigenous thought simply represents a smaller portion of people in the world.

When viewed this way, it may not be necessary to include a worldview from every continent in this thesis, if a relevant cross-section of worldviews can otherwise be procured. It is also a fact that, as a function of indigenous thought being less prominent in contemporary society, resources concerning these cultures are harder to come by. The scope of this thesis doesn't allow for an in-depth look at multiple indigenous cultures, if for no other reason than the difficulty of obtaining reliable information. I can read the Bible, or a book by James Rachels, but I can't distill the ethical precepts of an oral culture without finding a translator and spending time with the people of the culture.

Despite these challenges, examining indigenous thought may be considered to be the strongest evidence of a universal moral code there is. Indigenous cultures are, as much as is possible, free from the influence of Eastern and Western modern thought. They are independent from these behemoth categories and represent a completely different lifestyle and understanding of the world. If a universal morality does exist, then surely it will be manifested by similarities between indigenous and contemporary thinking. This use of indigenous thought as a type of control against Eastern and Western thought is the main purpose behind its inclusion in this thesis.

The Navaho are attributed with being the largest Native American tribe of North America, with about 300,000 people claiming full or partial Navaho ancestry¹. They are purported to have originally migrated to the modern-day Southwest United States from Canada in the second century BCE. Today they live primarily on reservations in the Four Corners region of the United States.¹

As was previously mentioned, there is no Navaho version of the Bible or Tao Te Ching on which to base a list of ethical precepts. Instead, I have chosen the book *The*

Structure of a Moral Code, by John Ladd, as a representation of Navaho ethics. The book was written in 1957, when John Ladd was an associate professor of philosophy at Brown University. He is a well known expert on Navaho philosophy, and *Structure* contains precepts directly obtained from Navaho Native Americans obtained through talking with various Navaho via an interpreter. The majority of Ladd's fieldwork with the Navaho involved talking with a tribal elder, who had led his community for many years. Acknowledging that one source wasn't enough to call any ethical precepts he obtained as representative of all Navaho, Ladd also spoke with a variety of others in the Navaho community, and the resulting list of ethical precepts is a compilation from his discussions. Thus, while not being a primary document of Navaho ethics *per se*, it is a direct compilation of Navaho ethics obtained directly from the culture by a well-respected philosopher.

Virtues

No specific virtues were enumerated or spoken about in Ladd's book. There were, however, prohibitions against laziness and being out of shape,² as well as an understanding that good people work hard at whatever they do.²

Actions

1. Don't drink.³
2. Don't kill anyone.⁴

3. Don't be violent.⁴
4. Do not commit adultery.⁵
5. Don't steal.⁵
6. Don't lie.⁶
7. Do not be sexually promiscuous.⁷
8. Help those that are less fortunate.⁸
9. Take good care of your children.⁹
10. Children should love and help their parents.⁹
11. Take care of the old aged.⁹
12. Help anyone when they ask for it, but especially family.⁹

Summation

This chapter concludes the research portion of the thesis. At this point, seven schools of thought have been examined, and the virtues and ethical precepts to which they ascribe have been listed. The following chapter begins the analysis of these injunctions, beginning with a comparison of semantics.

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Chapter 5

Laying the Groundwork for a Universal Code of Ethics – the Semantic Comparison of Moral Precepts and Virtues

The Task Ahead

The comparison of the moral precepts and virtues enumerated in the previous three chapters, let alone the construction of a common morality based upon them, is a difficult task. It should be made clear that, in order to designate any moral precepts as universal, including those as basic as prohibitions against murder, lying, and stealing, it is necessary to apply some interpretation to make sense of the data previously presented. Up to this point, this thesis has been mostly exploratory; it has searched for and found precepts and virtues, but hasn't tried to understand what they mean – either by themselves or with reference to one another. This is the remaining task of the thesis, to see if these precepts and virtues are indeed indicative of a common morality and if they can be used to construct a code of ethics. Trying to do this raises many questions, all of which can be answered if the solution to the following problem is known: how do we move from an amalgamation of morality-themed statements to any kind of final conclusions in a consistent and justifiable way?

No clearcut answer to this big question exists. Thus, the best we can do is carefully outline and carry out all of the steps between the injunction identification and any final conclusions, doing the most thorough job possible of justifying the process, while understanding its limitations. My general strategy will be to first present the

virtues, and then norms for actions, in the most explicit, non-interpretational way possible. By “non-interpretational,” I mean that no groupings outside of semantic similarities will be considered. For instance, “do not offend your neighbor,” “be honest,” and “do not lie” will all be placed in separate categories because they are phrased differently. The reasoning for this step, and my subsequent steps, will be most thoroughly discussed within the steps themselves. However, by way of preface, the purpose of this first step is to explicitly outline the injunctions listed in the previous three chapters, in their original phrasing as understood in English, before any kind of interpretation is applied.

After this step, in which semantic categories are put forth, a strict content alignment will be done in the next chapter – creating another set of categories I will refer to as content categories. It will be in the content categories that “be honest” and “do not lie” are grouped together for the first time, as they are clearly related in content by the theme of truthful speech. This step, like the semantics step, will not apply any interpretation to the injunctions. It will, however, clearly show any groupings of precepts with clear content similarity. This is also the step at which this thesis will introduce the idea of *frequency analysis* and discuss any findings of a “core of moral values” as stated in the hypothesis.

These two steps, involving semantics and content, are simply different ways of presenting the same data. The categories created in those steps are reflective of a face-value analysis of their similarities and differences. The final step this thesis will take attempts to take the data a step further – to sort and group the precepts into interpretive “families.” For instance, if the Golden Rule can be justifiably said to prohibit the act of

non-lethal violence, it will be grouped with the specific injunctions against violence found in the Tao Te Ching, the Dalai Lama's book, and the Navaho worldview into a "family" of precepts which prohibit violence. It is from these families, and their subsequent frequency analysis, that a code of ethics can be generated.

In summary, this thesis will work with the precepts and virtues enumerated in the previous three chapters in the following 3-step manner:

Step 1: Semantic alignment

Step 2: Content alignment, introduction of the frequency analysis concept, discussion of a "core of moral values."

Step 3: Interpreting the precepts and virtues in order to sort them into "families," followed by the creating of a code of ethics

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the step of semantic alignment.

Semantic Alignment

Categories in this chapter will reflect the semantic nature of the precepts, such as "specifically prohibited actions" or "general norms." The reason for this first step is to outline what the various documents I have studied have to say before trying to place them into content categories. It is important to have all of the precepts presented in the previous chapters to be *strictly* enumerated before they are *generally* assigned to content categories. As mentioned in the limitations section of this thesis, this project requires the

comparison of injunctions from a wide variety of original languages. One thing this alignment accomplishes is to simply account for the English wording of the precepts and virtues, before our attention is turned towards their content.

In the end, these basic, strictly categorized groupings will serve as the groundwork from which I will discuss a core of moral values and interpret the precepts for a universal code of ethics. The purpose of this chapter is to clearly list all of the accumulated precepts and virtues into narrow categories, in order to build from these categories a sense of the general categories a universal morality would contain.

For this semantic alignment, the virtues and precepts discussed in the previous chapters are broken down semantically by a positive/negative distinction and by a general/specific distinction. The positive/negative distinction is the main way I am attempting to retain semantic fidelity to the original documents. The precept “be honest” is said to be a *positive* precept, because it requires us to *do something*. The precept “do not lie” is said to be a *negative* precept, because it *prohibits* us from doing something.

Breaking the precepts down via a general/specific distinction is essentially a way to understand which injunctions require further interpretation. Specific injunctions are those with a clear antithesis. For instance, the precept “do not lie” is a specific precept with a narrow scope, because it has a clearly defined antithesis – lying. The precept “avoid all extremes”, on the other hand, is general, since there is no clearly defined antithesis in terms of *specific actions*. The precept doesn’t define at what point something is considered “extreme.” Eating two thousand calories a day may be considered extreme to a Hindu ascetic, but may be considered a moderate intake in America.

When the injunctions are broken down by positive/negative and specific/general distinctions, they create four possible types of virtues and precepts, as indicated in the diagram below.

Table 1. Types of Virtues or Actions

		Types of Virtues or Actions	
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>
Scope	<i>General</i>	i.e. "avoid all extremes"	i.e. "always treat others fairly"
	<i>Specific</i>	i.e. "do not kill"	i.e. "work hard at whatever you do"

Virtues

General, positive virtues: This category includes virtues that do not have a clearly defined scope, and are those which we, moral human beings, *should* possess. In the Rachels text, both “understand individual passions” and “respect for persons as rational decision-makers,” fall in this category, as the specific actions these virtues would require

are not defined. In the Laws of Manu, the single virtue of indifference belongs here, as does the Dalai Lama's virtues of compassion and of recognizing that genuine happiness arises out of our love and concern for others. The Tao Te Ching also requires compassion.

Specific, positive virtues: This category includes virtues that we *should* possess, and which have a defined scope. The virtues of Rachels which fit this description are humility, courage, generosity, honesty, and loyalty to and love of friends and family. Aquinas' virtues that fit this category are temperance, prudence, justice, courage, charity, hope, and faith. The Navaho virtue of "working hard at whatever you do," and the Tao Te Ching's virtue of submissiveness belong here. The Dalai Lama promotes the virtues of love, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, forbearance, courage, and humility.

Specific, negative virtues – vices: This category is a collection of character traits with a defined scope that we *should not* possess, commonly referred to as vices. The Tao Te Ching, states that we should "not desire more than what is needed," and we should "avoid ambition." The Navaho prohibit being lazy and unfit. The Dalai Lama states that we should not overvalue material possessions or be inconsiderate, and that we should avoid hatred, anger, pride, lust, greed, aggressiveness, and envy. The Ten Commandments and the Tao Te Ching specifically prohibit being covetous. Aquinas prohibits covetousness, sloth, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and pride.

Actions

General, positive norms: This category includes all actions which do not possess a clearly defined scope, yet are actions we *should* perform. The Golden Rule is a good example of this type of action, since it is positive, but not clearly defined – it does not tell us how to conduct ourselves in a specific situation. Aquinas states that anything which is a means of preserving life, and warding off its obstacles, is good – “self-preservation” for short. Aquinas also dictates that we must perform any act that “encompasses being able to live in a society” – his specific examples of this precept are listed in a different category. Rachel’s precept of “always treating others fairly” belongs in this section, as does the Tao Te Ching’s statement that “excess should be taken away in order to bolster deficiency.” The Dalai Lama states that “any action made purely out of concern for others is automatically positive.”

Specific, positive actions: This category includes all specific actions which we *should* do. Aquinas states that we must procreate, educate our offspring, and educate ourselves. The Ten Commandments state that we must honor our fathers and mothers. Rachels states that we must remain impartial when discussing ethical matters, and that we must tell the truth and take care of our children. The Laws of Manu tell us to only speak the truth and be patient in the face of harsh words. The Tao Te Ching tells us to be modest, to treat others well, and to never show favoritism. The Dalai Lama states that we should be honest and speak out against injustice. The Navaho believe that we should help the

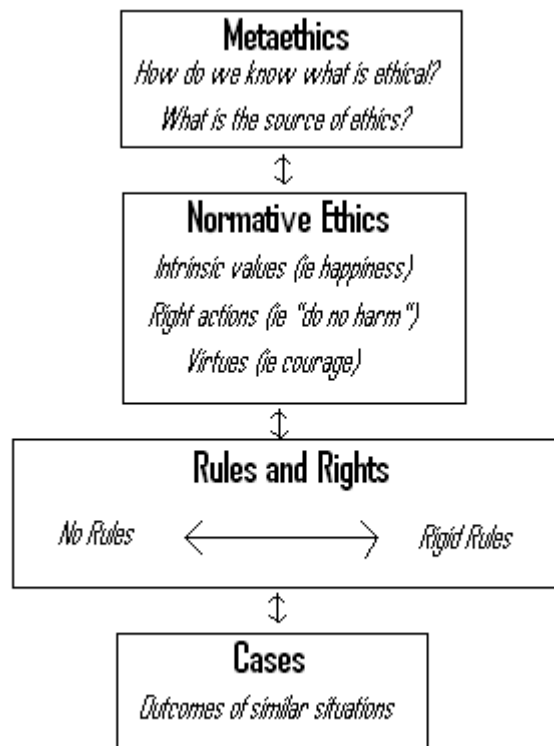
less fortunate, take good care of our children, take care of the old aged, and help anyone who asks for it.

General, negative norms: This category includes all actions which do not possess a clearly defined scope, and are actions we *should not* perform. Aquinas prohibits causing offense to a neighbor. The Tao Te Ching and the Dalai Lama both state that we must “avoid all extremes.”

Specific, negative actions: This category includes specific actions which we *should not* do. The Ten Commandments state that we should not kill, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness against our neighbor, that is, not lie. Rachels prohibits discrimination of any form, using weapons of mass destruction, and murdering. The Laws of Manu prohibit killing anything, having any possessions other than coarse garments and an alms pot, insulting anyone, and showing anger. The Tao Te Ching prohibits being covetous and partaking in violence. The Dalai Lama prohibits, violence, adulteration, and discrimination. The Navaho prohibit drinking, killing anyone, violence, adultery, theft, lying, and sexual promiscuity.

Conclusion of the Semantic Alignment

In developing this analysis, one conclusion is that the broad/narrow distinction is similar to the second and third levels of moral discourse as diagrammed by Veatch.



The “normative ethics” level is essentially the category of general injunctions – the category from which specific rules with narrow scope, such as “do not lie” may stem from. General injunctions, such as the Golden Rule, “avoid extremes,” and “be compassionate” are all precepts which may influence the collection of *specific* rules, rights, virtues, and actions. For instance, the Tao Te Ching advocates the general precept of compassion, yet makes no specific statements on generosity. But, if a Taoist comes

across a panhandler, and decides that compassion dictates a charitable act, they may carry out the *generous* action of giving the panhandler money despite no specific call to do so. Contrarily, a specific and narrow-scope precept of generosity does not “trickle upwards” and require complete compassion in all things. Thus, a broad distinction may be viewed as an injunction belonging to the third level of moral discourse, while a narrow distinction may be viewed as a part of the second level.

Three other findings from this first step are noteworthy. The first finding concerns the section on vices. The Dalai Lama prohibits covetousness, envy, lust, anger, and pride. These are five of the well-known “seven deadly sins” in Western culture, all of which were enumerated by Aquinas. The two deadly sins not listed by the Dalai Lama, gluttony and sloth, are prohibited in the Tao Te Ching and the Navaho respectively. This overlap is of no resounding significance to this thesis’ end goals, but it’s interesting that two schools of thought, so far removed from one another at conception, focus on the same handful of vices; and when the comparisons don’t exactly match a third and fourth party fill in the missing pieces.

The second point of interest is that no general negative virtues were discovered during my research on the seven schools of thought. There does not seem to be a “Golden Vice” or any equivalent to the general positive virtues. Again, this doesn’t add or subtract to the end goals of this thesis, but I found it interesting.

The final finding of this section concerns a significant difference between the specific and the general injunctions. It would seem that the general injunctions, such as the Golden Rule, require a large expenditure of intellectual effort in order to really be carried out. A general virtue, like compassion, and a general action, like the Golden

Rule, both require the ability to empathize, a certain degree of introspection, an assessment of risk and benefit to the parties involved, and a final judgment of whether a possible action fits the criteria of the injunction. This is a much more complicated process than something like avoiding the specific action of killing. Essentially, the broad/narrow distinction has provided us with a fairly accurate gauge of the mental rigor needed to carry out an injunction.

The following chapter will analyze the injunctions listed above with respect to their content.

Chapter 6

Content Alignment – Understanding Frequency Analysis and Discussing a Core of Moral Values

Creating Content Categories

This chapter is dedicated to the second step in the process of analyzing the injunctions this thesis is working with, which encompasses three interrelated discussions – aligning the precepts and virtues based on content, understanding and using frequency analysis, and discussing the evidence for a core of moral values.

Unlike the previous chapter, the following analysis of the injunctions is based upon similarities and differences in moral content as contrasted with semantics. This is where, for instance, precepts such as “do not lie” and “be honest” will be placed in content categories.

This analysis will provide us with what a core of moral values may look like, as it is the first time in this thesis the moral precepts and virtues are grouped based on their content. It is also the first section where the *frequency* of a precept or virtue becomes visible. That is, by listing an injunction such as compassion, one can look at the schools of thought which proclaim that injunction and see how many, out of seven, specifically mention compassion. As in the previous section, this section will refrain from analysis whilst categorizing the injunctions, and only focus on clearly related themes within the precepts and virtues.

In order to cut down on redundancy, the following categories will be presented in a slightly different way than in the semantic alignment section. The categories reflect simple themes such as “truth in speech and communication,” and it will only list the schools of thought which are strictly appropriate to the category. Remember that without interpretation, this will not result in a complete list of the precepts and virtues, it will only list *categories* of moral content under which more than one precept falls. For instance, the analysis will show that five schools of thought clearly prohibit murder, thus warranting a content category under which to place all five schools of thought. On the other hand, Rachels’ precept banning the use of weapons of mass destruction is not clearly echoed in any of the other schools of thought, which means it won’t appear in this step. This will be done in two tables, one for virtues and one for actions. An “X” in the table indicates that the school of thought clearly agrees with the corresponding content category.

The creation of the categories themselves was very straightforward – the categories are simply the common sentiment between injunctions from different schools of thought. For categories such as the prohibition of murder, the precepts themselves suggest the proper name of the category, as they all simply prohibit murder. For the categories “truth in speech and communication” and “the importance of familial care,” it became necessary to phrase the category in a way that could encompass various injunctions which shared a theme but differed in wording. Thus these two categories are not reflective of the precise wording of the injunctions, but of their theme.

The seven schools of thought discussed in this thesis will be abbreviated as follows in the tables:

Selections from the Old Testament: Old

Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*: Tom

Rachels' *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*: Rac

The Laws of Manu: Man

The Tao Te Ching: Tao

Ethics for the New Millenium: New

Navaho ethics: Nav

Table 2. Precept Content Categories

Precept Content Categories

Precept	Old	Tom	Rac	Man	Tao	New	Nav
Prohibition of murder	X	X	X	X			X
Truth in speech and communication	X		X	X		X	X
The importance of familial care	X	X	X				X
Prohibition of adultery	X					X	X
Treat others equally			X		X	X	
Refrain from violence					X	X	X
Prohibition of theft	X						X
Refrain from extremes					X	X	

Table 3. Virtue Content Categories**Virtue Content Categories**

Virtue	Old	Tom	Rac	Man	Tao	New	Nav
Avoid envy	X	X			X	X	
Courage		X	X			X	
Humility		X	X			X	
Compassion					X	X	
Generosity		X	X				
Avoid Anger		X				X	

Conclusion of the Content Alignment

It is surprising to see the overall degree with which the different schools of thought intermingle. Dividing the schools of thought into Eastern, Western, and the Navaho, only avoiding extremes, compassion, and generosity were dominated by one category. Remember that this section only dealt with rigid content similarities. This type of injunction similarity is essential in the attempt to discuss precepts and virtues in larger

terms than cultural similarity, and the results of this section seem to suggest that this may be possible.

The Introduction of Frequency Analysis

From this point forward, frequency analysis becomes the driving force behind all of the conclusions this thesis will draw. It is, essentially, the final test the precepts and virtues will be put through in order to determine what a core of moral values looks like, from which a universal code of ethics can be generated. Frequency analysis is nothing more than looking at the frequency with which a certain virtue or precept occurs within the seven schools of thought investigated in this thesis. It is nothing more than a way of distilling an injunction down to a number, which can then be compared to another injunction's number.

Looking at the tables in the content alignment section above, two instances of frequency analysis are clearly visible. The first is simply the number of X's each precept or virtue has in either table. Notice that in both tables, the injunctions are in descending order from the most X's to the least – from the highest amount of occurrences to the lowest. The second instance of frequency analysis lies within the existence or non-existence of the content categories themselves. All of the categories in the tables have at least two schools of thought which adhere to them. Logically, then, every other injunction found during the course of this thesis which does not appear in the content tables must have no immediate connection to any other – they must be distinct. The

content alignment discriminates between injunctions with only one occurrence and those with two or more.

While the specific uses of frequency analysis are best explained in the chapters and sections in which it is used, the reason for using it should be discussed now, and that reason is simple – it presents less bias than alternatives. The very idea of this thesis is to collect a sizeable amount of precepts and virtues and then try to conclude which of them are universal, and in what manner. That is, it's a process of taking injunctions and putting them together, or separating them, then deciding what is retained and what is discarded. It would be impossible to do this in an unbiased way *unless* some uncaring and disinterested entity was doing the sorting. Frequency analysis is that entity.

Morality is a deeply individual and variable subject. Two Jews may agree that the Golden Rule is important but disagree on its application. A Taoist and a humanist may disagree on what constitutes an “extreme.” The point is that it would just not be justifiable for me to look at the precepts and virtues, and then comment on what I felt constituted a core of moral ethics. It wouldn't be justifiable for me to look at the injunctions and simply decide which should be part of a universal code of ethics and which shouldn't. My own personal beliefs, experiences, and prejudices, both conscious and subconscious, would prohibit me from doing the job in a fair manner, regardless of my intentions. Thus, I turn those decisions over to an analysis that can't carry any bias. With this in mind, it's time to look at what the content alignment can tell us in terms of a core of moral values.

A Core of Moral Values

The results of this thesis, with regard to finding a common core of moral values amongst all mankind, are mixed. If this thesis was expansive enough, what it would enumerate as a core of moral ethics would list *every* precept and virtue that *every* person in the world would most likely agree upon. Furthermore, this core of ethics would spring from an in-depth frequency analysis which would account for every single school of thought on earth, both past and present. It would then be possible to discuss mankind's core ethical beliefs not in terms of worldview or metaethics, but in terms of what our species has enduringly considered to be moral behavior regardless of metaethics, location, and time.

This thesis, of course, does not resemble this best case scenario very well. Comparing the results of this thesis to the ideal scenario above, let's look at what this thesis can actually say about a core of moral values.

This is, in terms of stated goals, the first real discussion of whether this thesis' hypothesis can be affirmed or rejected. The results are ambiguous, with evidence existing for both cases. Looking at the case for dismissing the hypothesis, with regards to uncovering a core of moral values, most of the reasoning would likely stem from the small sample size this thesis draws from. Remember that the goal is to look at *universal* ethics – a morality that applies to everyone. While the logical limitations of trying to speak about universals from a small sample of ethical thought have already been discussed, the content categories created in the previous section highlight these problems.

As far as this thesis can tell from just the data alone, only five out of seven schools of thought prohibit murder explicitly. Even this most basic of moral tenets was only represented, in terms of frequency analysis, by 71% of the schools of thought. With over a quarter of the schools of thought *not* assenting to this precept, this thesis can't really call a prohibition of murder universal. Furthermore, prohibition of murder was the most reiterated injunction between the schools of thought, meaning all other content categories had even *lower* frequencies.

This problem is, more or less, a function of this thesis' scope, as opposed to its methods. Remember that to be in these tables, at least two schools of thought had to agree with them. The content categories, for all their statistical shortcomings, still represent a variety of precepts and virtues which seem to be significant. Murder, truth, family, equality, courage, and compassion – these are some of the things which the data speaks about. It is in a way remarkable that from such a relatively small sample size such central themes of human morality are the noticeable trends. Even more remarkable is that, since these trends came from research instead of intellectual or religious discourse, the fourth level of moral discourse is nowhere to be found. By this I mean that we can now discuss murder without discussing whether god would approve, or whether it is rational – we can discuss it in terms of human nature throughout the centuries.

All of this is to say that, while the evidence itself is not nearly robust enough to actually *list* the virtues and precepts which all of mankind may follow, the method itself seems to suggest this possibility. In actuality, this thesis is probably best off *not* distinguishing between the injunctions on the tables, and those which are off the tables. For instance, the Navaho's prohibition on being intoxicated was not reiterated in any

other school of thought, so it isn't on the content table. Theft was only prohibited by two schools of thought, yet is on the table. With such a small sample size, a difference of one school of thought makes such a large impact on the frequency, that a true frequency analysis isn't really possible. It isn't really clear if theft is a more important action to avoid than intoxication.

Thus, in terms of which specific injunctions are part of the universal core of human morality, this thesis must say *all of them*. There isn't enough data to properly discriminate between the frequencies, so any of the precepts and virtues enumerated in this thesis may indeed be part of a core of moral values, or they may not be. Certainly those injunctions with a higher frequency are more likely to be part of this core, but it can't be said for certain.

Overall, given the enormity of the task, I believe the method employed by this thesis has worked well. The method has allowed for the identification of content categories, which while not being solid enough to really justify as universal points of morality, seem to be non-trivial. The final step this thesis will take is an attempt to take these content categories and, after one more step of analysis, create a code of ethics from them.

Chapter 7

Family Resemblance and Filtering – A Final Analysis

What do gymnastics, basketball, and hockey have in common? They are all “sports”, but require drastically different equipment, scoring paradigms, numbers of participants, and specific physical movements. Consider competition at the grade school level, when score isn’t kept and winners and losers don’t exist, and the relationship between the three examples becomes even more difficult to articulate – yet these activities are still all “sports.” Now consider golf or curling, neither of which requires raw physical acumen, or weightlifting, which doesn’t require an expansive array of specialized techniques. The features of categories of action, such as sports, are harder to describe than one might think. Despite this, it would be hard to argue that weightlifting, golf, and hockey aren’t all sports. We might say, following the idea suggested by the philosopher Wittgenstein, that all of the activities listed as sports share a “family resemblance.” They may not all have the same things in common, but different commonalities exist between *some* of the activities, which form a web of associations we then call “sports.”

This chapter is dedicated to constructing this kind of family resemblance, and it is upon this idea of resemblance that a universal code of ethics will be based. As it currently stands, this thesis has presented a range of precepts and virtues found in seven different schools of thought, and has rigidly sorted those injunctions by their wording. Consider the combination of “do not lie” and “be honest.” Using the sports example, this

has been akin to categorizing college basketball and high school basketball as simply “basketball.” These basic alignments are crucial to what follows.

Imagine we find a remote tribe of people living deep within Antarctica. This tribe participates in an activity similar to basketball. However, the ball is made out of a different material than what we are used to, the point system is slightly different, the hoop is a foot higher, the court three feet shorter. How do we, empirically, decide if what they are playing is basketball? It would first be prudent to recall every type of game we know to be basketball – the European leagues, the NBA, school leagues of all levels. All of these types of basketball would share a family resemblance, even if they differ in multiple ways from one another. Comparing the different basketball leagues is essentially what took place in the previous chapter in the *content alignment* section. The content alignment was a way of grouping together injunctions which may be worded differently but share a common theme.

Our Antarctic tribe of basketball players, then, represent the precepts and virtues that have not yet been accounted for, a conceptual outlier such as the Golden Rule, or “do not offend your neighbor.” It must be decided whether general precepts and virtues, such as “do not offend your neighbor” bear enough of a family resemblance to the content categories to be included within them; much in the same way as we would have to decide whether playing a game with a sealskin ball on a higher hoop and shorter court was basketball. In this sporting example, this could be done most efficiently by a tally of similarities and differences. Let’s say that the ball, while being made of something odd, was the same shape and size, and bounced the same. The rules, except the points system,

were the same, and the same number of people play on each team as what we're used to. We might be inclined to call that basketball – there are more similarities than differences.

When referring to virtues and precepts, it is harder to tally similarities and differences, because each injunction only provides a small amount of information dealing with one specific act or trait. Thus, we must decide how these specific acts or traits interact in a way that allows us to decide whether a family resemblance exists or not. This is where a system of interpretation must come into play. The precepts and virtues not yet categorized have to be put through some kind of filter which transforms them into a useful reference for comparison. Take a simple example of a possible filter – the filter would simply be the statement “stealing is offensive.” Now, if we take the precept “don’t offend your neighbor,” with the understanding that stealing is offensive, it would be correct to say that the precept belongs in the category of “do not steal.” We can say that “don’t offend your neighbor” has a family resemblance to “do not steal,” in light of this filter – it is possible to understand very different statements as pertaining to the same subject. The problem then becomes how a justifiable and data-driven filter and baseline set of family categories can be created.

Baseline Family Categories

The content categories enumerated in the previous chapter will serve as the families to which the uncategorized precepts and virtues will be compared. This is for three reasons. The first two are related - data fidelity and proper focus. Since this thesis uses an inductive approach, it is necessary that the comparative concepts come from

somewhere within the data, in a justifiable manner. As previously discussed, any of the precepts and virtues discussed in this thesis may or may not be part of a common core of ethics – however it is more likely that those enumerated in the content tables in chapter six belong to the core. If a precept wasn't mentioned in the previous chapter, it wasn't uncovered in the research, and it can't be used as a baseline family concept. This is, simply put, a way to stay faithful to the data uncovered.

This point segues into the second justification for using the content categories as the baseline families, which is a reasonable focus of the families. Let us take, for instance, the Golden Rule and only the Golden Rule, and make a family from it. Let's say I get very annoyed when people talk on their cell phones while they drive. Thus, a completely legitimate precept stemming from the Golden Rule would be "never talk on your cell phone while driving." If I took offense to this action, then it could be said that the schools of thought which preach compassion and not causing offense are also then in this family which opposes driving while using a cell phone. Suddenly, not driving while on the phone has become a candidate for being a universal precept.

Thankfully, my proposed precept concerning cell phone use, and the subsequent invocation of the Golden Rule, isn't justified. Specifically, focusing the Golden Rule on an action *outside* of the actions discussed in this thesis isn't justified. Cell phone usage is not specifically tied into any previously discussed injunctions; creating a family based upon it would require an "outside" statement such as my initial disdain in order to be introduced into the thesis. Unless family building is done from specific injunctions already uncovered in the thesis, a random and subjective starting point would suffice to build a family.

Since most of the interpretation in this chapter will focus on general injunctions, without some kind of focus present this thesis runs the risk of introducing trivial or false families – such as prohibitions on cell phone usage. The families must emerge from specific injunctions and then have general injunctions filtered in or out – not vice versa. Only by concentrating on families based in content categories can it be assured that that analysis is properly focused.

The final reason for basing the families in the common moral core is simply empirical frequency. Whether an injunction is universal, and thus whether it belongs in a universal code of ethics, will depend on its frequency in the seven schools of thought. Even if the first two reasons for this approach were discarded, and families were created at random, the odds of their success at the universal level would be low, as they would have no specific injunctions bolstering their frequency – most likely guaranteeing the injunction to be non-universal.

In light of the frequency methodology of creating a code of ethics, as well as the need for fidelity to the data and a reasonable scope, basing a universal code of ethics on previously uncovered families is the only satisfactory course of action.

An Overview of Filtering

The goal of this chapter is to transform the content categories of the previous chapter into more robust families. The basic idea is that by interpreting the general precepts and virtues, injunctions which were mostly unaccounted for in the previous chapter, it is possible to increase the frequency of a particular injunction. After the

family resemblance analysis is complete, a final frequency analysis will be done on the families and what a code of ethics may look like will be discussed.

Consider the content category tables discussed in the previous chapter.

Virtue Content Categories

Virtue	Old	Tom	Rac	Man	Tao	New	Nav
Avoid envy	X	X			X	X	
Courage		X	X			X	
Humility		X	X			X	
Compassion					X	X	
Generosity		X	X				
Avoid Anger		X				X	

Precept Content Categories

Precept	Old	Tom	Rac	Man	Tao	New	Nav
Prohibition of murder	X	X	X	X			X
Truth in speech and communication	X		X	X		X	X
The importance of familial care	X	X	X				X
Prohibition of adultery	X					X	X
Treat others equally			X		X	X	
Refrain from violence					X	X	X
Prohibition of theft	X						X
Refrain from extremes					X	X	

In this current state, comprehensiveness and fidelity to the data have not yet been achieved. Recall in chapter four that every precept and virtue this thesis has dealt with was enumerated according to general/specific and negative/positive distinctions. The above tables, with the exception of “compassion” and “refrain from extremes” are reflections of *specific* injunctions. The general injunctions simply do not lend themselves to the kind of side-by-side comparison used with the specific injunctions. This means that while the above tables are an accurate reflection of which specific injunctions were reiterated and which weren’t, they do not account for the general injunctions. If no further analysis was done, a large portion of the general injunctions would exist as outliers to the data – they would no longer be part of the discussion. Since no attempt to categorize and understand these general injunctions has been done thus far, the analysis would be incomplete.

What we need, then, is a way of deciding which general injunctions fit with which specific content categories. I refer to this as “filtering,” which is simply a metaphor for interpretation. This filtering, the interpretation of the general precepts and virtues, is a two step process. The first step is to simply list all of the general precepts and virtues once more, and then decide which of those may be justifiably filtered. The second step is to then filter each general injunction through each specific content category, one-by-one. Both steps require a blend of reason and data interpretation, and will be discussed in detail subsequently.

Filtering: Step One

The task of this step is to decide which injunctions can be filtered, and which can't. First, let us look at all of the general injunctions this thesis has enumerated. What follows are the general injunctions, originally listed in chapter five, sorted by author. The “filterable” injunctions are in bold.

Old Testament – **The Golden Rule.**

Aquinas – Anything which is a means of self preservation is good, any act that encompasses being able to live in a society is good, **avoid causing offense to a neighbor.**

Rachels – Understand individual passions, respect people as rational decision makers, and **always treat others fairly.**

Laws of Manu – **Be Indifferent.**

Tao Te Ching – **Compassion**, excess should be taken away to bolster deficiency, avoid all extremes.

Dalai Lama – **Compassion**, recognize that genuine happiness arises out of love and concern for others, any action made purely out of concern for others is automatically positive, avoid all extremes.

Let us now discuss which injunctions will be discarded for the filtering process, and the reasoning behind their removal. Rachel's virtues of respecting people as rational decision makers and their individual passions are simply not relevant to the content categories, upon which the filtration is based. In other words, it is not readily apparent how either of those injunctions fit with the content categories. For instance, respecting an individual's passions has no bearing on humility, courage, or telling the truth. This notion of irrelevance to the content categories is the main driving force behind which injunctions are being disregarded. Aquinas' self-preservation, "avoid all extremes" and the Dalai Lama's injunctions regarding happiness and concern for others were discarded via similar logic.

The other reason for disregarding an injunction is redundancy. For instance, the Tao Te Ching contains the precept of being compassionate, as well as the precept "excess should be taken away in order to bolster deficiency." Compassion will be filtered, while the precept dealing with excess will not. The excess precept has relevance to the content category of "refrain from extremes," as well as "generosity." However, "refrain from extremes" is already represented in the Tao Te Ching, and I argue that compassion may lead to generosity. Thus, the precept dealing with excess does not supply us with any information that we don't already have. Aquinas' precept of "anything which encompasses being able to live in a society" was also discarded for its redundancy. The

reason for this is that, in the context of the upcoming analysis, no difference between living in a society and not offending a neighbor is discernable.

The reasoning for *keeping* the remaining injunctions is that they simply possess some relevant connection, a family resemblance, to the content categories. These relevant connections are discussed in detail during the second step of the filtering process. We are now in a position to filter the remaining injunctions and to look at what the genesis from content categories to families can tell us.

Filtering: Step Two

After looking at the general injunctions and deciding which of those were most likely to result in a match with one or more of the content categories, we are left with five injunctions: compassion, indifference, the Golden Rule, “always treat others fairly,” “avoid extremes,” and “don’t offend your neighbor.”

With the exception of indifference, the other four injunctions will be filtered using a “dichotomy method.” A dichotomy method is simply a way of looking at the actions or virtues within the content categories and assigning them as either good things or bad things – or a similar dichotomy. For instance, from the content category “prohibition of murder” we can reasonably say that murder must be “bad,” or something to be avoided. We could make a similar deduction that truth must be good.

The Golden Rule

The value of the dichotomy method is best represented by using a good/bad distinction as a filter for the Golden Rule, “treat others as you wish to be treated.” I believe it is reasonable to rephrase this precept as “treat others well, don’t treat them poorly” – because I personally want to be treated well, and I believe it is justifiable to say that most people desire to be treated well instead of poorly. To further simplify this statement we might say “do good to others, do not do bad.” At this point, we now have a way of directly comparing the Golden Rule to the content categories. The content categories endorse treating others equally as “good.” Therefore, we can say that the “treat others equally” content category should have an “X” for the Old Testament. Running through the content categories in this manner, we find that both violence and extremes are bad, and hence the content categories prohibiting them should have an “X” corresponding to the Old Testament. All of the other content categories either already contain an X from the Old Testament or the Golden Rule isn’t strictly applicable.

Don’t Offend Your Neighbor

Filtering this precept requires a similar thought process to that of the Golden Rule. The only difference is that in this case, the dichotomy we are concerned with is that between offensive and non-offensive behavior. That is, for this particular precept it is useful to think of truth telling as “nonoffensive” instead of “good,” although both of these descriptions of truth are correct insofar as they agree with the content category’s *affirmation* of truth-telling as a positive duty. Thus, telling the truth and treating others equally are nonoffensive, whilst adultery, violence, theft and extremes are offensive. It is

easy to see that, taken in this light, all of the content categories prohibiting an offensive action should receive an “X” for Thomas Aquinas. But what about any nonoffensive categories? Looking at those categories which are nonoffensive, namely truth telling and treating others equally, it is reasonable to state that *failing* to do those things would be offensive, and thus they are required activities in order to remain nonoffensive.

Treat Others Fairly

Fair is defined as “free from bias, dishonesty, injustice” and “favorably.” From these definitions, it is reasonable to view this precept as a decree that we must treat everyone the same, and that we should treat everyone well. Relying on the dichotomy method, this means that we are to carry out good actions and refrain from the bad. Thus, the content categories take on their now familiar good or bad characterizations, and the “X” marks can be accordingly distributed.

Compassion

Compassion is generally defined as the ability to understand someone else’s suffering and a desire to alleviate that suffering. The ethos of compassion, at least partially, must then be an aversion to suffering. It is reasonable to equate suffering with the presence of having bad things happen to you, which thus makes the prohibition of any “bad” actions, as defined by the content categories, fair game for filtering. In this case, an aversion to “bad things” would earn compassion an “X” for “prohibition of adultery,” “prohibition of theft,” and “prohibition of murder.”

Indifference

This is the only precept that won't be filtered using the dichotomy method. Instead, it will be filtered based on an "action distinction." An action distinction is simply whether a precept or virtue requires you to act, or refrain from an act. For instance, a truly indifferent person would naturally refrain from stealing and extremes, as doing those things would require a level of personal investment not consistent with the idea of indifference. Thus, content categories which *do not* require action deserve an "X" from the Laws of Manu. The relevant categories are those prohibiting adultery, violence, theft, extremes, envy, and anger.

Filtering: The Results

The results of filtering the general injunctions through the content categories are represented in the following tables. Notice that the tables are identical to the content category tables in structure, and that an "F" represents that a school of thought is now associated with a precept or virtue based on the filtering analysis. The order of the injunctions has also been changed to reflect their new frequencies.

Table 4. Precept Families

Precept Families

Precept Family	Old	Tom	Rac	Man	Tao	New	Nav
Prohibition of murder	X	X	X	X	F	F	X
Prohibition of theft	X	F	F	F	F	F	X
Refrain from violence	F	F	F	F	X	X	X
Prohibition of adultery	X	F	F	F	F	X	X
Truth in speech and communication	X	F	X	X		X	X
Refrain from extremes	F	F	F	F	X	X	
Treat others equally	F	F	X		X	X	
The importance of familial care	X	X	X				X

Table 5. Virtue Families**Virtue Families**

Virtue Family	Old	Tom	Rac	Man	Tao	New	Nav
Avoid envy	X	X		F	X	X	
Courage		X	X			X	
Humility		X	X			X	
Avoid Anger		X		F		X	
Generosity		X	X				
Compassion					X	X	

Summation

This chapter has taken the results of the previous two chapters and interpreted them in such a way as to create two final tables of precepts and virtues, with each table representing a specific injunction and that injunction's frequency throughout the seven schools of thought. Discussing what a universal code of ethics may look like based on these frequencies, as well as my concluding remarks, takes place in the final chapter.

Chapter 8

Final Remarks

On the Findings of this Thesis

As this thesis has progressed, I have come to realize that any possible significance to be found in this document is not within the results, but within the method that produced those results. The stated goals of this thesis were to find a core of moral values, and attempt to generate a universal code of ethics and virtues based on those values, independent of metaethics. While these intentions were framed with the acknowledgment that this was a “proof of concept” thesis, it is still important to discuss whether this thesis itself, regardless of its methods, produced any specific results. In terms of results, regarding discovery of the actual core of moral values and developing a universal code of ethics, I do not feel comfortable with designating this thesis a “success” in the traditional sense. I did not and will not even attempt to enumerate a universal code of ethics; and while not without merit, the core of moral values lacked any kind of specificity. All of this is to say that this thesis is unable to distill the research down into a few pages-worth of universal virtues, precepts, and guidelines.

The difficulties encountered whilst trying to enumerate specific results, from what I can tell, are mostly a product of the enormity of the task. To speak of a specific and well-defined universal morality is to speak of something far beyond this thesis’ scope.

With only seven small samplings of thought throughout time, it was admittedly over-ambitious to imagine that the language of universality could be justified. This is why I have not included any kind of “bulleted” list of precepts and virtues to serve as a code of ethics, it would simply be incorrect to do so, regardless of how carefully the data was interpreted.

Despite this conclusion, I do draw a firm line between being unable to enumerate a list, and being unable to create a viable method for discussing morality. With regard to the hypothesis of discussing morality without metaethics, I believe this thesis was a success. I invite review of the final precept and virtue categories – which represent the culmination of this thesis’ research. From what I can tell, from my own personal opinion, none of the families are trivial. From such varied source material a discussion of values regarding murder, truthfulness, courage, and compassion has emerged, amongst others – completely without outside influence. To me, this suggests that enough similarity exists throughout humanity’s ethical spectra to make this type of research-based morality viable.

Furthermore, it is possible to imagine what a universal code of ethics *might* look like based on what this thesis has done. Imagine that this thesis really was comprehensive, accounting for most if not all beliefs throughout time. It would make sense that if precept and virtue families were created from this data, those families with 100% frequency could really be called universal. From the data in this thesis, prohibitions of murder, theft, and violence would all be universal – followed closely by admonitions to tell the truth and refrain from extremes. This is, by my estimation, a good start. I believe one would be hard-pressed to find a belief system which did not reflect

these values. This seems to suggest that frequency analysis may be a viable method of deciding which families should be considered universal. A precept doesn't necessarily have to have 100% frequency either, it was just used for illustrative purposes.

Overall, I believe that this thesis' method of discussing morality, in terms of humanity's tendencies throughout time and across cultures, does indeed provide a justifiable method of discussing morality without discussing metaethics. Recall that, according to Veatch's flow chart, metaethics is the anchor of the entire process. Our worldviews, consisting of god or gods or no gods, are what we ultimately turn to when debating morality. What the results of this thesis suggest is that metaethics isn't really necessary as an anchor. The "common morality" as discussed by Veatch, essentially called "content families" by myself, can be anchored in something much less elusive than metaethics – it can be anchored in ourselves. It can be anchored in centuries of mankind's struggle to do right and avoid wrong. It can be anchored in the similarities between all of those struggles throughout time. Thus, there would be no fourth level of moral discourse in the schematic – there would only be the third level, a common morality, anchored by an understanding of our own tendencies; and I believe that the methods employed in this thesis provide a way to do so.

The added benefit of this possibility is the fact that, while removing metaethics from moral discourse as it pertains to interacting with others, it does not support one worldview over any other. It does not pass any judgment on metaethical schools of thought. Furthermore, as long as a worldview did not conflict with the common morality, it would not prevent an adherent in any way from practicing their beliefs. Thus, a system of dealing with morality would be provided that, while not professing to be of any one

worldview, would support the general tenets of most worldviews by the very nature of the process. This observation may be the most important in this thesis. It suggests that while it may not be prudent to view metaethics as the *anchor* of our ethical interactions, metaethics still permeates the discussion. Instead of having its own level of discourse, in this thesis' system of ethical inquiry, metaethics is acknowledged as influencing all of the other levels. Therefore, we don't have to debate where our conceptions of right and wrong come from, we can focus on the first three levels of moral discourse with the acknowledgement that our commonalities spring from a wealth of different beliefs.

Future Work

One of the benefits of a “proof of concept” work is that, if the concept seems viable, it becomes a building block for future work. While the method employed by this thesis does seem to be viable, much work must be done if it is to supply us with any specific results. The conclusions drawn from this thesis suggest further steps which may yield some important results.

The first step is to simply gather more data. A theme throughout this thesis is that a robust discussion of what it's trying to accomplish is simply not possible given the timeframe of this particular project. It would be wise to start with the seven schools of thought already examined and simply expand upon them – incorporate them in their entirety instead of just the selections chosen for this thesis. This would most likely yield more injunctions which could be put through the same analysis. It would then be prudent

to add more schools of thought to the body of research. These two steps combined would yield more family categories, and more frequencies.

Once the data pool is large enough, a larger range of frequencies will be present. Once this has happened, it would be possible to start speaking about universals. That is, if the frequency of a specific tenet were high enough, and the data pool was big enough, we could actually designate that injunction as a universal. We would then have a picture of what mankind's core of moral values is, and what a universal code of ethics would consist of. It would also be possible to look at how the frequencies themselves may aid us in deliberation. For instance, if two injunctions were clashing with each other over a particular situation, would the injunction with a higher frequency take precedence? Would it be possible to use the frequencies as a way to mediate conflicts?

Another step may be to try a more in-depth filtering process. The dichotomy method was only one possible way of interpreting the data. I chose it because it was straightforward, and left the smallest interpretive fingerprint possible. However, other interpretations may yield different outliers. For instance, Rachel's "respect" injunction was an outlier by the end of the analysis, yet the specific language of respect is central to modern ethical discourse. Was respect for persons covered in other families? Does it equate with compassion? A more rigorous look at the data, the connotations of each precept, as well as what the implications of leaving certain injunctions as outliers are, is warranted in order to derive more robust results.

A final step might be to simply run the results through some ethical exercises. If a code of ethics were created, or even if only a pool of common values were used, could the results inform our decisions? Could we talk about stem cell research, or abortion, or

gay marriage with respect to the results and arrive at a conclusion of their morality that makes sense? What would the results say about doctor-assisted suicide, or capital punishment, or universal healthcare? What even, about the morality and necessity of war, or of giving aid to poorer countries? These questions, the questions that most routinely end up as debates on the fourth level of moral discourse, are the questions any results using this thesis' methods *must* be able to answer.

A Final Thought

On a global scale, the morality of the situations listed directly above continues to be debated, often on the fourth level of moral discourse. Simply put, we put so much effort into the conflicts between our metaethical views that we never get around to addressing the actual moral problem at hand. For instance, how often, in American politics, does a debate over a controversial issue rapidly devolve into a fight between the religious conservatives versus the secular liberals? While this fight rages, the problem at hand goes unresolved.

It is my sincerest wish that this thesis will in some manner contribute to solving this tendency to retreat to our respective metaethical views and refuse to budge. I have often heard the phrase “those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it,” and I can’t help but think that it is no less true in ethics than it is anywhere else. It is safe to say that, given our history of conflict, mankind seems to focus on differences instead of similarities. I believe that much good can be done by simply understanding all that we have in common.

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