Glossary

**Altruism**: Way of feeling or acting characterized by unselfish concern for others.

**Animal liberationist**: Someone who argues that we should take the suffering of sentient animals into account in ethical deliberation.

**Anthropocentrism**: Moral vision according to which human interests are the measure of all earthly value; implies that neither animal species nor ecosystems have any intrinsic worth, any value not reducible to the degree to which they satisfy human needs and desires.

**Autonomous**: Self-legislative, or capable of laying down the law (*nomos*) for oneself (*auto*); attribute of beings possessing rationality.

**Civil disobedience**: Nonviolent resistance to laws thought to be unjust or oppressive.

**Categorical imperative**: Supreme command of reason that directs the will absolutely or unconditionally, irrespective of anyone’s particular desires; given multiple formulations by Kant.

**Cultural Relativism**: Theory holding that there is no such thing as universal truth in ethics; there are only the various cultural codes, and our own is merely one among many.

**Descriptive ethics**: Attempt to describe or explain moral phenomena or work out a theory of human nature that bears on ethical questions.

**End in itself**: Something that has absolute worth, that possesses value in its own right rather than mere usefulness as a means of achieving some goal external to itself.

**Ethical egoism**: Normative moral theory according to which people are never under any obligation to act unselfishly.

**Ethics**: Branch of philosophy dealing with morality, moral problems, and moral judgments; synonymous with “moral philosophy.”

**Ethics of care**: Relatively young moral theory that focuses on the importance of attending to the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility; rooted in a vision of human interdependence, it values emotion as a potential guide to understanding and implementing what morality recommends and stresses the cooperative well-being of self and other together.

**Euthanasia**

**Passive euthanasia**: Rachels’s term for a physician’s decision to withhold treatment at the request of a terminally ill patient or the immediate family so that the patient might be allowed to die.

**Active euthanasia**: Directed action taken by a physician, at the request of a terminally ill patient or the immediate family, to kill the patient to spare him or her needless suffering; sometimes referred to as “mercy killing”; according to
Rachels, not necessarily different in any morally relevant way from passive euthanasia.

**Immoralist**: Someone who does not allow moral considerations to become a hindrance to the pursuit of self-interest.

**Intention**: Conscious motivation of an action.

**Law of nature**: General rule, discovered by reason, forbidding us to do what is destructive of our own lives and obligating us to do whatever best preserves them; for example, we ought to try to make peace, insofar as we have hope of obtaining it; when we cannot obtain it, we ought to defend ourselves by any means necessary.

**Liberty**: Absence of external impediments to our power to do as we please.

**Maxim**: Principle according to which one sees oneself as acting.

**Mean**: In Aristotle, the virtuous intermediate state between the two extremes of excess and defect in passions (feelings) and actions.

**Meta-ethics**: Philosophical thinking about the meaning, use, or justification of moral expressions and value judgments.

**Moral scepticism**: View, closely linked to egoism, that most people are grossly deceived about what is or should be the case where morals are concerned.

**Negative Duties**: Duties not to perform certain acts of causation.

**Negative Right**: Right of noninterference (i.e., moral or legal entitlement to be left alone); for example, right not to be killed, right to property, right to privacy, right to exercise religious freedom.

**Normative ethics**: Philosophical thinking about what is right, good, or obligatory.

**Obligatory**: Quality of an act that it would be wrong not to do; applies to duties.

**Original position**: John Rawls’s term for the hypothetical state of perfect equality among those who undertake the deliberative search for the principles of justice; corresponds in Rawls to the “state of nature” in traditional social contract theory.

**Personhood**: Possession of at least some of the following characteristics, none of which are possessed by the fetus: sentience, emotionality, reason, capacity to communicate, self-awareness, and moral agency.

**Positive Duties**: Duties to perform certain acts of causation.

**Positive right**: Right of recipience (i.e., moral or legal entitlement to receive some good); for example, children’s rights to be fed, clothed, and housed by their natural or adoptive parents.
**Preferential affirmative action:** Programs that pay attention to group-identity criteria to increase numbers of women and minorities in the workplace.

**Procedural affirmative action:** Measures taken to eradicate all racial, religious, ethnic, and sex discrimination from the workplace.

**Psychological egoism:** Descriptive theory of human nature according to which people never act unselfishly.

**Right:** Claim or potential claim that one party may exercise against another, be it a single person, a group, or a community; can be legal, moral, or both.

**Right of nature:** Individuals’ liberty to use their power to protect their lives in whatever way seems most prudent.

**Self-interest:** Motivation that gives rise to actions benefiting oneself but not necessarily harming others; not the same as “selfishness,” which implies a blameworthy disregard of others’ well-being.

**Social contract:** Implied agreement among individuals relinquishing the right to do whatever they please in exchange for all others’ limiting their own rights in a similar manner.

**Speciesism:** Term coined by Peter Singer to designate systematic discrimination based on species membership; meant as an analogy to such terms as “racism” and “sexism,” which denote other forms of systematic discrimination against members of particular groups.

**Supererogatory:** Quality of an act that it would be good to do but not wrong not to do; synonymous with “charitable.”

**Utilitarianism:** Moral theory holding that actions are right to the extent that they promote as much happiness as possible and wrong to the extent that they promote unhappiness, each person counting equally.

- **Act utilitarianism:** Moral theory holding that an act is right if and only if it results in as much good or utility as any available alternative.

- **Rule utilitarianism:** Moral theory holding that an act is right if and only if it is required by a rule that is a member of a set of rules whose acceptance would lead to a greater utility than any available alternative.

**Veil of ignorance:** In John Rawls’s theory, hypothetical mechanism by which those in the original position have no knowledge of their own social status, class positions, or even natural abilities and inclinations; guarantees that no one can advocate principles that would be to their own special advantage.

**Virtue:** Synonymous with “excellence” in Aristotle; comes in two forms in humans: intellectual virtue, which is acquired by birth and teaching, and moral virtue, which comes about by habituation.
Virtue ethics (or ethics of character): Moral theory that focuses primarily on what kind of person it is good to be, what kind of traits it is good to embody; Aristotle