A Quick Summary of Some Ethical Theories

No Universal Moral Value Exists

- **Ethical Relativism:** Moral Value is a matter of social or individual preferences so one set of preferences cannot be the standard by which we judge another set of preferences

Moral Values Exist

- **Ethical Absolutism/Objectivism:** There are some moral values and practices that can be objectively proven to work better than others (e.g. Nurturing one’s young).

**Value of the Moral Agent**
(Ethical value is defined by the qualities of the individual)

- **Aristotle’s Aretaic Theory** (Socially defined virtues)
  - Virtues chosen based on the welfare of the *polis*
  - Define the excellent qualities of the individual/citizen

- **Nietzsche’s Master Morality** (Individually defined virtues)
  - Virtues chosen by individuals who define excellence for themselves – to be contrasted with “slave morality” which consists of traditional rules defined socially

**Value of the Moral Act**
(Ethical value is defined by looking at the action)

- **Kant’s Deontology** (The intentions count)
  - Only one’s intention motivating each action to perform one’s duty counts & duty is defined as a rational willingness to universalize one’s actions (The good will)

- **Mill’s Utilitarianism** (The ends count)
  - Only the consequences of an action count – the best end is to promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people
Questions to Consider: (This is not a homework assignment; it is just to help review & evaluate the theories.)

1. Aristotle doesn’t think everyone is equal but can everyone demonstrate virtue?

2. If Nietzsche’s “masters” are supposed to move beyond considerations of good and evil, how does he define excellence?

3. Does Kant care if you enjoy doing the right thing?

4. For Mill, does the moral value of the action change if what you thought was going to happen turns out very differently?