

## Typology Of Ethical Choices

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The essential premise of this typology lies in the relationship between three levels of value choices facing every person: existential, motivational and volitional. Existential choices are those directly relating to the physical survival of one's life. The choice to breathe, eat and sleep are essential to human life as we know it. This also goes for protection against poisons and pathogens. Existential choices are explicitly clearcut in character. One makes the correct choice or dies soon after, depending on the nature of the action. Motivational choices deal with moral-ethical values which have major ramifications for the existential and in fact are ultimately survival oriented. These involve the meaning aspect of survival. Existential choices deal with "how" to survive the motivational with "why" to survive. For the morally integrated individual, his motivational values are not only coequal with his existence but become his existence. This is the identity of a human, the merger of meaning and existence. Motivational choices then deal with all essential problems of identity and by inference presuppose consciousness. A motivational choice deals with essential abstract values which permit the individual to maintain not merely existence but existence with meaning. For example, were a person to murder someone for food, although he would maintain his existence, his life would lose meaning and ultimately identity as a volitional entity. Why? Because the initiation of force against another sentient being precludes the moral right for oneself to remain free from the initiation of force. One's life and all its products are subject to being 'harvested' by a physical aggressor of greater strength. By resorting to the initiation of force to murder or rob another means that one is unable to sustain one's own life by one's own efforts. More succinctly, violence is the incompetent's last resort.

Motivational choices deal with all-essential values of sentient being's existence and identity. These stem from ultimate metaphysical and epistemological premises. Metaphysically, motivational choices can only be based on the premise that man is a volitional being by his essential nature. His activity is purposeful and his choices are based on the existential and identital necessity of maximizing value. This is true of any living organism with the qualification that less complex organisms are ruled by a much narrower range of volition by range of the moment responses to stimuli. But all living things must maximize the return of their efforts to maintain the economy of life.

The essential nature of man is volitional because he is able to abstract from past experience by inferring concepts from sensory perception. The metaphysical nature of man as volitional being hinges directly on his epistemological capacity i.e. his ability to know the world with greater or lesser degrees of assurance. Man is primarily an epistemological being because his capacity for volition hinges on his capacity for non-contradictory knowledge. Other organisms may survive on automatic range-of-the-moment responses but man is a creature of his own mind. It is from concepts that he is able to project from the lessons of the past into the actions of the future. With each new concept gained from experience, man's capacity for knowledge increases geometrically, not additively. This is why man is not a product of his environment but a creation of his own mind. The content of his own mind extends far beyond the information originally gained by his sensory perceptions.

An individual has the capacity to learn and instead of going over single and lower order problems, responds to these automatically so as to deal with more complex issues. A child may have considerable trouble responding to a single problem in arithmetic but as an adult he may be able to spontaneously and immediately answer two-zero-two-four to the question what is the sum of one thousand twelve and one thousand twelve. He no longer consciously goes through the mechanics of two plus two is four, one plus one is two. The efficiency comes from two capacities associated with consciousness: memory and abstraction. Abstraction is the more fundamental. Its essential characteristic is logic, which is the method of non-contradictory identification i.e. A is A not B and cannot be both A and B. In that an object cannot have two identities, a living organism cannot simultaneously exist and not exist. In that a man's moral values are the product of his epistemological and metaphysical nature, these cannot contradict each other or he loses identity. This quality is called integrity i.e. non-contradiction of values. All values consciously held, emotively felt and expressed in behavior must be logically in line with each other if motivational choices complement and reinforce existential choices. This is the only way that man survives as a purposeful being, anything less results in his devolution to an animal state.

Volitional choices are those which deal with options permitting a wider range of flexibility. All volitional choices implicitly if not explicitly involve existential and motivational choices. For example, an individual may desire an automobile and he may regard this as a purely volitional choice as to whether he walks, takes the bus or chooses not to travel. But if his livelihood depends on having an automobile under given circumstances, then his choice is implicitly existential (depending on his degree of awareness). Whether he chooses to steal a car or decides to pay for it is a motivational (moral-ethical) choice. The color of the car for example is purely a volitional choice unless he consciously identifies the color with some symbolic meaning i.e. black for death. A volitional choice is one in which the existential or motivational aspect is not certain. Ultimately, however, all choices are moral and volitional choices are only in areas where errors of knowledge are not objectively critical.

The activity of a sentient being is purposeful and as such it seeks to maximize the economy of its action. Randomness, which is the essential character of a volitional choice, is unefficacious. In the mind of a rational, purposeful being, the purposeful ultimately will replace nearly all nonpurposeful activity. Even in experimental behavior where errors of knowledge can result from uncertainty, activity can and in fact must be purposeful.

In sum, existential, motivational and volitional choices can be distinguished only in the abstract for in reality these are unified in every choice. However, this typology is extremely useful in categorizing the explicit and implicit meanings of particular choices. This is of crucial importance to the moral man who seeks to maintain the integrity of his self-identity.

The following examples are presented to demonstrate the implicit and explicit relationship of existential, motivational and volitional values which may exist in a choice under given conditions. Note that the hierarchy of consideration is in descending order: existential, motivational and volitional. The essential rule in purposeful action is to never surrender a higher value for a lower value. This is called the rule of non-sacrifice. I.e. one cannot surrender an existential value for a volitional value. However, the reader must take careful note of the

interplay between motivational and existential value choices previously described in correctly understanding the meaning of the examples.

Situation An individual finds himself in a German concentration camp and is told that he must man the gas switch killing other prisoners if he is to remain alive or die immediately.

Interpretation This is explicitly an existential choice. It is plainly do or die. But implicitly it is a motivational choice. Assuming the individual totally rejects the initiation of force against others but values his life above all else, the existential choice of saving his physical existence one would think would prevail according to the rule of non-sacrifice. However the individual faces a terrible dilemma - a moral dilemma. If he is logically astute, he knows that his physical existence is meaningless unless he is true to the values he holds. The integrity of his ethical code does not permit a slip for the sake of expediency. It would seem then that the only choice would be to refuse pushing the gas switch but to go down fighting in defense of his life, however futile this might be.

Conclusion There is, however, a morally correct alternative to the drastic conclusion offered in the interpretation. One is not morally responsible for actions explicitly commanded under the imminent threat of death. Do or die is not a choice but a moral imperative to live! A moral life must not be sacrificed to an immoral command. It must live, if nothing else, to conquer the evil which threatens its existence. To surrender one's life for an objectively futile gesture of disobedience is to break the rule of non-sacrifice. In essence, the moral responsibility of the action falls upon the initiation of force which in this case would be the officer of the concentration camp. The only decision one can make is to live to free oneself. Only in this way can the values that one holds to be true be maintained.

Situation An individual who rejects the initiation of force is physically aggressed by another person and he estimates his life to be in danger. He has the capacity to kill the aggressor.

Interpretation The individual who is being physically attacked rejects the initiation of force and values the absolute right to life for others. He does so out of rational self-interest since he sees life in others as potentially adding value to his life through trade. He understands that by respecting another's right to live his own life, he engenders reciprocal respect for his own right to live. The question then is can he kill in self-defense. Although the choice at first might appear existential rather than motivational, it is essentially moral. The same existence-identity dilemma appears to be working in this case. Perhaps he should do his best to fend off the attack without chancing the death of the aggressor.

Conclusion This approach is wrong. Unless one is very skilled, one should feel morally correct in destroying the aggressor while taking as few chances as possible. Rejecting the initiation of force does not prohibit one from vigorous and efficacious self-defense against physical aggression or the threat of physical aggression. In fact, the individual is logically bound by the rule of non-sacrifice to protecting his own life by taking as few chances as possible. The aggressor gives up his right to life the moment he proceeds to physically aggress another person or threatens by word or obvious action to do so. By rejecting the right to life in others he rejects his own right by inference. Whether the aggressor is conscious of this fact or not is irrelevant.