Late last night, when you were parking your car, you happened to bump into a car in front of you. You noticed that you had dented the bumper on that car.

There is an ethical dimension to your thought process here.

If you ignore the ethical dimension, what – in general terms – are you ignoring? Can you generalise this, so that you can identify what it is that makes an ethical consideration an ethical consideration?

Don’t use any of these words:
Thinking here is focussed on answering the question,

**What should I do?**
Descriptive Ethics
Investigates what people do, and what they think are the right things to do. “As a matter of fact, this is what they do think.”

Prescriptive Ethics
Normative Ethics
Reaches a view about what ought to be done, and how people should behave.

Descriptive Ethics
Describes behaviour
= anthropology, sociology

Prescriptive Ethics
Normative Ethics (principles)
Normative Issues
Casuistry, Moralising
List the four or five most important ethical characteristics possessed by someone you greatly admire.

**Amazing Coincidence**

Dispelling the significance of *relativism*

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Fairness
- Compassion (caring)
- Openness
Thinking here is focussed on answering the question,

What kind of person should I be?

What makes moral reasoning so difficult?
Moral = Ethical

vs.

• prudential
• political
• preference
• artistic
• ...
• ...

Ethics

Consequences, Outcomes

Rules

More?

What else?

e.g.,

• professional code,
• law,
• loyalty to employer,
• confidentiality,
• requirements of one’s role in an organisation
**Normative Ethical Theories**

**Consequential** (teleological)
- Egoism (oneself)
- Nationalism (the nation)
- Utilitarianism (happiness, pleasure, welfare, “general utility”)

**Non-Consequential** (deontological)
- Rights?
- Duties?
- Contracts?
- Contractarianism
- Fairness?

**Contractarianism**
- Immanuel Kant
- Thomas Hobbes
- John Rawls

**Virtue Ethics**

Human Excellence
Virtuousness – exhibiting the virtues

- honesty
- trustworthiness
- courage

*aretē*

**Plato**
**Aristotle**
The only thing that is good without qualification is a good will – i.e., a will which wills will (does a good job willing). The good lies in the willing, not in the particular thing which was willed.

This has to be the basis of morality. Any other proposed criteria are either inappropriate or inadequate.

“duty” – not “inclination” or “achievement of some particular result” – is the central notion of morality.

This is the only thing which makes sense:
Otherwise, rightness and wrongness are matters of fortuitousness (luck) or simply a person’s natural characteristics (like height, weight, and, perhaps, sense of humour), rather than necessary characteristics, and behaviour that we can exercise control over. And that is simply not how we think about morality.

Willing well is a matter of consistency and universalisability:

The test –

Could what you are willing become a universal law? That is, “what would things be like if everyone did it? It’s not a matter of whether or not you would like it; but whether it could even be possible for there to be such a world.
• Duty as the basic moral feature

• Good will
  ✓ Not in terms of effects

• Good will → duty
  ✓ Agent autonomy
  ✓ Morality not a matter of luck or accident

• Avoidance of hypocrisy

• Not character

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**John Stuart Mill** (1861)

When we engage in any action, we first have some idea of what we’re trying to accomplish. A reasonable gauge, then, of rightness and wrongness would seem to be whether the means we’ve chose to get there actually do the job.

“actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure.”

Nothing else makes any sense.
• Basis of morality
  ✓ anti-Kant

• Utilitarian principle

**Plato** *(circa 380 BC)*

State (large, general)

↓

Individual (small)

• Virtue as internal – not interpersonal
• Good person
**Plato (circa 380 BC)**

Virtues: those things that enable humans to function well as humans.

Function of a knife is to cut. A sharp edge allows it to perform this function well. So, a sharp edge is the virtue of a knife.

What are particularly human functions? virtues are – courage, wisdom, temperance, justice

**Aristotle (circa 330 BC)**

Question: “What’s *IT* all about, anyway?  
Answer: Happiness

What does happiness amount to, and how do we get to it – what are the characteristics we should develop in ourselves so as to arrive at happiness?

Whatever these characteristics are, they are therefore “human virtues”. Consider the types of things that humans do, and where they (we) find happiness; and then consider what is involved in doing them well or badly: these will be the corresponding virtues and vices.

Moral virtues – concerned with “doing things”

Intellectual virtues – concerned with “thinking”
• Happiness – end of the chain of “why?”
• Character

• Degree of precision

"it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is … equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs."

Bk. 1, chap. 3, *Nichomachean Ethics*