

Chapter 2: Introduction to Ethics

Chapter Overview

- Introduction
- Review of nine ethical theories
- Comparing four ethical theories
- Morality of breaking the law

Why Study Ethics?

- Ethics: a way to decide the best thing to do
- New problems accompany new technologies
- “Common wisdom” may not exist for novel situations brought about by new technologies

The Ethical Point of View

Most everyone shares “core values”, desiring:

Life

Happiness

Ability to accomplish goals

Two ways to view world

Selfish point of view: consider only your own self and your core values

Ethical point of view: respect other people and their core values

Defining Terms

Society

Association of people organized under a system of rules

Rules: advance the good of members over time

Morality

A society's rules of conduct

What people ought / ought not to do in various situations

Ethics

Rational examination of morality

Evaluation of people's behavior

Real – Life Scenario

You are the senior software engineer at a start-up company developing an exciting new product. Your company's sales force has led a major corporation to believe your product will be available next week.

Unfortunately, at this point the software still contains quite a few bugs. The leader of the testing group has reported that all of the known bugs appear to be minor, but it will take another month of testing for his team to be confident the product contains no catastrophic errors.

Because of the fierce competition in the smartphone software industry, it is critical that your company be "first to market." To the best of your knowledge, a well-established company will release a similar product in a few weeks. If its product appears first, your start-up company will probably go out of business.

Scenario Questions

- Should you recommend release of the product next week?
- Who will benefit if the company follows your recommendation?
- Who will be harmed if the company follows your recommendation?
- Do you have an obligation to any group of people that may be affected by your decision?
- What additional information, if any, would help you answer the previous questions?

More on Ethics

- Ethics: rational, systematic analysis
 - “Doing ethics” means explaining conclusions
 - Best explanations based on facts, shared values, logic
- Ethics focuses on people’s voluntary, moral choices
- Workable ethical theory: produces explanations that might be persuasive to a skeptical, yet open-minded audience

A Good Ethical Theory Supports Persuasive, Logical Arguments



2.2 Subjective Relativism

What Is Relativism?

- Relativism
 - No universal norms of right and wrong
 - One person can say “X is right,” another can say “X is wrong,” and both can be right
- Subjective relativism
 - Each person decides right and wrong for himself or herself
 - “What’s right for you may not be right for me”

Case for Subjective Relativism

- Well-meaning and intelligent people disagree on moral issues
- Ethical debates are disagreeable and pointless

Case Against Subjective Relativism

- Blurs line between doing what you think is right and doing what you want to do
- Makes no moral distinction between the actions of different people
- SR and tolerance are two different things
- Decisions may not be based on reason
- Not a workable ethical theory

2.3 Cultural Relativism

Cultural Relativism in a Nutshell

- What is “right” and “wrong” depends upon a society’s actual moral guidelines
- These guidelines vary from place to place and from time to time
- A particular action may be right in one society at one time and wrong in other society or at another time

Case for Cultural Relativism

- Different social contexts demand different moral guidelines
- It is arrogant for one society to judge another

Case Against Cultural Relativism

- Because two societies **do** have different moral views doesn't mean they **ought to** have different views
- It doesn't explain how moral guidelines are determined
- What if there are no cultural norms?
- It doesn't account for evolution of moral guidelines.
- It provides no way out for cultures in conflict
- Existence of many acceptable practices does not imply all practices are acceptable (many/any fallacy)
- Societies do, in fact, share certain core values
- Only indirectly based on reason
- Not a workable ethical theory

2.4 Divine Command Theory

Overview of Divine Command Theory

- Good actions: those aligned with God's will
- Bad actions: those contrary to God's will
- Holy books reveal God's will
- We should use holy books as moral decision-making guides

Divine Command Theory in Action



Case for Divine Command Theory

- We owe obedience to our Creator
- God is all-good and all-knowing
- God is the ultimate authority

Case Against Divine Command Theory

- Different holy books disagree on certain teachings
- Society is multicultural, secular
- Some modern moral problems not directly addressed in scripture
- “The good” ≠ “God” (equivalence fallacy)
- Based on obedience, not reason
- Not a workable ethical theory for our purposes

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2.5 Ethical Egoism

Definition of Ethical Egoism

- Each person should focus exclusively on his or her self-interest
- Morally right action: that action that provides self with maximum long-term benefit
- Ayn Rand, author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, espoused a theory akin to ethical egoism

Case for Ethical Egoism

- It is practical since we are already inclined to do what's best for ourselves
- It is better to let other people take care of themselves
- The community can benefit when individuals put their well-being first
- Other moral principles are rooted in the principle of self-interest

Case Against Ethical Egoism

- An easy moral philosophy may not be the best moral philosophy
- We know a lot about what is good for someone else
- Self-interest can lead to blatantly immoral behavior
- Other moral principles are superior to principle of self-interest
- People who take the good of others into account lead happier lives
- By definition, does not respect the ethical point of view
- Not a workable ethical theory

2.6 Kantianism

Critical Importance of Good Will

- Good will: the desire to do the right thing
- Immanuel Kant: Only thing in the world that is good without qualification is a good will
- What we want to do is of no importance. Our focus should be on what we ought to do. This is called **dutifulness**
- Reason should cultivate desire to do right thing

Categorical Imperative (1st Formulation)

A categorical imperative is an **unconditional rule**: a rule that always applies, regardless of the circumstances.

Act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws.

(Not fair to make exceptions for yourself)

Illustration of 1st Formulation

- Question: Can a person in dire straits make a promise with the intention of breaking it later?
- Proposed rule: “I may make promises with the intention of later breaking them.”
- The person in trouble wants his promise to be believed so he can get what he needs.
- Universalize rule: Everyone may make & break promises
- Everyone breaking promises would make promises unbelievable, contradicting desire to have promise believed
- The rule is flawed. The answer is “No.”

A Quick Check

- When evaluating a proposed action, reverse roles
- What would you think if that person did the same thing to you?
- Negative reaction → evidence that your will to do that action violates the Categorical Imperative

Categorical Imperative (2nd Formulation)

Act so that you treat both yourself
and other people as ends in themselves
and never only as a means to an end.

Means implies using only for your own benefit,
with no thought to the interests or benefit of the
thing that you are using.

Humans are ends-in-themselves

Kant: Wrong to Use Another Person Solely as a Means to an End



Plagiarism Scenario

- Carla
 - Single mother
 - Works full time
 - Takes two evening courses/semester
- History class
 - Requires more work than normal
 - Carla earning an “A” on all work so far
 - Carla doesn’t have time to write final report
- Carla purchases report; submits it as her own work

Kantian Evaluation (1st Formulation)

- Carla wants credit for plagiarized report
- Rule: “You may claim credit for work performed by someone else”
- If rule universalized, reports would no longer be credible indicator’s of student’s knowledge, and professors would not give credit for reports
- Proposal moral rule is self-defeating
- It is wrong for Carla to turn in a purchased report

Kantian Evaluation (2nd Formulation)

- Carla submitted another person's work as her own
- She attempted to deceive professor
- She treated professor as a means to an end
 - End: passing the course
 - Means: manipulate professor
- What Carla did was wrong

Case for Kantianism

- Aligns with common moral concern: “What if everyone acted that way?”
- Produces universal moral guidelines
- Treats all persons as moral equals

Perfect and Imperfect Duties

- Perfect duty: duty obliged to fulfill without exception
 - Example: Telling the truth
- Imperfect duty: duty obliged to fulfill in general but not in every instance
 - Example:
 1. Duty of self-improvement.
 2. Duty to aid others.

Case Against Kantianism

- Sometimes no rule adequately characterizes an action. Eg: stealing to feed starving children
- Sometimes there is no way to resolve a conflict between rules
 - In a conflict between a perfect duty and an imperfect duty, perfect duty prevails
 - In a conflict between two perfect duties, no solution
Eg: never tell a lie and avoid harming someone
- Kantianism allows no exceptions to perfect duties
Commending someone for a dress.

Breakout Discussion: Mobile Surveillance

- “a special investigative team covertly infiltrates the mobile devices of Canadians. The tools, which have been used on at least 10 investigations between 2018 and 2020, give the police access to text messages, email, photos, videos, audio files, calendar entries and financial records. The software can also remotely turn on the camera and microphone of a suspect’s phone or laptop.”
- **Is it ethical for the Canadian government to use this system?** Consider from the perspective of Kantianism.



<https://bit.ly/3BJUvNX>

<https://theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/07/canada-police-spyware-admission-surveillance-experts>

2.7 Act Utilitarianism

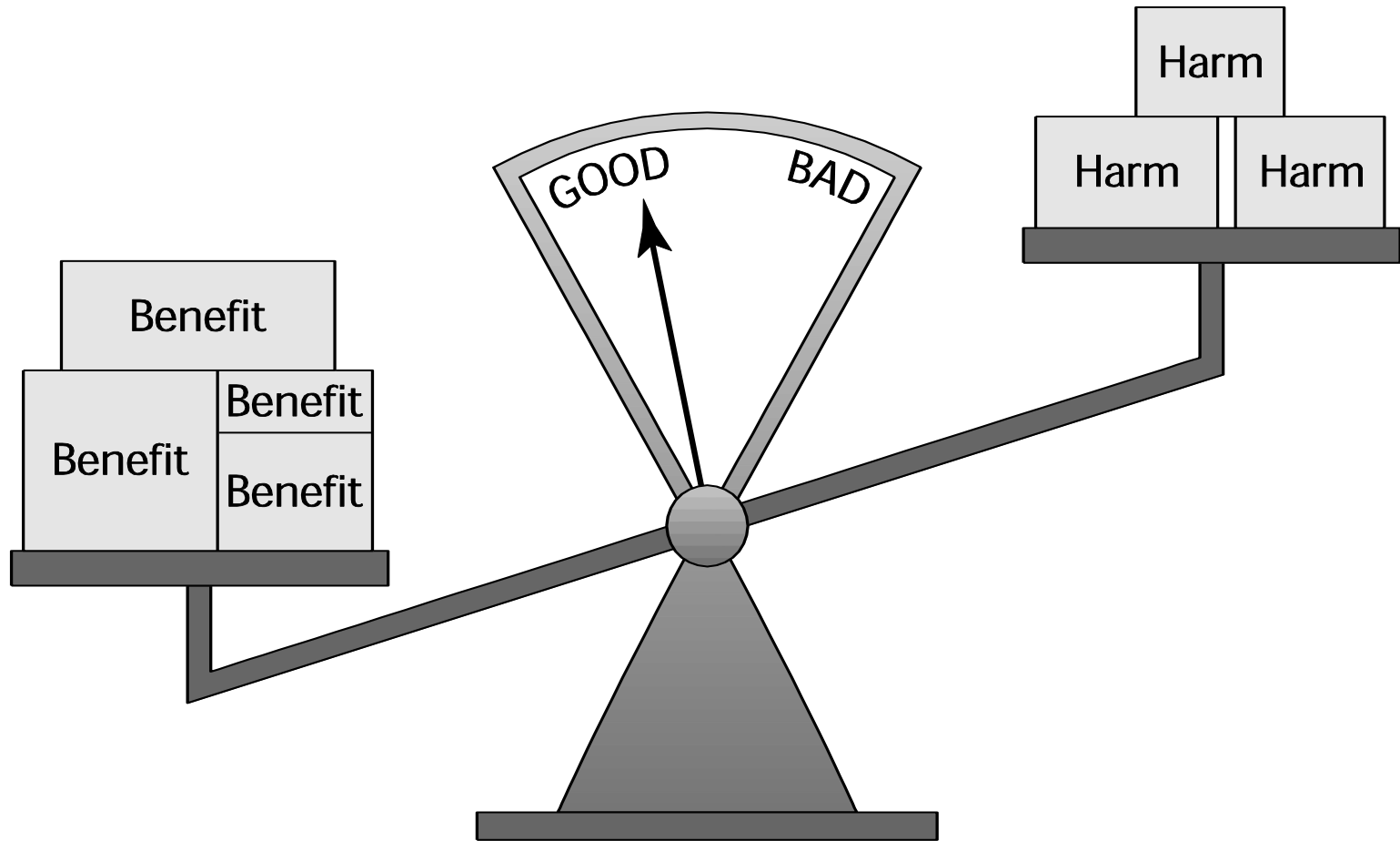
Principle of Utility

- Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill
- An action is good if its benefits exceeds its harms
- An action is bad if its harms exceed its benefits
- Utility: tendency of an object to produce happiness or prevent unhappiness for an individual or a community
- Happiness = advantage = benefit = good = pleasure
- Unhappiness = disadvantage = cost = evil = pain

Principle of Utility (Greatest Happiness Principle)

An action is right (or wrong) to the extent that it increases (or decreases) the total happiness of the affected parties.

Principle of Utility



Act Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism
 - Morality of an action has nothing to do with intent
 - Focuses on the consequences
 - A consequentialist theory
- Act utilitarianism
 - Add up change in happiness of all affected beings
 - $\text{Sum} > 0$, action is good
 - $\text{Sum} < 0$, action is bad
 - Right action to take: one that maximizes the sum

2.8 Rule Utilitarianism

- The case of organ transplant for 5 (useful members of society) patients from one lesser member of society.
- Refrain from acts that might maximize utility in the short run and instead follow rules that will maximize utility for the majority of the time

Applying Principle of Utility to Rules

- We ought to adopt moral rules which, if followed by everyone, will lead to the greatest increase in total happiness
- Act utilitarianism applies Principle of Utility to individual actions
- Rule utilitarianism applies Principle of Utility to moral rules

Anti-Worm Scenario

- August 2003: Blaster worm infected thousands of Windows computers
- Soon after, Nachi worm appeared
 - Took control of vulnerable computer
 - Located and destroyed copies of Blaster
 - Downloaded software patch to fix security problem
 - Used computer as launching pad to try to “infect” other vulnerable PCs

Evaluation using Rule Utilitarianism

- Proposed rule: If I can write a helpful worm that removes a harmful worm from infected computers and shields them from future attacks, I should do so
- Who would benefit
 - People who do not keep their systems updated
- Who would be harmed
 - People who use networks
 - People who's computers are invaded by buggy anti-worms
 - System administrators
- Conclusion: Harm outweighs benefits. Releasing anti-worm is wrong.

Case for Rule Utilitarianism

- Not every moral decision requires performing utilitarian calculus
- Moral rules survive exceptional situations
- Avoids the problem of moral luck
- Reduces the problem of bias
- Appeals to a wide cross-section of society

Case Against Utilitarianism in General

- All consequences must be measured on a single scale.
 - All units must be the same in order to do the sum
 - In certain circumstances utilitarians must quantify the value of a human life
- Utilitarianism ignores the problem of an unjust distribution of good consequences.
 - Utilitarianism does **not** mean “the greatest good of the greatest number”
 - That requires a principle of justice
 - What happens when a conflict arises between the Principle of Utility and a principle of justice?

2.9 Social Contract Theory

Basis of Social Contract Theory

- Thomas Hobbes
 - Lived during the English Civil War (1600s)
 - In a “state of nature” our lives would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”
 - We *implicitly* accept a social contract
 - Establishment of moral rules to govern relations among citizens
 - Government capable of enforcing these rules
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau
 - In ideal society, no one above rules
 - That prevents society from enact bad rules

James Rachels's Definition

“Morality consists in the set of rules, governing how people are to treat one another, that rational people will agree to accept, for their mutual benefit, on the condition that others follow those rules as well.”

Kinds of Rights

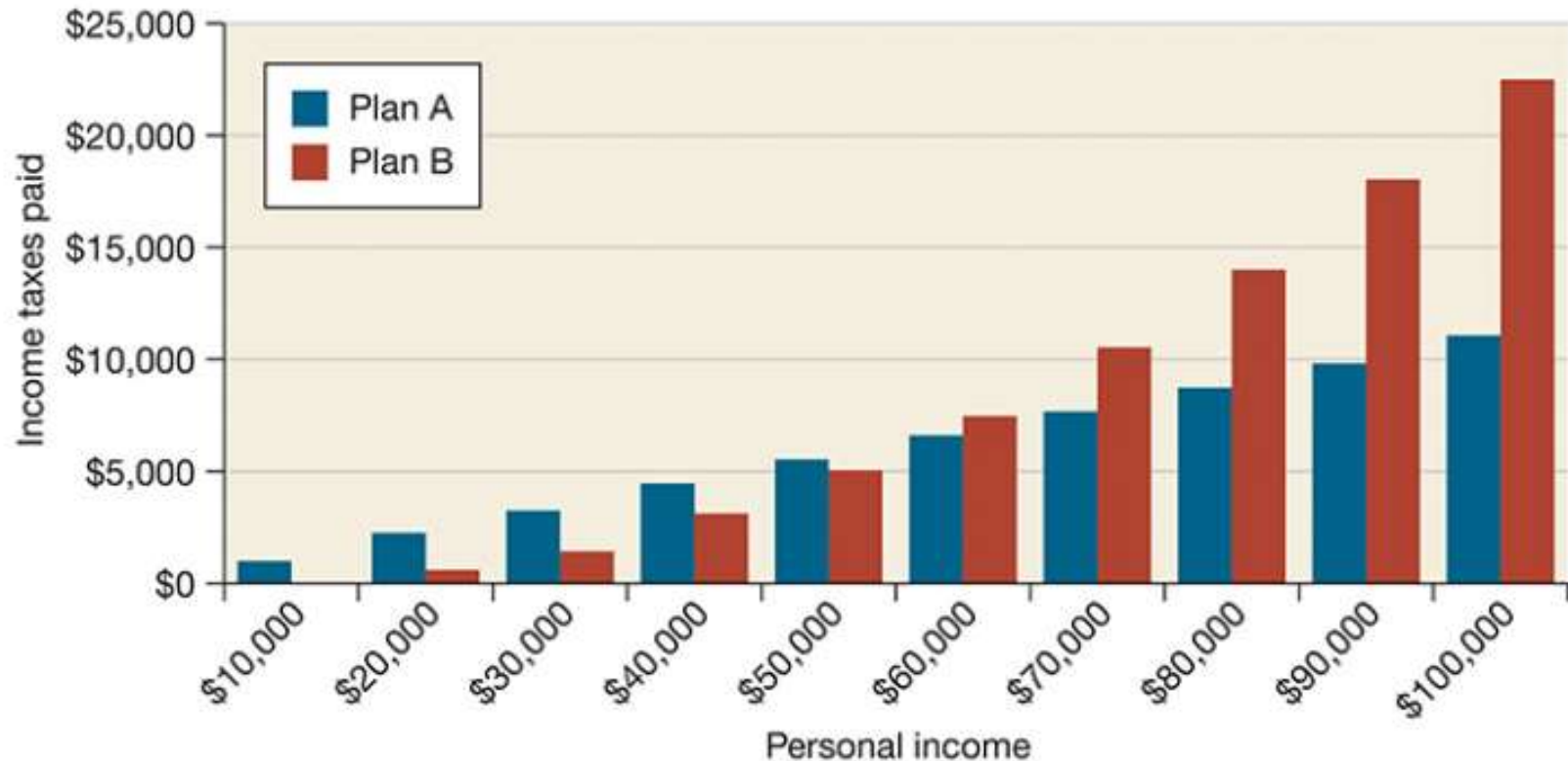
(Classified according to the duties they put on others)

- Negative right: A right that another can guarantee by leaving you alone or limiting action against you
Eg: The right to privacy, the right not to be killed, or the right to do what one wants with one's property
- Positive right: A right obligating others to do something on your behalf
Eg: right to a free education
- Absolute right: A right guaranteed without exception
Eg: the right to life
- Limited right: A right that may be restricted based on the circumstances. Typically, positive rights are considered to be limited rights.
- **Eg: Free education till 12th grade**

John Rawls's Principles of Justice

- Each person may claim a “fully adequate” number of basic rights and liberties, so long as these claims are consistent with everyone else having a claim to the same rights and liberties
- Any social and economic inequalities must
 - Be associated with positions that everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to achieve
 - Be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (**the difference principle**)

Rawls's Difference Principle



Suppose both of these income tax structures will produce the same income to the government. Plan A is a flat tax in which every citizen pays the same percentage of his or her income; plan B is a progressive tax in which the income tax rate gradually rises as a citizen's income increases. Plan B does not treat every citizen equally, but the inequality is justified under Rawls's difference principle because it is of greatest benefit to the most disadvantaged.

Rawls's Difference Principle

- Social and economic inequalities must be justified. The only way to justify a social or economic inequality is to show that its overall effect is to provide the most benefit to the least advantaged.
- An example is a graduated income tax system in which people with higher incomes pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes (See Figure on next page).
- A violation of the difference principle would be a military draft system in which poor people had a higher probability of being drafted than wealthy people.

Movie Download Scenario

- InterMovies is a site that streams movies for a flat monthly fee
- Collects information about movie choices from customers
- Constructs profiles of customers
- Sells profiles to direct marketing firms
- Some customers happy to receive more emails; others unhappy at increase in “junk mail”

Evaluation (Social Contract Theory)

- Consider rights of InterMovies, customers, and other companies
- Does customer have right to expect name, address to be kept confidential?
- If customer watches movies using InterMovies, who owns information about transaction?
- If InterMovies and customer have equal rights to information, InterMovies did nothing wrong to sell information.
- If customers have right to expect name and address or transaction to be confidential without giving permission, then InterMovies was wrong to sell information without asking for permission.

What do you think about InterMovies?

Now, let's explore both scenarios. Working in groups 2-4 to consider one of the following scenarios can be justified using social contract theory.

GROUP A: Customer doesn't have the right to privacy

- Try to construct a system of rules that rational people would accept as beneficial, given that others would accept these ideas as well.
- Does this system of rules meet Rawls' conditions?

GROUP B: Customer does have the right to privacy

- Try to construct a system of rules that rational people would accept as beneficial, given that others would accept these ideas as well.
- Does this system of rules meet Rawls' conditions?

Case for Social Contract Theory

- Framed in language of rights
- Explains why people act in self-interest in absence of common agreement
- Provides clear analysis of certain citizen/government problems
 - Why civil obedience can be morally right action

Case Against Social Contract Theory

- No one signed social contract
- Some actions have multiple characterizations
Eg: Stealing food from a grocery store to feed my starving children
- Conflicting rights problem
- May unjustly treat people incapable of upholding contract

2.10 Virtue Ethics

Critique of Enlightenment Theories

- Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory ignore important moral considerations
 - moral education
 - moral wisdom
 - family and social relationships
 - role of emotions
- Virtue ethics

A good person does “the right thing at the right time for the right reason”

Virtues and Vices

- Two types of virtue
 - intellectual virtues: virtues associated with reasoning and truth
 - moral virtues: virtues of character (e.g., honesty)
- Moral virtues
 - developed by habitually performing right action
 - deep-seated character traits
 - disposition to act in a certain way *and* feel in a certain way

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Aristotle: Happiness derives from living a life of virtue.



Summary of Virtue Ethics

A right action is an action that a virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the same circumstances.

A virtuous person is a person who possesses and lives out the virtues.

The virtues are those character traits human beings need in order to flourish and be truly happy.

VICE

DEFICIENCY

VIRTUE

GOLDEN MEAN

VICE

EXCESS



VICE

DEFICIENCY

VIRTUE

GOLDEN MEAN

VICE

EXCESS



cowardice

courage

recklessness

VICE

DEFICIENCY

VIRTUE

GOLDEN MEAN

VICE

EXCESS



*failing to say things
that need to be said*

honesty

brutal honesty

Vices

- Vices are opposite of virtues
- Vice: a character trait that prevents a human being from flourishing or being truly happy
- Often, a virtue situated between two vices
 - Courage between cowardliness and rashness
 - Generosity between stinginess and prodigality

Case for Virtue Ethics

- It often makes more sense to focus on virtues than obligations, rights, or consequences
- Personal relationships can be morally relevant to decision making
- Our moral decision-making skills develop over time
- With this theory there are no irresolvable moral dilemmas
- Emotions play an important role in living a moral life

Case Against Virtue Ethics

- Reasonable people may disagree on character traits needed for human flourishing
- Cannot use virtue ethics to guide government policy
- Virtue ethics undermines attempts to hold people responsible for their bad actions

2.11 Comparing Ethical Theories

Objectivism vs. Relativism

- Objectivism: Morality has an existence outside the human mind
- Relativism: Morality is a human invention
- Divine command theory, ethical egoism, Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory, and virtue ethics examples of objectivism

Workable Ethical Theories

- We seek theories with these characteristics:
 - Based on the ethical point of view
 - Objective moral principles developed using logical reasoning based on facts and commonly held values
- Workable ethical theories
 - Kantianism
 - Act and rule utilitarianism
 - Social contract theory
 - Virtue ethics

Comparing Ethical Theories

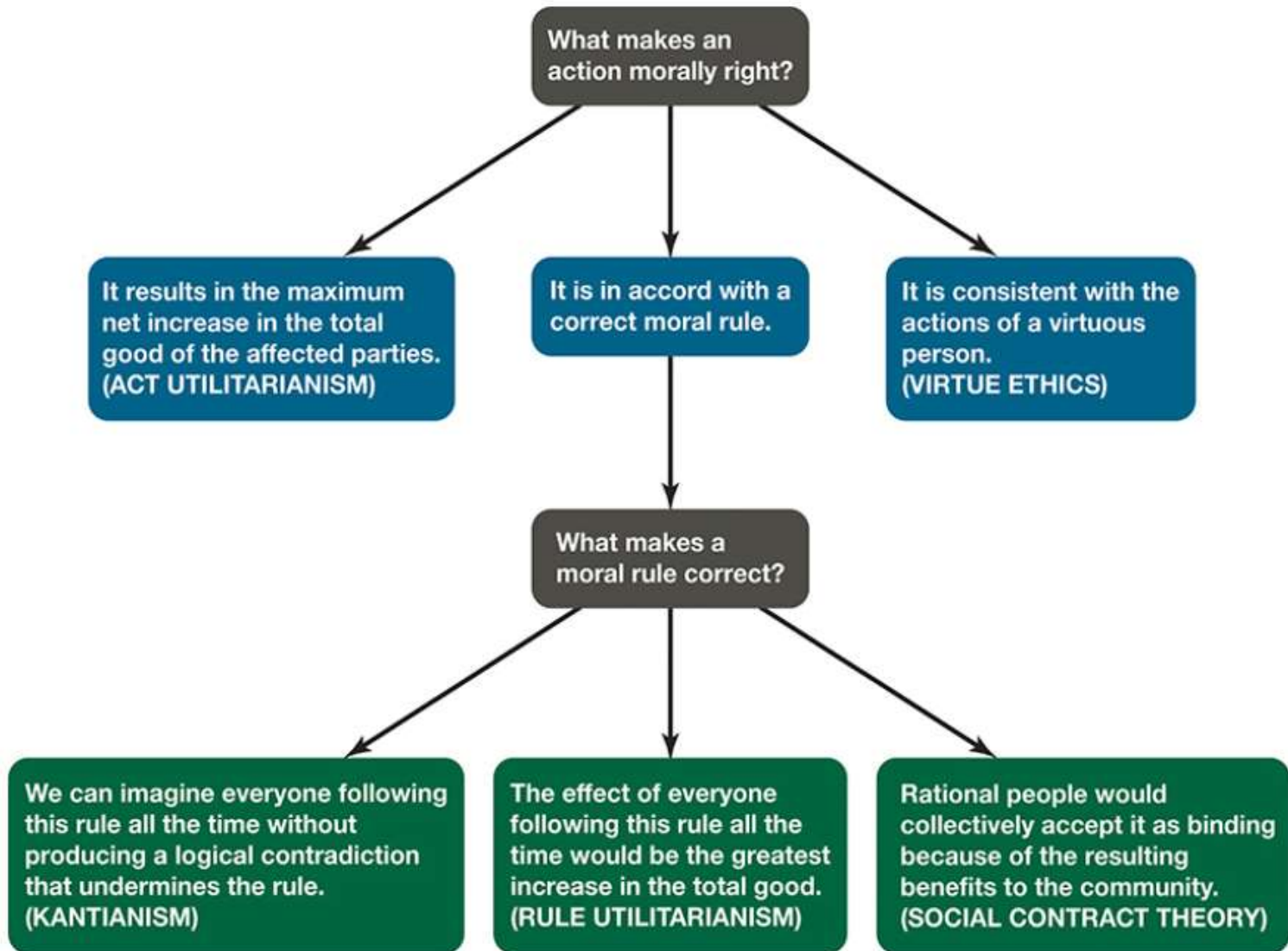


TABLE 1-4 Four common approaches to ethical decision making

Approach to dealing with moral issues	Principle
Virtue ethics approach	The ethical choice best reflects moral virtues in yourself and your community.
Utilitarian approach	The ethical choice produces the greatest excess of benefits over harm.
Fairness approach	The ethical choice treats everyone the same and shows no favoritism or discrimination.
Common good approach	The ethical choice advances the common good.

Source Line: Course Technology/Cengage Learning.

TABLE 1-4 Manager's checklist for establishing an ethical work environment

Question	Yes	No
Does your organization have a code of ethics?		
Do employees know how and to whom to report any infractions of the code of ethics?		
Do employees feel that they can report violations of the code of ethics safely and without fear of retaliation?		
Do employees feel that action will be taken against those who violate the code of ethics?		
Do senior managers set an example by communicating the code of ethics and using it in their own decision making?		
Do managers evaluate and provide feedback to employees on how they operate with respect to the values and principles in the code of ethics?		
Are employees aware of sanctions for breaching the code of ethics?		
Do employees use the code of ethics in their decision making?		

What trends have increased the likelihood of an unethical behavior?

- Globalization has created a much more complex work environment, making it more difficult to apply principles and codes of ethics consistently.
- Organizations may be tempted to resort to unethical behavior to maintain profits in today's more challenging and uncertain economic climate.
- It is not unusual for powerful, highly successful individuals to fail to act in morally appropriate ways as such people are often aggressive in striving for what they want and are used to having privileged access to information, people, and other resources.
- Furthermore, their success often inflates their belief that they have the ability and the right to manipulate the outcome of any situation.

Technology Trends that Influence Ethical Issues

Trend	Impact
Computing power doubles every 18 months.	More organizations depend on computer systems for critical operations and become more vulnerable to system failures.
Data storage costs rapidly decline.	The steep reduction in cost enables the collection and storage of Big Data. Organizations can easily maintain detailed databases on individuals. There are no limits on the data collected about you.
Data analysis advances	Companies can analyze vast quantities of data gathered on individuals to develop detailed profiles of individual behavior. Large-scale population surveillance is enabled.
Networking advances	The cost of making data accessible from anywhere falls exponentially. Access to data becomes more difficult to control.
Mobile devices proliferate.	Mobile devices may be tracked without user consent or knowledge. The always-on device becomes a tether.
Artificial intelligence (AI)	Increased reliance on various forms of AI in decision making substitutes data-driven calculations for human judgment.