

Paper 1  
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CS3043 Social Implications  
Ethical Theories and You

The formal introduction to ethical theories I received from this class did not change my personal ethical framework, but certainly gave me a better understanding of the technical definition of my beliefs and the intricacies of the theories I practice.

My primary identifier is my faith as a Christian. As a consequence, my moral and ethical compasses are built almost entirely on a foundation of Christianity and obedience to God. After only the first few readings I've been able to match my prior ethical practices to two major ethical theories. The first, and possibly most obvious is divine command theory. While it is considered unworkable for multiple reasons, the foundation of my faith demands that I obey God's commands unfailingly. I follow a train of logic common to many Christians where I see "the need for theological foundation [in order to avoid] nihilism and subjectivism [1]." However, divine command theory alone is not enough to apply to every ethical dilemma I've encountered. As the textbook discusses, one of the largest shortcomings of divine command theory is that "some moral problems are not addressed directly in scripture [2]." Here is where I found myself also following a tweaked version of rule utilitarianism. Ethical dilemmas are often not clearly laid out, and depending solely on scripture to determine the good decision in every situation is clearly impossible, but I have applied rule utilitarianism to those cases (only doing good actions because, if everyone else were to act similarly it would cause a net increase in happiness), under the "new" condition where I take into account the commands given by scripture. In this way, I can practice rule utilitarianism without allowing for the extreme situations that can arise from it, instead limiting my choices by the inherently good commands of God.

Divine command theory is a highly criticized ethical framework, and for good reason. As seen in [3], the concept of God's commands being inherently good implies either the existence of a universal standard of good that is beyond even God (which would be theologically catastrophic for many), or that the aspect of something being good is equivalent to it being "God-approved," degrading its meaning, and making "good" entirely arbitrary [4]. The aspect of ethics and morality that makes this criticism so interesting is faith. To a secular viewer, this argument is clearly an issue, and for good reason, but from the perspective of a Christian the possible ethical issues that arise from this "blind obedience" are satiated by one's faith that God is himself the concept good and by his nature could not give a morally wrong command. This is a subtle but important distinction, where something is in fact good if it is "God-approved," but the faith of believers claims that God is not fickle, and that he only chooses to deem "good" that which is actively for the betterment of everything, a sentiment that interestingly echoes rule utilitarianism on a cosmic level [5].

While my personal views and actions have not changed as a consequence of this course, my understanding of others' and my own frameworks have deepened far more than I thought they would, especially in such a short time. I've learned to rationally and critically analyze tenants of my beliefs that I've taken for granted and, improved my ability to defend my ethical and moral stances.

- [1] St. Olaf College, “What is Christian Ethics?,” [Online]. Available: <https://pages.stolaf.edu/ein/christian-ethics/what-is-christian-ethics/>. [Accessed: Oct. 27, 2020].
- [2] M. Quinn, *Ethics for the Information Age*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, NY: Pearson, 2016. [E-book] Available: Yuzu E-book.
- [3] B. Kilian, “Virtue Ethics for Christians,” in *CedarEthics Online*. Cedarville University Center for Bioethics, [online document], 2010. Available: Cedarville Digital Commons, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/301465482.pdf> [Accessed: Oct. 28, 2020].
- [4] M. Austin, “Divine Command Theory,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Eastern Kentucky University, [online document]. Available: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://iep.utm.edu/divine-c/#H7> [Accessed: Oct 28, 2020].
- [5] S. Nathanson, “Act and Rule Utilitarianism,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Northeastern University, [online document]. Available: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://iep.utm.edu/util-a-r/> [Accessed: Oct 28, 2020].