

# ETHICAL THEORIES APPLIED IN COMPUTING PROFESSION

(Theories and Applications)

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## Reflections:

1. Week 1: Fundamentals of Morals/Ethics/Legal issues for IT Profession
2. Week 2: Psychological Theories applied to control digital citizens in the virtual world)
3. Week 3 : Philosophical Theories (Ethics) applied to govern computer Professionals)

# Introduction

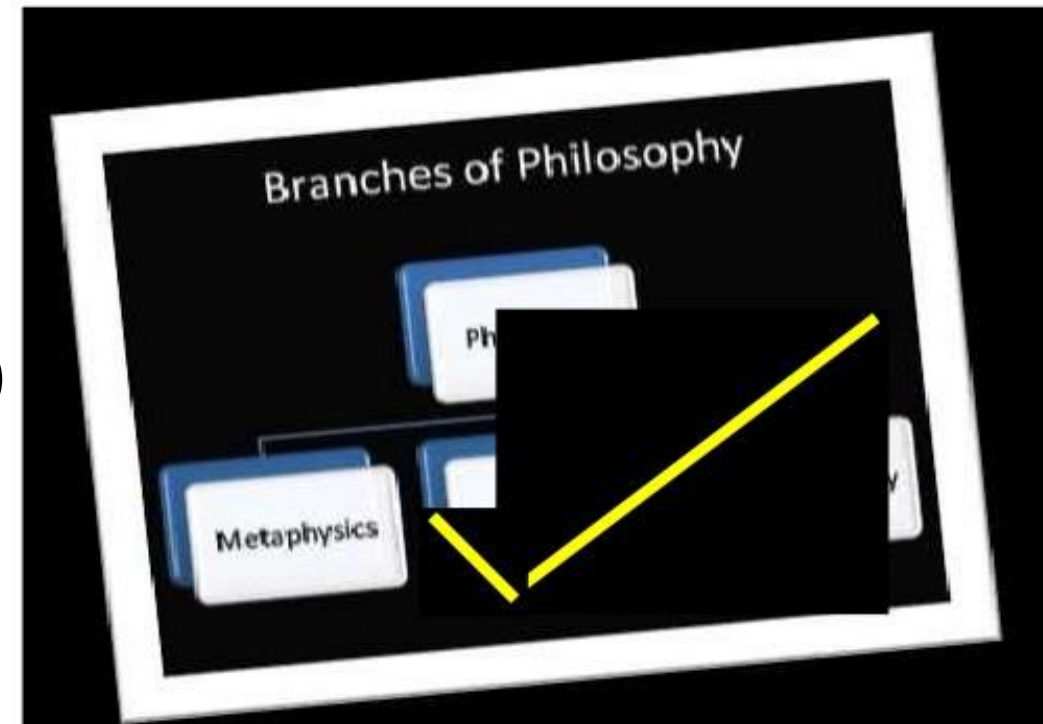
1. Relativism (Subjective Relativism AND Cultural Relativism)
2. Devine Command Theory
3. Virtue Ethics
4. Kantianism
5. Utilitarianism (ACT Utilitarianism AND Rule Utilitarianism)
6. Social Contract Theory

## Learning Philosophy:

Metaphysics: Abstract Concepts (Identity, Time etc)

**Ethics** (Moral principles to govern behavior)

Epistemology: (About knowledge, belief)



# 1. Relativism Theory

**Relativism** is the theory that there are no universal moral norms of right and wrong. Different individuals and groups of people can have completely opposite views of a moral problem. (Both can be right; both can be wrong).

## **Type 1: Subjective Relativism:**

Subjective relativism holds that each person decides right and wrong for himself or herself. This notion is captured in the popular expression “What’s right for you may not be right for me”. **Effect:** Because of its self-defeating nature, we reject subjective relativism as a workable ethical theory. This cannot be applied in the ICT profession.

## **Type 2: Cultural Relativism:**

Cultural relativism is the ethical theory that the meaning of “right” and “wrong” rests with a society’s actual moral guidelines. These guidelines vary from place to place and from time to time. It gives tradition more weight in ethical evaluations than facts and reason. **Effect:** Cultural relativism is not a powerful tool for conducting ethical evaluations persuasive to a diverse audience.

## 2. Divine Command Theory

**The Divine Command theory** is based on the idea that good actions are those that align with the will of God and bad actions are those contrary to the will of God. Since the holy book contains God's directions, we can use the holy book as moral decision-making guides. *E.g. God says we should revere our mothers and fathers, so revering our parents is good. God says do no lie or steal, so lying and stealing are bad.*

### The Case for Divine Theory

1. We owe obedience to our creator.
2. God is all-good and all-knowing
3. God is the ultimate authority

### The Case against the Devine Command Theory (Bible, Quran, Judaism)

1. There are many holy books and some of their teachings disagree.
2. It is unlikely that a multicultural society will adopt a religious-based morality.

# 3. Virtue Ethics

The **virtue ethics** approach to decision making focuses on how you should behave and think about relationships if you are concerned with your daily life in a community.

E.g of virtues: Chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, kindness, patience and humility.

## The Case for Virtue Ethics

1. It does not define a formula for ethical decision making, but suggests that when faced with a complex ethical dilemma, people do either what they are most comfortable doing or what they think a person they admire would do..
2. People are guided by their virtues to reach the “right” decision. A proponent of virtue ethics believes that a disposition/situation to do the right thing is effective than following a set of principles and rules.
3. Virtue ethics can be applied to the business world by equating the virtues of a good businessperson with those of a good person.

## The Case against Virtue Ethics

The definition of virtue cannot be worked out objectively; it depends on the circumstances—you work it out as you go. For example, **bravery** is a great virtue in many circumstances, but in others it may be foolish.

## 4. Kantianism (Immanuel Kant, German Philosopher)

**Kant** believed that people's actions ought to be guided by moral laws, and that these moral laws were universal. He held that in order to apply to all rational beings, any supreme principle of morality must itself be based on reason. Hence while many of the moral laws Kant describes can be found in the Bible, Kant's methodology allows these laws to be derived through a reasoning process. A Kantain is able to go beyond simply stating that an action is right or wrong by citing reason/chapter and verse to defend.

### The Case **for** Kantianism

1. Kantianism is rational.
2. Kantianism produces universal moral guidelines.
3. All persons are treated as moral equals.

### The Case **against** Kantianism

1. Sometimes no single rule fully characteristics an action.
2. There is no way to resolve a conflict between rules.
3. Kantianism allows no exceptions to moral laws.

## 5. Utilitarianism (Principle of Utility)

**“An action is right (or wrong) to the extent that it increases (or decreases) the total happiness of the affected parties.”** *(Majority Good/bad: How many will be affected / happy”)*

The English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill proposed a theory that is in sharp contrast to Kantianism. According to Bentham and Mill, **an action is good if it benefits someone; an action is bad if it harms someone**. Their ethical theory, called utilitarianism, is based upon the Principle of Utility, also called the Greatest Happiness Principle. The utilitarian approach to ethical decision making states that you should choose the action or policy that has the best overall consequences for all people who are directly or indirectly affected. The goal is to find the single greatest good by balancing the interests of all affected parties. We call utilitarianism a consequentialist theory, because the focus is on the consequence of an action.

**Type 1: Act Utilitarianism**

**Type 2: Rule Utilitarianism**

# 5. Utilitarianism (ACT & Rule Types)

## Type 1: Act Utilitarianism

**Act utilitarianism** is the ethical theory that an action is good if its net effect (over all affected beings) is to produce more happiness than unhappiness. It means, for example, that the environmental impact of decisions must often be included when performing the utilitarian calculus.

### The Case for Act Utilitarianism

1. It focuses on happiness
2. It is down-to-earth
3. It is comprehensive

### The Case against Act Utilitarianism

1. When performing the utilitarian calculus, it is not clear where to draw the line, yet where we draw the line can change the outcome of our evaluation.
2. It is not practical to put so much energy into every moral decision.
3. Act utilitarianism ignores our innate sense of duty.
4. Act utilitarianism is susceptible to the problem of moral luck.



# 5. Utilitarianism (ACT & Rule Types)

## Type 2: Rule Utilitarianism ( overlaps with Kant's theory on universal rule)

**Rule Utilitarianism** is the ethical theory that holds we ought to adopt those moral rules which, if followed by someone, will lead to the greatest increase in total happiness. Hence a Rule Utilitarian applies the principle of utility to moral rules, while an Act Utilitarianism applies the principle of utility to individual moral actions.

### The Case for Rule Utilitarianism

1. Performing the utilitarian calculus is simple.
2. Not every decision requires performing the utilitarian calculus
3. Exceptional situations do not overthrow moral rules.
4. Rules utilitarianism solves the problem of moral luck.
5. It appeals to a wide cross of society.

### The Case against Rule Utilitarianism

1. Utilitarianism forces us to use a single scale or measure to evaluate completely different kinds of consequences.
2. Utilitarianism ignores the problem of an unjust distribution of good consequences.

## 6. Social Contract Theory (Thomas Hobbes)

**Social Contract Theory** suggests that without rules and a means of enforcing them, people would not bother to create anything of value, because nobody could be sure of keeping what they created. There would be social anarchy. To avoid this state of affairs, which Hobbes calls the “state of nature”, rational people understand that cooperation is essential. However, cooperation is possible only when people agree to follow certain guidelines.

Hence moral rules are simply the rules that are necessary if we are to gain the benefits of social living. Hobbes argues that **everybody living in civilized society has implicitly agreed two things:**

- (1) The establishment of such a set of moral rules to govern relations among citizens
- (2) A government capable of enforcing these rules. He calls this arrangement social contract.

# 6. Social Contract Theory

**Example:** A government has a social contract with citizens to implement Decisions, policies on social systems, institutions, and environments that everyone depends on and that benefit all people. Examples include an effective education system, a safe and efficient transportation system, and accessible and affordable health care.

## **The Case **for** Social Contract Theory**

1. It is framed in the language of rights
2. It explains why rational people act out of self-interest in the absence of a common agreement.
3. It provides a clear analysis of some important moral issues regarding the relationship between people and government.

## **The Case **against** Social Contract Theory**

1. None of us signed the social contract.
2. Some actions can be characterized multiple ways.
3. Social contract theory does not explain how to solve a moral problem when the analysis reveals conflicting rights.
4. Social contract theory may be unjust to those people who are incapable of upholding their side of the contract.

# Summary: Ethics in Computing Profession

Ethics is a standard of behavior which tells us (IT professionals) how to act in different situations.

## Computer Ethics:

1. Is not a religion
2. Is not the feelings
3. Is not a law
4. Neither it follows any law (but could lead to a breach of law)
5. Is not a science
6. Ethics is not a collection of norms that a specific culture accepts

# Application: Ethical Principles for Computing Professionals

## Principle 1: Autonomy: (Relativism application)

Allow clients/subordinates the freedom to make a personal decision. E.g.

Presenting all technology solution *options to a client*, explaining risks in terminologies or language that a client/ employers/ other IT subordinates can understand. Make sure they understand and agree to all procedures before an act.

## Principle 2: Beneficence: (Virtue Ethics & Utilitarianism application)

An action that is done for the benefit of others. E.g. client who has had his system hacked at one time may want to refuse may refuse new system protection recommendation. Think about his future happiness (utilitarianism) and persuade. Don't get upset for rejecting your recommendations/options.

# Application: Ethical Principles for Computing Professionals

## Principle 3: Non-Maleficence: ( Kantianism application)

It means to “do no harm to an IT client/employer etc.” E.g. An IT professional should not provide ineffective software or system security solution to a client as these offer risk with no possibility of benefit and happiness. NB: Alert/Stop a users/client/employer from using IT Tools that is shown to be harmful.

## Principle 4: Justice: (Social Contract application)

Try to be as fair as possible when offering solutions to IT clients. Apply equality in your customer relationship (Treat persons equally irrespective of any discrimination-race, gender, belief, ignorance in ICT, IT guru etc).

**THANK YOU**