

Workable Ethical Theories based on Quinn's discussion in "Ethics for the Information Age"

|                       | Kantianism   | Act Utilitarianism  | Rule Utilitarianism   | Social Contract   |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Motivation            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ People should be guided by universal moral laws of good will and duty.</li> <li>○ Categorical Imperative (2nd Formulation): Treat yourself and others as an end in themselves, never as the means to an end.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An action is good if it benefits someone. Causes greatest benefit for the greatest amount of people.</li> <li>○ An action is bad if it harms someone. Minimizes harm to the most people.</li> <li>○ Produces happiness or prevents unhappiness for an individual or a community.</li> <li>○ Greatest Happiness Principle (74).</li> <li>○ Benefits and harms can be calculated by these factors: Intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, extent. Allows direct comparison of different actions to see if the benefits outweigh the harms.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ See Act Utilitarianism.</li> <li>○ Provides a set of rules, which when followed, lead to the greatest increase in total happiness.</li> <li>○ Individuals and groups choose to follow the rules because it produces the greatest good.</li> <li>○ Applies the Principle of Utility to individual actions and moral rules.</li> <li>○ Evaluates the consequences of an action.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Members have rights but no one is above the rules.</li> <li>○ We implicitly accept a social contract (rules) when we become part of a group (such as a country).</li> <li>○ Government can enforce the rules.</li> <li>○ Rawls's Principles of Justice (p. 85)</li> <li>○ Difference Principle: strives for the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members. (p. 85)</li> </ul> |
| Criteria are          | Based on rules derived by the reasoning process.   | Based on actions.   | Based on rules of a majority of the culture, religion, gov't.   | Based on rules of gov't.  |
| Focus audience is ... | the individual.  | everyone.   | everyone; majority of society.  | Individuals.  |
| Cases for             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It is rational.</li> <li>○ Produces universal moral guidelines.</li> <li>○ Treats everyone as moral equals.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comprehensive in evaluation of actions.</li> <li>○ Does not distinguish between individuals; works for everyone.</li> <li>○ Practical and easy to understand.</li> <li>○ Focuses on happiness</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Simpler to evaluate/calculate harms/benefits because it focuses on long term outcomes rather than individual actions.</li> <li>○ Rules are set, so not every action needs to be evaluated; consequences are already understood.</li> <li>○ Rules survive exceptional situations.</li> <li>○ Does not rely on moral luck.</li> <li>○ Appeals to the majority of a society.</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Based on rights</li> <li>○ Explains why people act in self-interest without common agreement.</li> <li>○ Provides clear analysis of certain citizen/gov't problems.</li> </ul>   |
| Cases against         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sometimes no rule adequately characterizes an action.</li> <li>○ Doesn't have a way to resolve a conflict between rules.</li> <li>○ Doesn't allow exceptions to moral laws.</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Unclear who to include in calculations; who are the moral beings involved in the decision.</li> <li>○ Calculations are too much work.</li> <li>○ Intent of the action is not considered; ignores our innate sense of duty.</li> <li>○ Hard to see where the lines are drawn.</li> <li>○ Doesn't handle the problem of moral luck.</li> <li>○ Individual rules work poorly in larger context/community.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ignores a potentially unjust distribution of good consequences (may ignore minority groups).</li> <li>○ Single scale does not apply in every situation.</li> <li>○ Some situations may be just, regardless of the rules.</li> <li>○ No objective measure of amount of happiness.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No one signed the contract.</li> <li>○ Some actions have multiple characterizations.</li> <li>○ Problems with conflicting rights.</li> <li>○ May unjustly treat people who cannot uphold the contract.</li> </ul>  |