

Ethical Theories and Approaches

From “A Framework for Making Ethical Decisions”, Bonde and Firenze (Brown)

1. Consequentialist
 - a. Utilitarian: maximize good and minimize bad
 - b. Egoistic: self-interested brand of utilitarianism
 - c. Common Good: community-minded brand of utilitarianism; “general will” of the people
2. Non-consequentialist
 - a. Duty-based: act in accordance with (universal) laws or rules
 - b. Rights: protect the ethical rights, dignity of people
 - c. Justice: act to promote fairness and equality
 - d. Divine Command: follow and respect God’s command and will
3. Agent-centered
 - a. Virtue: act as an ideal person would; ethics concern a person’s life more than actions
 - b. Feminist: care for the totality of human life, recognition of the marginalized

From *Ethics of Emerging Technologies*, Budinger and Budinger

- **Virtue (Aristotle)**: aspire to qualities such as courage, wisdom, loyalty, and fairness
- **Justice**: treat everyone equally without favoritism or bias
- **Rights (Locke)**: act to protect the rights and liberties of the individual
- **Duty (Kant)**: act in accordance with moral motives and universal law above all else
- **Utilitarianism**: good results maximize benefits and minimize harms, even if this may entail self-sacrifice and loss of autonomy
- **Rules (Hobbes)**: observe and follow the rules and laws established by society
- **Pragmatism**: rejection of the search for general ethical theories; maximum good by flexible and impartial consideration of the interests of everyone affected
- **Cultural Relativism**: concept that moral beliefs and principles are uniquely informed by individual cultures
- **Subjectivism**: morality is a matter of (individual) sentiment rather than fact
- **Pluralism**: notion that heterogeneous culture will produce heterogeneous morals and perspectives
- **Minimum Conception of Morality**: underlying moral concepts/constructs that unite different ethical theories and principles

Other concepts of interest

- **Prima Facie duty**: first intuitive notion of what one’s duty should be. Literally means “primarily appears”.
- **Autonomy**: principle referring to self-determination or self-rule. People have the right to make their own decisions.
- **Beneficence**: duty to act in such a way to benefit and protect others with minimal risk.
- **Non-maleficence**: principle describing the obligation to do no harm.

References

"A Framework for Making Ethical Decisions | Science and Technology Studies." [Online]. Available: <https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions>.

T. F. Budinger and M. D. Budinger, Ethics of Emerging Technologies: Scientific Facts and Moral Challenges, 1 edition. Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2006.