

## TYPES OF ETHICAL THEORIES

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An engineer with ethics is a person who is expected to process the moral integrity with right ethical values. Depending upon the ethics a person is intended to follow 4 theories were postulated by 4 different philosophers. These theories help to create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional and personal conduct of a person in his every day life.

Ethical theories : 

- Golden Mean Ethics
- Duty Based Ethics
- Right Based Ethics
- Utilitarian Ethics.

① Golden Mean Theory: The Golden Mean theory was proposed by Aristotle. According to this, the solution to a problem is found by analyzing the reason and the logic. A "Mean value of solution" which will be between the extremes of excess and deficiency. For eg, the solution to the problem of environment pollution is neither by avoiding industrialization and civilization nor by neglecting the environment completely. A mean solution that will work towards controlling the pollution and protecting the environment will also help.

Problem in application: The application of this theory varies from person to another with their powers of reasoning and the difficulty in applying the theory to ethical problems.

What is golden mean? The golden mean can be understood as the virtue of reaching a proper balance between extremes in conduct, emotion, desire and attitude. The most important virtue is practical wisdom; it

morally good judgement which is  
the mean for all other virtues.

② Rights Based Ethical Theory: The Rights Based ethical theory was proposed by John Locke. According to the theory, the solution to a problem is by realizing the theory. Every person has a right to live. Live and let live is the philosophy behind this theory. The rights of a person towards life, health, liberty, possessions etc. are taken care of under this theory. For eg, any action in terms of capital punishment, Jail, Income taxes and medical charges etc come under this category.

Problem in application: One rights of a person may conflict with rights of the other. Rights based ethics is the recognition of human dignity at its most basic form. The ethics refer to the basic human rights whether they are positive or negative. Everyone has a right to live, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Any action done by a person that would prevent a fellow being from living a good and happy life is considered immoral or unethical.

③ Duty Based Ethical Theory: The duty-based ethical theory was proposed by Immanuel Kant. According to the theory, every person has a duty to follow which is accepted universally without any exceptions. An example of this can be expecting all to be honest, kind, generous and peaceful.

Problem in application: The universal application of this theory can be misleading.



Kant observed that everyone is bound to follow some moral laws. It is the choice we make to be morally sound though we have chances to do anything. This theory can also be called as Deontological theory or Absolutist theory. According to this, it is our duty to obey the categorical imperative rules. To have good

will, is to perform one's duty and for no other reason. The categorical imperative law states that "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law". The main criteria are

- (1) Act of showing respect to persons for the principles of duty.
- (2) Application of moral principles in an universal manner.
- (3) Expression of certain actions in terms of hypothetical and moral imperatives for duty ethics.

The 4 virtues under this law are

- (1) Prudence
- (2) Temperance
- (3) Fortitude
- (4) Justice

A free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same. We are free only when we act in accordance with our own best natures, while we are slaves under the rule of our passions and wills. There should be a universally valid will, under which everyone can be free.

④ Utilitarian Ethics - The Utilitarian Ethics was proposed by John Stuart. According to this theory, the happiness or pleasure of a greatest no. of people

in the society is considered as the greatest good. According to this philosophy, an action is morally right if its consequences lead to happiness of people and wrong if they lead to their unhappiness. An example of this can be unequal of the reservation system in education and government jobs, which can really benefit the talented. But this can have an impact on the rights of the minorities.

Problem of Application: Qualification of the benefits can be difficult.

It weighs the total good against total bad and then compares the results to similar values of the alternative actions or rules. The types are - Act Utilitarianism: focuses on each situation and the alternative actions possible in the situation. In accordance with this theory, the good done is only considered but not the way how it is done.

For eg, looting the riches to feed the poor, can satisfy poor people but looting is not an act of morality.

Rule Utilitarianism: states that "Right actions are those required by rules that produce the higher level of good for most people". We need to consider a set of rules, where they interact with each other. This was developed to overcome act of justifying wrong-doing in Act Utilitarianism. Engineers must follow it even when an exception might happen to be beneficial.

For previous eg, we should seek help of law and order to prove guilt of riches and let see that the poor get benefitted.