The 2 models I have chosen are the utilitarian approach and the rights approach.

## The Utilitarian Approach

The utilitarian approach is built on the idea that the ethical value of an action depends on its consequences. The main question it asks is: Which option will bring the most benefits and the least harm? The focus is on the collective good: an action is considered justified if it maximizes overall well-being, even if some individuals are negatively affected (Tardi, 2025). This makes utilitarianism very practical in situations where resources are limited or trade-offs must be made, such as in healthcare or environmental policy.

## The Rights Approach

The rights approach starts from the principle that individuals have inherent moral rights. For example, the right to privacy, freedom, and human dignity. The central question is: What rights do the people involved have, and which action respects those rights best? According to this model, certain actions are simply unethical if they violate basic rights, no matter how much benefit they could create for others. This approach is often used in contexts such as human rights law, workplace ethics, and especially data privacy.

## Similarities and Differences

Both models are meant to guide ethical decision-making when situations are complex. They push us to think things through in a structured way instead of just acting on intuition or convenience. In that sense, they both aim to improve moral reasoning.

The big difference is in their focus. Utilitarianism looks mainly at outcomes: a decision is good if it maximizes happiness or reduces harm. The rights approach, on the other hand, looks at principles: even if breaking a rule could bring better results for the majority, it is still considered wrong if it violates an individual’s rights (Medium, 2024).

Because of this, the two models can lead to very different conclusions. For example, using large-scale surveillance to improve public safety might make sense from a utilitarian point of view, but the rights approach would likely reject it because of the threat it poses to personal privacy.

## Personal Preference

Picking one of these models is not easy. The utilitarian approach is attractive because it offers a clear, outcome-based way to weigh pros and cons and then choose what benefits the most people. At the same time, the rights approach strongly emphasizes respect for individuals, which feels crucial in a world where people can easily be overlooked.

If I had to choose, I would lean toward the utilitarian approach, because it fits the way I naturally make decisions. When I am uncertain, I often create a list of pros and cons, weighing benefits against harms before reaching a conclusion. This approach feels practical and realistic, especially when decisions affect many people. At the same time, I realize that utilitarianism can sometimes overlook individual rights, which is why I still see value in the rights approach as a safeguard. Overall, however, utilitarian reasoning seems closer to my personal way of evaluating choices.

## Relevance for Data Ethics

When it comes to data ethics, both models can be applied. The utilitarian approach can justify data projects that aim to bring clear benefits to society, such as improving public health, optimizing resources, or making services more efficient. For example, analysing mobility data to manage traffic or predict disease outbreaks could be seen as beneficial from this perspective.

However, data ethics often revolves around personal information and privacy, which link directly to individual rights (de Rooij, 2020). This makes the rights approach especially relevant, because it stresses consent, transparency, and the protection of personal data. Without such a focus, utilitarian reasoning could easily justify intrusive practices that damage trust and reduce autonomy.

For that reason, the rights approach seems more suitable for data ethics. It helps make sure that technological progress stays in line with core values and that individual dignity is respected, even when organizations aim for broader societal gains.

# Literature

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