

# MORAL PHILOSOPHY

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Moral philosophy is the branch of philosophy that contemplates what is right and wrong. It explores the nature of morality and examines how people should live their lives in relation to others.

Moral philosophy has three branches.

One branch, meta-ethics , investigates big picture questions such as, “What is morality?” “What is justice?” “Is there truth?” and “How can I justify my beliefs as better than conflicting beliefs held by others?”

Another branch of moral philosophy is normative ethics . It answers the question of what we *ought* to do.

Normative ethics focuses on providing a framework for deciding what is right and wrong. Three common frameworks are deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics.

The last branch is applied ethics . It addresses specific, practical issues of moral importance such as war and capital punishment. Applied ethics also tackles specific moral challenges that people face daily, such as whether they should lie to help a friend or co-worker.

So, whether our moral focus is big picture questions, a practical framework, or applied to specific dilemmas, moral philosophy can provide the tools we need to examine and live an ethical life.

# UTILITARIANISM

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Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that determines right from wrong by focusing on outcomes. It is a form of consequentialism.

Utilitarianism holds that the most ethical choice is the one that will produce the greatest good for the greatest number. It is the only moral framework that can be used to justify military force or war. It is also the most common approach to moral reasoning used in business because of the way in which it accounts for costs and benefits.

However, because we cannot predict the future, it's difficult to know with certainty whether the consequences of our actions will be good or bad. This is one of the limitations of utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism also has trouble accounting for values such as justice and individual rights. For example, assume a hospital has four people whose lives depend upon receiving organ transplants: a heart, lungs, a kidney, and a liver. If a healthy person wanders into the hospital, his organs could be harvested to save four lives at the expense of one life. This would arguably produce the greatest good for the greatest number. But few would consider it an acceptable course of action, let alone the most ethical one.



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So, although utilitarianism is arguably the most reason-based approach to determining right and wrong, it has obvious limitations.

# Kantian Ethics

- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was an opponent of utilitarianism.  
Leading 20<sup>th</sup> century proponent of Kantianism:

## A. Basic Summary

- a. Kant believed that certain types of actions (including murder, theft, and lying) were absolutely prohibited, even in cases where the action would bring about more happiness than the alternative.
- b. 2 questions to act:
  - i. Can I rationally will that *everyone* act as I propose to act?
    1. If the answer is no, then we must not perform the action.
  - ii. Does my action respect the goals of human beings rather than merely using them for my own purposes?
    1. Again, if the answer is no, then we must not perform the action.

## B. Deontological moral theory

- according to these theories, *the rightness or wrongness of actions does not depend on their consequences* but on whether they fulfill our duty.

## C. The Categorical Imperative

- determines what our moral duties are.
1. **Morality and imperatives:** *What does it mean for one's duty to be determined by the categorical imperative?*
    - a. **What is an imperative?**
      - i. An imperative *is a command*. So, "Pay your taxes!"
    - b. **Hypothetical Imperatives:** *command conditionally on your having a relevant desire.*
      - i. "If you want to go to medical school, study biology in college."

## Kantian Ethics

### Deontology

- Duty as the foundation of morality
- Kant — provides a justification for morality and views morally repugnant behaviour as a fallacy in logic
- A posteriori considerations: inability to create laws that apply to everyone or necessity
- only offer judgments on speculative, situation-specific issues
- Moral drive: the desire to do what is right results in duty compliance.
- The shopkeeper's amorality of inclination

### The Categorical Imperative

- Moral obligations are unambiguous, not speculative.
- Their satisfaction is not dependent on desires.
- caused by a conflict between the willing and the conception

The Categorical Imperative is a set of maxims that describe how particular tasks ought to be generated:

- The rule of law
- People (means and ends)
- Self-rule (We are all legislators)
- Kingdom of Ends (essentially the culmination of above 3)

### Autonomy vs. Heteronomy

- The autonomous will is free and only deviates from its own norms. Rationality versus inclination or desire.

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# KANTIANISM VERSUS UTILITARIANISM

## KANTIANISM

A moral philosophy introduced by Immanuel Kant that emphasizes that morality of an action/decision is not determined by its consequences but by the motivation of the doer

Postulated by Immanuel Kant

A deontological theory

Action should be motivated by goodwill and duty and the morality of an action is not measured by its consequences

## UTILITARIANISM

A moral philosophy introduced by Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick, etc. that emphasizes that morality of an action/decision as determined by its consequences

Postulated by Jeremy Bentham, John Sturt Mill, Henry Sidgwick, et al.

A teleological theory

An action is considered moral and good if it results in providing greater happiness for others, regardless of its intention