PhD Reading List – Recommended by Dr. Sharon Stoll – April 21, 2023

208-885-2103 [stoll@uidaho.edu](mailto:stoll@uidaho.edu)

Fox, R. M. & DeMarco, J. (2000). *Moral reasoning: A philosophical approach.* San Diego, CA: Harcourt College Publishing.

1. Morality refers to a complex system of beliefs, practices, and values that are aimed at helping individuals and societies lead fulfilling lives.
2. Philosophers have long been interested in exploring the nature of morality and developing ethical theories that provide a framework for understanding moral behavior.
3. There are many different ethical theories, including:
   * **Consequentialism** is a moral theory that judges the worthiness of an action based on its outcomes or consequences.
     + **Clarity**: Consequentialism provides a clear and straightforward approach to ethics by focusing on the consequences of actions rather than on abstract principles or rules.
     + **Flexibility**: Consequentialism is a flexible approach that can accommodate a wide range of situations and contexts
     + **Empirical support**: There is some empirical support for consequentialism, with research indicating that people tend to make moral judgments based on the outcomes of actions.
     + **Pragmatism**: Consequentialism can be a practical approach to ethics, as it encourages individuals to consider the real-world consequences of their actions and the actions of others.
     + The problem of measurement: Consequentialism relies on being able to accurately measure the outcomes of different actions, which can be difficult or even impossible in some cases.
     + The problem of distribution: Consequentialism does not provide clear guidance on how to distribute benefits and harms across individuals or groups, which can lead to conflict and inequality.
     + The problem of knowledge: Consequentialism requires knowledge about the future consequences of an action, which may not always be available or accurate.
     + The problem of impartiality: Consequentialism can be seen as overly impartial or indifferent to the circumstances and values of individuals or communities, leading to criticisms of moral relativism or lack of concern for justice.
   * **Deontology** is the moral theory that actions should be based on duty and rights, rather than consequences or personal gain. Deontology is a moral theory that prescribes actions or duties based on the inherent nature of actions themselves, regardless of their consequences.
     + Emphasizes the intrinsic value of individual rights and dignity, which is important for ethical decision-making.
     + Provides clarity and predictability in moral decision-making because it focuses on rules that are applicable to all situations.
     + Prioritizes the importance of moral duties and responsibilities, which can help to reinforce social norms and promote ethical behavior.
     + Deontological principles can sometimes conflict with each other, creating ethical dilemmas from which there is no clear solution. For instance, the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence could be in conflict in certain medical situations.
     + Deontology does not consider the consequences of actions, which can lead to moral decisions that are detrimental to the greater good.
     + It can be too inflexible in its moral duties, which can create situations where it is impossible to act morally without breaking the rules.
   * **Virtue ethics** is an ethical theory that emphasizes the development of moral character and virtues for ethical decision-making rather than following rules or utilitarian outcomes.
     + **Emphasis on character**: One of the key strengths of virtue ethics is that it focuses on the character of the moral agent rather than the actions. This approach emphasizes the importance of cultivating good character rather than following rules. Virtue ethics is concerned with promoting virtuous behavior rather than simply following a set of rules.
     + **Flexibility**: Virtue ethics is flexible in that it is not bound by rigid rules or principles. Virtue ethics recognizes that moral situations are complex and require nuanced responses. Rather than relying on pre-determined rules, virtue ethics allows individuals to use their judgment and insight in making moral decisions.
     + **Emphasis on the individual**: Virtue ethics recognizes the importance of individual differences and acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to morality. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of individual growth and development to become a virtuous person.
     + **Lack of guidance:** One of the key weaknesses of virtue ethics is that it may not provide clear guidance in moral decision-making. Since it emphasizes character traits rather than rules, there may be some uncertainty on how to apply virtue ethics in specific situations. This can lead to inconsistency in moral decision-making.
     + **Subjectivity**: The subjectivity of virtue ethics can also be a weakness. Because virtue ethics is based on the traits and character of the individual, it is difficult to determine which virtues are most important or how to balance them in specific situations. Additionally, different people may have different opinions on what constitutes a virtuous character.
     + **Lack of universal principles**: Virtue ethics do not provide universal principles that can be applied to all cultures or situations. This can lead to cultural relativism, where different virtues are valued differently in different cultures. It is also difficult to apply virtue ethics on a global scale.
   * **Care ethics** emphasizes relationships and interconnectedness, prioritizing compassion over individual rights and justice. It provides an alternative way of understanding moral reasoning that values empathy and compassion, is inclusive and attentive to contextual factors. The highly contextual dependent nature of care ethics, the limited emphasis on justice, and the potential for confusion or contradiction may weaken the practical applicability of this approach to moral reasoning.
     + **Emphasis on empathy and compassion** – Care ethics highlight the importance of empathy and compassion in moral reasoning. It recognizes that human beings are interdependent and that we have a responsibility to care for one another.
     + **Attention to Contextual Factors** – Care ethics recognizes that moral decisions are strongly influenced by contextual factors such as social and cultural mores, and interpersonal relationships. It encourages individuals to consider these contextual factors when making moral decisions.
     + **Inclusiveness –** Care ethics promote inclusiveness by recognizing the value of diverse perspectives, experiences, and relationships. This helps to promote a more egalitarian society, which is receptive to a variety of different viewpoints.
     + **Relativity** – One weakness of care ethics is that it is highly contextually dependent. This means that moral decisions vary depending on the situation and as such, may lead to moral relativism. There is a danger that care ethical reasoning could lead to confusion or contradiction in terms of what is ethically acceptable or not, depending on the context.
     + **Limited Emphasis on Justice** – Critics argue that care ethics does not give sufficient attention to the issue of justice. Justice is often viewed as a core value in contemporary moral discourse, and some scholars believe that care ethics does not provide adequate attention to the wider societal structures that can adversely affect human flourishing.
     + **Unhelpful for dilemma situations** –Care ethics provides guidance to complex moral situations, but it can be unhelpful when it comes to situations that require trade-off decisions to provide ethical values to be maximized.

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|  | **Consequentialism** | **Deontology** | **Virtue Ethics** | **Care Ethics** |
| **Strengths** | Solid consequences  Wide range of contexts.  Some empirical support  Practical real-world | Emphasizes individual rights.  Emphasizes responsibilities.  Provides predictable moral decision making.  Supports social norms | Emphasis on character  Judgment and insight based.  Unique individual based. | Focuses on compassion over rights and judgment.  Contextual at the core  Inclusive and egalitarian |
| **Weaknesses** | Hard to measure.  Hard to generalize.  Hard to predict.  Relativistic. | Inability to account for moral conflicts  Lacks consideration for consequences, and its inflexibility. | Lack of guidance  Subjective ambiguity  Lacks universal principles.  Cultural relativism | Relative to “care” and “compassion”  Limited emphasis on justice  Not nuanced enough for dilemmas |

1. Moral reasoning involves the process of determining which ethical theory is most appropriate for a particular scenario and then applying that theory to come up with a moral judgment.
2. Ethical decision-making can be influenced by a variety of factors such as cultural values, personal beliefs and biases, and social pressures.
3. To make well-reasoned ethical decisions, individuals must become familiar with different ethical theories and learn to critically analyze moral arguments.
4. Moral reasoning is an important skill that can be developed through education and practice. It can help individuals navigate complex moral dilemmas and make more informed ethical decisions.
5. Finally, while there is no one-size-fits-all approach to moral reasoning, developing a strong moral compass and a commitment to ethical behavior can help individuals lead more fulfilling and meaningful lives.