

What is Ethics?



Three branches of ethics

Meta Ethics

The study of ethical language and concepts. Before we can decide what constitutes good/bad behaviour we must define terms such as good/ bad etc.

Normative Ethics

What practically constitutes morality? Aims to put forward a method by which the right moral action can be discovered, but MANY conflicting methods.

Applied Ethics

Employing moral theories to make decisions about a real issue, e.g. abortion.

Absolutist



a moral judgement that relies upon a fixed truth. No regard for consequences. Therefore stealing is always wrong.

Relativist



considers specific situations/circumstances. There are no fixed rules.

Subjectivist



judgements are based on personal opinion not on any fixed rules.

Objectivist



Judgements are made on an impartial absolute fixed value system.

Teleological



focused on the end result of the action.

Deontological



focused on the intention, rather than the outcome

Teleological vs Deontological decision making

<https://www.mytutor.co.uk/answers/25753/A-Level/Philosophy/What-is-the-difference-between-deontological-and-teleological-ethics-systems/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz2huupsgM>

There is a runaway trolley (train) barreling down the railway tracks. Ahead, on the tracks, there are five people tied up and unable to move. The trolley is headed straight for them. You are standing some distance off in the train yard, next to a lever. If you pull this lever, the trolley will switch to a different set of tracks. However, you notice that there is one person on the side track. You have two options: (1) Do nothing, and the trolley kills the five people on the main track. (2) Pull the lever, diverting the trolley onto the side track where it will kill one person. Which is the correct choice?

You are an inmate in a concentration camp. A sadistic guard is about to hang your son who tried to escape and wants you to pull the chair from underneath him. He says that if you don't he will not only kill your son but some other innocent inmate as well. You don't have any doubt that he means what he says. What should you do?

A young mother recently lost her job and cannot afford to buy nappies and formula for her baby. The local shop has no CCTV cameras and no security guard on the door. Should she steal the things she needs for her young baby?

Teleological ethics:
Utilitarianism

Probably the most famous teleological ethical theory.

British in origin.

Two main 'groups'.

- Theological Utilitarians: John Gay and William Paley
- Classical Utilitarians: Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Utilitarianism is **A posteriori** - Based on knowledge gained through experience. Contrast this to **A priori**- knowledge gained through logic.

It takes an **empirical** approach to ethics. Empirical knowledge is gained through our senses.

It is **teleological**. Telos = “purpose” or “end”.

For a teleological thinker the end will justify the means. The rightness of an action is decided by the end result of the action.

Basic Utilitarianism

Goodness and Rightness based on human experience.

Hence it is a posteriori and empirical.

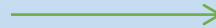
Disagreement in the details is what has lead to the different branches of Utilitarianism.

What is Good?
What is Right?

Good



That which produces
pleasure, happiness,
contentment or
welfare.



Right



That which maximises
one of these things
(happiness, pleasure
etc.)

Principle of Utility- an introduction.

Principle of Utility



The Utilitarian maxim that seeks “**the greatest good for the greatest number**”.

Maxim: moral principle which demands practical application.

**The Principle of Utility- the method
for maximising good.**