

# **Ethical Approaches:**

An Overview of (1) Consequential,  
(2) Nonconsequential, and (3) Virtue Ethics  
Theories

# **What is Ethics?**

Ethics is the study of those values that relate to our moral conduct, including questions of good and evil, right and wrong, and moral responsibility.

## **Consequentialist Theories:**

- Consequentialist theories claim that the morality of an action depends only on its consequences.
- It only considers the result of actions and not principles or rules in determining morality.

## **Types of Consequentialist Theories:**

-Ethical Egoism argues that each person should act in his/her own self-interest.

Act Utilitarianism argues that each person should act in a way that produces the greatest happiness for everyone.

-Rule Utilitarianism argues that each person should follow rules that tend to produce the greatest happiness for everyone.

## **Weaknesses of Consequentialist Theories:**

- Requires person to predict the future and all possible outcomes.
- Can easily be used to justify questionable actions (the ends justifies the means).

## **Nonconsequentialist Theories:**

Nonconsequentialist theories claim that the morality of an action depends on principles or other factors that are not related to consequences.

## Types of Nonconsequentialist Theories

-Divine command theory argues that we should obey the laws of God.

-Kant's Categorical Imperative states that we should always act in a way that is based on reason, duty, and would be considered ethical if everyone acted in the exact same way. Also, people should be treated as an end and not as a means.

## **Weaknesses of Nonconsequentialist Theory**

- Divine Command requires a high degree of interpretation skills.**
- Can be rigid and ignore outcomes**

**Question: What might prove a problem in a country so diverse as the U.S. with regards to Nonconsequentialist theories?**

***When you are ready you can check your response on the next slide.***



## **Expert Response:**

Question: What might prove a problem in a country so diverse as the U.S. with regards to Nonconsequentialist theories?

***Expert response:*** A variety of religions makes standards hard to develop for all.

## **Virtue Ethics Theoretical Approach:**

Virtue ethics seeks to identify character traits of a moral person and develop those with the idea that the virtuous person will act in a virtuous manner. It does not look to principles or consequences.

Virtue ethics was developed among the ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and the Chinese teacher and philosopher Confucius.

Virtue ethics enjoys modern support as an approach that avoids many of the problems with Consequential and Nonconsequential ethical theories.

# Weaknesses of Virtue Theory

- Difficulty in determining just which characteristics are virtues
- Justification for respecting a virtue usually brings one back to either consequences or principles.
- Difficulty in applying to specific situations

# Conclusion

**What might you conclude from this?**

*When you are ready, check the next slide for the correct responses.*

## **Conclusion:**

**What might you conclude from this?**

Expert response:

- One theory or approach is not enough to cover all possible choices.
- Theories can be synthesized to fit one's philosophy of life.
- One approach or theory's weakness is another's strength.