

ETHICS THEORIES CHEAT SHEET

Principles in Western Philosophy & Ethics

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PERENNIAL DUTIES	DIVINE COMMAND	FAIRNESS	KANT	RIGHTS & LIBERTARIANISM
<p>CLASS Deontology</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Tradition</p> <p>RULES FOR ACTION A set of moral directives seems to recur through historical times and places, and in diverse religious, social and political contexts. This durability can be taken to legitimize the guidelines. While no single list perfectly contains the recurring imperatives, typically there are: Duties to self: • Preservation • Develop my own talents • Fidelity/Integrity (Be true to myself) Duties to others: • Honesty (Be true to others) • Beneficence (Help others as reasonably possible) • Reparation (Repair harm done to others) • Gratitude</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Because ethical legitimacy stands on widespread historical acceptance of the moral rules, the guidelines are familiar, commonly employed, and easily applied to experience. But, multiple duties may yield contradictory imperatives. For example, a student may have money to buy a new computer (develop own talents) or donate to a scholarship fund (beneficence), but not both. No formula has been discovered to</p>	<p>CLASS Deontology</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Religious faith</p> <p>RULES FOR ACTION Follow the command of God (or Gods in the case of polytheism, as in ancient Greece).</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Divine sanction fortifies confidence in moral regulation, but difficulties remain in decoding how the regulation should be applied on the human level, as exemplified by conflicting interpretations of religious texts, and by the story of Job in the <i>Bible</i>.</p>	<p>CLASS Deontology</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Equality</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION (ARISTOTLE VERSION) Treat people identically unless they differ in ways relevant to the situation. Differences between people that are relevant should yield proportionately unequal treatment. (Treat equals equally, and unequals unequally.)</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Aristotelian fairness yields objectively correct responses to dilemmas. But, it can be difficult to define the “equal” and “unequal” in practice, especially in terms of what counts as relevant to a situation. For example, a five foot woman and a six foot man each pay the same price for an airplane ticket. Should they receive the same legroom?</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION (JOHN RAWLS VERSION) Decide without regard for how your conclusion affects you personally. The theory can be presented as a thought experiment in which deciders know nothing about themselves (age, education, preferences, and so on) and after making a judgement, those qualities are assigned to them randomly. So, with respect to the airplane ticket and legroom, deciders must imagine that their height will be assigned by lottery <i>after</i> pronouncing their decision.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS An effective strategy in some situations. For example, when sharing a cookie between two friends, one breaks it in half and the other chooses the side: the person breaking the cookie operates from behind the veil of ignorance in that they don’t know how they will be affected by their own portioning. But, in many situations it’s nearly impossible for deciders to blindfold themselves to their own reality within the decision being made.</p>	<p>CLASS Deontology</p> <p>GUIDING VALUES Rationality, Dignity</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION (RATIONALITY VERSION) Actions must be universalizable, meaning that it is possible to rationally conceive of everyone taking the action all the time. Lying, for example, cannot be universalized because if everyone lied all the time, no one would take anything seriously, so no one could successfully lie. Attempting to lie therefore contradicts itself. Restated, lying cannot make sense because universalizing the practice doesn’t make everything false, instead, it creates a reality like an adventure movie which is neither honest nor dishonest: it’s not true, but it’s also not misleading, just entertaining.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Powerfully objective, but practically torturous: imagine never lying about anything, ever.</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION (DIGNITY VERSION) Treat others as ends in themselves, and never only as means. Because others’ independent life projects must be respected, treating them as tools or instruments serving my own projects becomes inadmissible. The difference can be understood in the distinction between collaboration and exploitation: the first treats others as ends in themselves, the second treats them as tools for use.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS The ideal of universal dignity as inherent to human being is inspiring in the abstract, but does a remorseless murderer deserve to be treated as dignified? More practically, if humans may not be treated as mere instruments, what does that mean for our interactions with cashiers?</p>	<p>CLASS Deontology</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Freedom</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION Do what you want, up to the point where you interfere with others doing the same. Libertarian models extend freedom expressions from our minds and bodies, to our possessions and the fruits of our labors. In every case, freedom means applying rules to yourself, and obeying them.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Freedom maximization empowers individual experience: we are liberated to choose our own identities and destinies. But, the theory does little to resolve conflicts between individuals or support collective wellbeing. Zoning laws, for example, conflict with libertarian thought.</p>

UTILITARIANISM	ALTRUISM	EGOISM & ENLIGHTENED EGOISM	VIRTUE
<p>CLASS Consequentialist</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Happiness</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION Bring the greatest good and happiness to the greatest number. Total wellbeing is calculated by summing the condition of every member of society. Then, those actions raising the happiness count – or diminishing overall suffering – are implemented. Happiness can be defined hedonically (Bentham, physical pleasures), or idealistically (Mill, intellectual pleasures). In both cases, the happiness calculation must account for everyone, as far into the future as the effects of an action may be reasonably projected.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Overall wellbeing and the collective welfare is attractive in the abstract, but balances against injustices to flesh and blood individuals: if a fatal disease can be cured with a lethal experiment on a human, and there are no volunteers, a pure utilitarian will coerce participation. Another drawback is the difficulty in accurately calculating happiness in a world of diverse people with unpredictable futures.</p>	<p>CLASS Consequentialist</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Happiness</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION Bring the greatest good and happiness to the greatest number, not including the actor. Total wellbeing is calculated by summing the condition of every member of society except the person doing the calculating. Then, those actions raising the happiness count – or diminishing overall suffering – are implemented. Happiness can be defined hedonically (Bentham, physical pleasures), or idealistically (Mill, intellectual pleasures). In both cases, the happiness calculation must account for everyone except the actor, and the calculating must stretch as far into the future as the action’s effects may be reasonably projected.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Selflessly seeking collective wellbeing sounds noble, but is altruism based on generosity, or is it disguised self-abnegation?</p>	<p>CLASS Consequentialist</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Happiness</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION Bring the greatest good and happiness to me. Happiness can be defined hedonically (Bentham, physical pleasures), or idealistically (Mill, intellectual pleasures). Some egoists view the ethics as an inescapable psychological reality: we are all out for ourselves whether we admit it or not. Others support egoism as a rational choice, especially those promoting Enlightened Egoism, the view that acting to benefit others is desirable as an efficient strategy for self-service. More, the best way to bring happiness to others may be to seek it for oneself (Adam Smith, invisible hand).</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS No one knows my own happiness better than I do, so it makes sense that I hold the responsibility to seek it. Also, if the invisible hand idea is persuasive, then enlightened egoism becomes preferable to utilitarianism and altruism by default. But, egoism requires that others, even those closest to us, be categorized as unworthy of independent moral consideration.</p>	<p>CLASS Virtue</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Good living (<i>Eudaimonia</i>)</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION As opposed to deontological and consequentialist theories which attempt to form good rules for action, virtue ethics attempts to form good people, and then trust that they will act civically in a complex world. Virtue is a skill, one that is acquired intellectually through study, and also practically as part of youthful development in social institutions: families, schools, churches, the military, workplaces, sports teams, civic associations. As an example of virtue happening, a college student may attend an ethics lecture in the afternoon, and in the evening apply the lessons while participating in a water polo competition where the virtue of winning with humility (or losing with dignity) is practiced.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Because virtue is a skill, the attainment of mastery provides satisfaction, meaning virtue is its own reward: doing good feels good, and together they define a good life. However, exactly what counts as being virtuous is hard to define since different societies teach their youth different lessons and embody distinct practices for managing crime and punishment, vows of marriage and family responsibilities, the treatment of the vanquished in war and sporting competitions, and so on.</p>

AUTHENTICITY	CULTURALISM	DISCOURSE	CARE	CREATION
<p>CLASS Post-Nietzschean (Nietzsche/Heidegger)</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Authenticity</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION As opposed to the traditional ethical obligation for individuals to aspire to an ideal identity as defined by their society, the ethics of authenticity asks you to be true only to yourself, whoever you may be. The precedent requirement is to determine who, exactly, you are. Nietzsche proposed the Eternal Return thought experiment, Heidegger proposed anxiety in the face of death. In both cases, the result is an understanding one’s unique life projects as distinct from broader social expectations. The subsequent ethical imperative is to engage those projects.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS In a world without objective right and wrong, being true to myself provides a direction and use for my freedom. When the authentic person is an artist, the theory works well, but when the authentic person is a natural born murderer, the theory is less felicitous.</p>	<p>CLASS Post-Nietzschean</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Nativity</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION Traditionally, ethicists have worked to escape the idiosyncrasies of particular times and places by developing theories sufficiently abstract to apply universally. Culturalism reverses the tradition by embracing the idiosyncrasies: a community’s native beliefs are accepted as their legitimate moral rules, and the task of ethics is to learn the local practices, customs, and traditions, and then fit into them.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Respect for distinct cultures and traditions is maximized, but hope for ethical progress recedes because respecting another culture’s moral rules goes equally whether those rules seem noble, or barbaric.</p>	<p>CLASS Post-Nietzschean (Habermas)</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Consensus</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION Gather those involved in a conflict and discuss until reaching a shared resolution. The discourse must be rational and peaceful: participants comprehend their own agreements, and arrive without coercion. There is a partial analogy to American courthouse jury decisions here in that agreement is by informed consent, and the fact of agreement is the decision’s judicial/ethical legitimacy.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Provides a broad range of initially possible solutions since everything is on the table for discussion. But, everything on the table means a lot of talking since every conflict must be addressed and resolved from scratch.</p>	<p>CLASS Post-Nietzschean (Gilligan)</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Care</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION As opposed to concentrating on individuals, care ethics focuses on the <i>links</i> uniting people in their social networks. The aim is to strengthen the web of bonds, especially with those who are nearest. Families are a commonly cited example. For instance, a relative suffering drug addiction may receive a disproportionately large share of resources and concern. Or, if the addict becomes dangerously toxic, links to the family may be severed. In both scenarios, fortifying the web of familial care is the guiding concern, not any particular member.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Fortifying our intimate social networks conforms to intuitive feelings: many of us would rescue a sister before a stranger if only one could be saved. But, the theory can lead to tribalism, a mafia-family approach to civil co-existence.</p>	<p>CLASS Post-Nietzschean (Deleuze)</p> <p>GUIDING VALUE Originality</p> <p>RULE FOR ACTION The traditional ethical split between wrong and right is replaced by stagnation and creation. Creativity as an ethics repurposes customary elements of experience for original uses. A common example is slang: redirecting a language’s standard words for divergent meanings. Another example is the reorienting of web platforms, including the exploitation of LinkedIn as a dating site. As an ethics, creativity works within its native reality instead of coming from outside, its twists the elements of experience away from orthodox uses as opposed to destroying them, and it escapes conventions as opposed to overthrowing them.</p> <p>ADVANTAGES/DRAWBACKS Originality as the highest value can be individually invigorating. But, if the driving reason we innovate is to go on and create something else, the interminability is daunting, as in the endless “Yes, and...” of improvisation theater.</p>