

# Similarities and differences in virtue theory



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Similarities and Differences in Virtue Theory, Utilitarianism, and Deontological Ethics When talking about ethics it is hard to distinguish between ethics and morality. It is also hard to distinguish exactly what realm of ethics contributes to my everyday decisions. Ethics can be defined as “well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues [and] ethics refers to the study and development of one's ethical standards” (Andre, Shanks, & Velasquez, 2010, para. -9).

According to Psychology Today (2013) morality is, “ethics, evil, greed, sin, and conscience” (para. 1). “Morals can vary from person to person and culture to culture, many are practically universal, as they result from basic human emotions” (Psychology Today, 2013, para. 1). Today, I will take a look at the differences in virtue theory, utilitarianism, and deontological ethics and how each theory addresses ethics and morality.

Virtue Theory “takes the viewpoint that in living your life you should try to cultivate excellence in all that you do and all that others do” (Boylan, 2009, p. 133). This theory tends to take the complacent of being both moral and nonmoral (Boylan, 2009, p. 133). Virtue ethics takes on view points from Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas, each adapting the original theory. Aristotle states, “Every art and every methodological investigation and every action seems to aim at some good, for this reason the good is rightly said to be that to which all things aim” (Boylan, 2009, p. 35). According to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, “Morality is seen not as something to be done simply because it is right, per se, but because it contributes to the most

choiceworthy of lives" (Boylan, 2009, p. 137). Virtue ethics comes down to be content or having a sense of well-being (Boylan, 2009, p. 137).

" Utilitarianism is a theory that suggests that an action is morally right when that action produces more total utility for the group than any other alternative" (Boylan, 2009, p. 153); or, in short, " The greatest good for the greatest number" (Boylan, 2009, p. 53). In essence, utilitarianism is maximizing everyone's happiness, which can almost be considered a universal acceptance (Boylan, 2009, p. 154). Jeremy Bentham is one of the proponents of modern utilitarianism and states, " nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure" (Boylan, 2009, p. 154). In business utilitarianism shares the nonmoral views that the best decision that had no moral conflict would be to maximize profit, which would be the greatest good of the company and its employees (Boylan, 2009, p. 162).

Utilitarianism does not always hold true in some minds. Utilitarianism does not take into account motives of the people (Boylan, 2009, p. 165). " If one acts in accord with the general principle and its corollaries, then one is moral" (Boylan, 2009, p. 165). " Deontology is a moral theory that emphasizes one's duty to do a particular action just because the action, itself, is inherently right and not through any other sorts of calculations - such as the consequences of the action" (Boylan, 2009, p. 171). In many aspects deontology is contrasted with utilitarianism.

Deontology is based upon principle and does not calculate the consequences (Boylan, 2009, p. 171). Deontology attracts those seeking a stronger moral attraction because it refers to commanding rather than commending and

commanding is a stronger structure (Boylan, 2009, p. 172). The laws that govern deontology are “ human conventions, such as laws or customs; and natural moral duties” (Boylan, 2009, p. 172). There are many practitioners of deontology and if one was to choose one to follow it would probably be Kant (Boylan, 2009, p. 73). “ Kant understood the ethical enterprise was for an individual to contemplate about acting in the world and what reason requires us to do in order to obtain/create a good will” (Boylan, 2009, p. 176).

Kant believed by following his supreme principle of morality that all questions about mortality could be decided (Boylan, 2009, p. 176). Whether to follow a realm of virtue theory, utilitarianism, or deontology one must first ask if they are commending or commanding. Moral theories operation in the realm between commending and commanding” (Boylan, 2009, p. 172). Commending represents something as worthy if it is recommended to do and commanding is what must we do (Boylan, 2009, p. 172). I think that I fall under the “ what must I do” theory unless I was put into an executive or managerial position that would put me into the realm of utilitarianism because I would be making decisions that affect the business as a whole and the general masses.

In my line of work management takes the utilitarianism approach to ethics, but it does not always fall under what I would consider to be the better for the mass, but rather the better for the business. They tend to make decisions that make more money, but affect the mass (the employees) negatively. We need more coal to fulfill orders (makes the company money), but the employees have to work longer days including scheduled time off. Ethics and morality is a sensitive subject and is open for great debate, but I

would like to believe that the general population is good and morally depictable.