

# Teleological ethical theories vs. deontological ethical theories by: jesse colema...

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



There are two theories that have generally been used to analyze ethical questions. They are teleological ethics and deontological ethics.

There are similarities and differences between the two that I will explain in more detail, but first I will define a few terms that need explaining. The telos in teleological is translated as ends or goals. So in essence teleological ethics are decided by the ends not the actions that bring you to them. On the other hand deon in deontological is best translated as rule or duty. The end is not of importance, but it's the actions that bring you there. This ethics theory uses a set of moral rules to guide actions.

Next I will define and give examples for the specific theories. I will look at two teleological ethical theories, the first being Thomas Hobbes's egoism theory. Hobbes believed that individuals were looking out for his or her own good. He said that in any situation the individual would choose the side that is in their best interest. Hobbes also said that no act is solely done for others there is always a personal motive involved. For example most people do not say anything when a cashier undercharges them, but if they are overcharged they always point it out to the cashier. A major problem to Hobbes's ethical theory is that he took a part of human conduct and applied to all of human conduct. Another problem with his theory is that there is no way to prove if someone is acting in their best interest or if that person is honestly trying to help someone else, so there is no test for the egoism theories.

Another teleological theory is utilitarianism derived by Jeremy Bentham. Bentham stated that, "Mankind is governed by pleasure and pain". He says actions are based around what causes the greatest pleasure and the

least pain. He basically says that we should look to do the most good for the most people in a society or as a whole. His theory is explained by his Calculus of Felicity. He says we should use this to judge which action is the best. Bentham said that things like intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, propinquity or remoteness, fecundity, and purity of pleasure should be judged to decide if we should undertake an action. Bentham also says that all of these feelings can be measured by a certain quantity. A major argument against utilitarianism is that there is a possibility of something terrible being justified because it benefits the whole in the long run. It leaves the possibility for individual rights to be trampled. Another argument would be, how long down the road most you look to decide if a decision is for the greater good.

John Stuart Mill says that if we base our judgements on the idea of pleasure and pain that we will choose base pleasure at the expense of higher intellect. For example, if you have the choice between going to the OLE Miss football game on Saturday or studying for a Human Anatomy test that you have on Monday, which will give you more pleasure. Most people would say going to the OLE Miss football game either to see them win or lose mattering what team you are cheering for. But, in making this decision you may jeopardize your grade on your science test. Neither egoism nor utilitarianism is easily determined. It is almost impossible to know right away which is the greater good for us or for the group in everyday life.

The next ethical theory group is deontological ethical theories. These theories are most touched on by Immanuel Kant. He wrote two theories one

being his categorical imperatives and the other his divine command theory. The first one I will discuss is his categorical imperatives. He says that for an action to be deemed moral it must be done out of a sense of duty. First, in this ethical theory it is not the end that is important, but the intent of the person. This states the question many have with philosophical ethic theories, ? Just because an action has an acceptable outcome does that mean it is moral.

Second, Kant states that for every action we should decide if it is moral to always act in that way. For example is it morally right to lie. Following Kants theory one should never lie is universally accepted. Also, he states that one being should not use another being. Last Kant says we have perfect and imperfect duties. Perfect duties have no legitimate exception whereas imperfect duties require us to promote certain goals, such as the general welfare of the group. There are many critics to Kants theories. The main one being his dismissal of the importance of the end of an action. An often-used example against this theory is a neighbor is upset with his wife and wants to kill her. He asks me if I know where she is, I know she is next door so should I tell him even though I know he will kill her. Or should I lie to him breaking a universally accepted maxim. Most people would say lie, but according to Kant there is no reason why I should violate a categorical imperative.

Kant? s second theory is known as the divine command theory. According to this theory we should act according to the commands we receive from God. There are many problems associated with this theory. To begin with which God should we consult; the Christian, the Buddhist, the Moslem, and the

Hindu. Even within religions there are many different beliefs between different groups. Also some people claim they have spoken with God personally and that God has told them to do an immoral behavior. For example David Koresh of the Branch Davidians claimed that God told him he was Jesus Christ reincarnated. Over 60 people were killed in Waco , Texas because of his false belief. So in this sense there is no way to verify the validity of the claim.

Both teleological and deontological theories are applicable to everyday life, but they are only situationally applicable. Meaning that they are not universally acceptable. They both do give us consequences to immoral actions, but they do not give an absolute guide to resolving moral dilemmas. Also, I think you should take note that both theories only take concern with certain questions of morality, which makes you wonder if maybe they are not asking all the right questions. A big question is brought forth by Carol Gilligan, in ? Care, Justice, and Gender?. She says that the basic ethical questions in teleological and deontological are only applicable to men. Gilligan says that women look at ethical questions differently than men do. This is known as ethical relativism.

So, in comparison they both are looking for the moral good for the individual of the group without taking an unorthodox amount from another group in obtaining this good. Also both theories state that you cannot use people or groups for your own good. For example both believe it is wrong to take organs from one living being to save ten dying human beings. But, there are far more contrasts between the two. The biggest being that Kant shows

a complete disregard for the end results as long as you follow a moral path to get there. In teleological theories its not how you get there, but the end result has to be moral and for the good of the group. Also a major downfall with both theories to me is that Kant, Hobbes, and Bentham all seem to think less people take advantage of situations than actually occurs.

While it would be nice to think that as a society we followed deontological ethics, I don't think that that is possible because there are so many variations of situations that need a variety of morally right answers. It would be nice you could always follow universal maxims, but different situations call for different actions. In a perfect world if we used morally right means to get to an end than the end would be a good for the individual or entire group. But, due to lies, deceit, and evils in the world it doesnt always work out this way.

Now, I do not completely agree with the teleological ethical theories but I would say they are closer to the world we live in. Most people look for a good end no matter the situation that gets them there. This is not always reached along a moral path, but I think it does still bring a benefit to the group if there is a universally accepted good at the end, as long as no individual rights are trampled on. People live by the most pleasure with the least pain idea stated by Jeremy Bentham. And, I would have to agree with John Mills that the world is dumming down because we chose baser pleasures for instant gratification instead of going through a little pain for the greater satisfaction of a higher good.

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. - John Staurt Mills.