Ethical theories essay sample

Deontology and Utilitarianism are the two most dominant theories which forms the foundations of ethical analysis, because they are the viewpoints from which guidance can be obtained along the pathway to an optimum decision. Each theory emphasizes different points such as predicting the outcome and following one's duties to others in order to reach an ethically correct decision. However, in order for an ethical theory to be useful, the theory must be directed towards a common set of goals. Ethical principles are the common goals that each theory tries to achieve in order to be successful. These goals include: Beneficence, Least Harm, Respect for Autonomy and Justice.

Deontology

Deontology is an alternative ethical system that is usually attributed to the philosophical tradition of Immanuel Kant. It demands that actions, or means, themselves must be ethical. It argues further that there are excellent ethical norms and truths that are generally applicable to all people, beside, some actions are immoral regardless of their outcomes. Kant gives a ' categorical imperative' to act morally at all times and demands that individuals should act as though their actions would be made universal into a general rule of nature. It again believes that all people come to moral conclusions about right and wrong based on rational thought as it is moderately associated with the saying that ' the means must justify the ends.' Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is an ethical system that is most often attributed to philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham. Utilitarianism believes that the most ethical thing to do is to maximize the happiness within a society. It focuses on the outcomes or ends of actions. Utilitarianism

is thus often considered a ' consequentialist' ethical outlook because it both believes that actions can be predicted and judged based on their outcomes. Thus, utilitarianism is often associated with the phrase ' the ends justify the means'. However, to argue for and against the above mention two most dominant theories, using the five ethical principles are as follows: Beneficence

The principle of beneficence guides the ethical theory to do what is good. This principle specifies that ethical theories should make every effort to achieve the greatest amount of good, because people benefit most from it. This principle is mainly associated with the Deontology ethical theory. an example of doing good is found in the practice of medicine in which the health of an individual is bettered by treatment from a physician. On the contrary, the Utilitarian theory states that ' the ends justify the means' which in my view should not be the case because it is contrary to the generally accepted ethical theory. Least Harm

This is similar to beneficence, but deals with situations in which neither choice is beneficial. In this case, a person should choose to do the least harm possible and to do harm to the fewest people. For instance, in the Hippocratic Oath, a physician is first charged with the responsibility to " do no harm" to the patient since the physician's primary duty is to provide helpful treatment to the patient rather than to inflict more suffering upon the patient. Respect for Autonomy

This principle states that an ethical theory should allow people to rule over themselves and to be able to make decisions that apply to their lives. This

means that people should have control over their lives as much as possible because they are the only people who completely understand their chosen type of lifestyle. This principle is mainly associated with the deontology ethical theory which states that some actions are immoral regardless of their outcomes. For example, a patient with terminal cancer may prefer to live the rest of her life without the medication that makes her constantly ill which will be a burden on the family. Justice

The justice ethical principle states that ethical theories should prescribe actions that are fair to those involved. This means that ethical decisions should be consistent with the ethical theory unless qualifying circumstances that can be justified exist in the case. This principle is also associated with the Utilitarian ethical theory. For example a policeman is allowed to speed on the highway if he must arrive at the scene of a crime as quickly as possible in order to prevent a person from getting hurt. Although the policeman would normally have to obey the speed limit, he is allowed to speed in this unique situation because it is justified under the prevailing circumstances. Rights

In the rights ethical theory the rights set forth by a society are protected and given the highest priority. Rights are considered to be ethically correct and valid since a large or ruling population endorses them. This principle is mainly associated with the deontology ethical theory that the right thing must always be done. For example, currently in Ghana it is ethically wrong to import used fridges and underwear (clothing) into the country. But the Utilitarianism ethical theory is of the view that it is ethical to import those

items since people are going to use them. This is not good enough because there are accompanying health hazards. Virtue

The virtue ethical theory judges a person by his character rather than by an action that may deviate from his normal behaviour. It takes the person's morals, reputation and motivation into account when rating an unusual and irregular behaviour that is considered unethical. Thus Utilitarianism ethical theory (the consequentialist) is considered because it both believes that actions can be predicted and judged based on their outcomes. For instance, if a person copied a passage that was later detected by a peer, the peer who knows the person well will understand the person's character and will be able to judge the friend. But once the person copied that passage which activity is unethical, the means must justify the ends.

I therefore wish to state in conclusion that it is fortunate to have a variety of ethical theories that provide a substantial framework when trying to make ethically correct solutions. Each theory attempts to observe the ethical principles that lead to success when trying to reach the best decision. Utilitarianism and Deontological theory are both varieties of Consequentialism. Utilitarianism basically says that the moral worth of an action relates directly to whether it contributes to the overall utility. Deontological theory on the other hand basically says that an act is intrinsically good or evil, regardless of the consequences of the acts.