

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with moral principles, values and codes of conduct that guide human behavior. There are various ethical theories that have been developed over the years, such as virtue ethics, Deontology, and Utilitarianism. Throughout this course I have learned more about these theories and applied them to all kinds of cases of actions where the ethics of the actions were questioned. With each case analysis my opinions and thoughts have changed, deepened, or nuanced and affected my perception of things and changed how I act myself.

Virtue ethics was the first of the theories that I unlocked and learned about. Virtue ethics is a theory that focuses on moral character, rather than rules or consequences. It encourages individuals to cultivate virtuous habits that reflect their highest potential as human beings. In terms of personal development, this theory can be helpful in shaping one's behavior and attitude towards life. It suggests that investing in personal growth and developing virtues such as courage, empathy, and humility can help individuals become better versions of themselves, and ultimately lead to greater happiness. I always believed that compassion, honesty, and wisdom help me to be a better person and contribute positively to society. Using these virtue ethics, I feel as though I strive to follow these principles and improve on my decision making ensuring that I make the most ethical choices I can at all times. I had a small grasp of what it meant to act virtuously. My thinking has grown from just following rules and acting in ways to avoid consequences to actually making decisions due to respecting and caring for others and believing my actions to be ethical.

Deontology was the second tool I unlocked and studied throughout this course. Deontology prioritizes rules and duties above everything else. It suggests that some actions are inherently right or wrong, regardless of their consequences. This approach helps in maintaining a universal standard of ethical behavior that is not situational or subjective. However, it may also lead to some unintended consequences. In Deontology the duty to respect others is absolute, and it's never right to fail to respect others for the greater good. In this course this was put to the test by considering an extreme case. We had to imagine that a friend had sought shelter in our home from someone who intended to do violence to him. In this case, if this angry man comes to our door looking for our friend, it is still wrong to lie and say we don't know where he is. It was said that this is misleadingly, called "the murderer at the door example." This is a misleading name because it assumes that the stranger is a murderer, and that's the kind of disrespect that Deontology says is wrong. So long as we treat this man as a murderer and lie to him to protect our friend, we deny the stranger the opportunity to do the right thing. By lying to him, we fail to respect him as a moral agent, and we use him as a means to protect our friend, robbing him of the opportunity to choose the right thing and to redeem himself and become righteous. While I now have a better understanding of Deontology, I don't completely agree with it. However, I got the takeaway that when faced with ethical dilemmas to try to approach them with an open mind and a willingness to consider different perspectives.

The last of the three ethical tools that I learned about and studied throughout this course was Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism focuses on maximizing happiness for the greatest number of people, with the ultimate goal of creating a more harmonious society. This approach can help in promoting the greater good and ensuring that everyone's well-being is considered in decision making. However, it also raises some ethical concerns about the limits of sacrificing the interests of the individual for the sake of the majority. My thoughts on utilitarianism have deepened especially after learning about the Trolley problem example. I had to imagine that I was at a junction in a train track where I could switch the direction of the train. In this hypothetical situation I notice that a train is approaching, and, if it

continues down the track it is currently on, it will hit and kill five people, but I have the lever to change its direction. However, if I were to pull it, I notice that there is one person trapped on the other track, so if that person will be hit and killed. The utilitarian thinks the right thing to do is to pull the switch, no matter what as saving five lives can be expected to create more happiness and less suffering in the world than saving one life. To a Utilitarian it doesn't matter who that one person is, either; it could be your best friend, or your mother or child but your obligation is to choose the objectively best outcome, even if it's a difficult or painful choice. I think this is an interesting concept but admittedly I don't know if I could make that choice to kill a loved one to save the others. While I don't know in that specific situation if I could make the ethical choice, I have gotten the takeaway that it is important to consider the impacts of my actions on others and strive to maximize happiness or well-being for the greatest number of people.

In conclusion, ethical theories such as Virtue ethics, Deontology, and Utilitarianism provide different perspectives on how to approach decision making. Each of these theories has its strengths and weaknesses, and their application may depend on the specific context or situation. Ultimately, being guided by principles such as cultivating virtues, following universal ethical rules, and considering the impacts on others can help in making ethical decisions that reflect our highest potential as human beings and are something that will be relevant and prevalent in my life.