

UNIVERSITY MOHAMED BOUDIAF
FACULTY OF LETTERS & LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF LETTERS & ENGLISH LANGUAGE



جامعة محمد بوضياف
كلية الآداب واللغات
قسم الآداب واللغة الإنجليزية

Deontology & Deontological theories

Definition of Deontology

Deontology is an ethical framework centered on the intrinsic morality of actions, independent of their consequences. It asserts that specific actions possess inherent moral qualities, irrespective of their outcomes. Advocates of deontology maintain that moral conduct should be guided by principles or rules, typically rooted in concepts like duty, rights, and justice. Immanuel Kant stands as a prominent figure in deontological ethics, highlighting the significance of acting based on duty and adhering to universal moral principles, such as his well-known categorical imperative.

Deontological theories in ethics

Here are several influential deontological theories in ethics, each offering its perspective on moral principles and rules. Here are some of the key ones along with brief explanations:

Kantian Deontology (or Kantian Ethics):

- Developed by Immanuel Kant, this theory emphasizes the importance of duty and rationality in moral decision-making.
- Kant argues that moral actions are those performed out of a sense of duty, guided by principles derived from reason rather than emotions or consequences.
- Central to Kantian ethics is the idea of the categorical imperative, which asserts that one should act only according to principles that could be universally applied without contradiction.

Rossian Deontology (or Rossian Ethics):

- Proposed by W.D. Ross, this theory acknowledges multiple prima facie duties, which are duties that we are obligated to fulfill unless they conflict with stronger duties.
- Prima facie duties include duties such as fidelity, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and self-improvement.
- When faced with conflicting duties, one must carefully weigh the factors involved and prioritize the most significant duty in a given situation.

Rights-Based Deontology:

This approach emphasizes the importance of individual rights and liberties as the foundation of moral duties. It asserts that individuals possess certain inherent rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property, which must be respected and protected. Moral obligations arise from respecting these rights, and actions that violate or infringe upon these rights are considered morally wrong.

The Ethics of Prima Facie Obligations:

- Developed by David McNaughton and Piers Rawling, this theory expands on Rossian deontology by focusing on prima facie obligations.
- Prima facie obligations are those that hold unless overridden by stronger obligations.
- McNaughton and Rawling argue that our moral duties are determined by the weight of reasons supporting them, and conflicting obligations must be weighed and balanced accordingly.

These deontological theories offer different perspectives on moral decision-making but share the common emphasis on the importance of moral principles, duties, and rights in guiding ethical behaviour.

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Thank you!