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# Normative ethical theories: Utilitarianism, Deontology, and Virtue Ethics

Foundation of European Thought: A Business Ethics perspective.  
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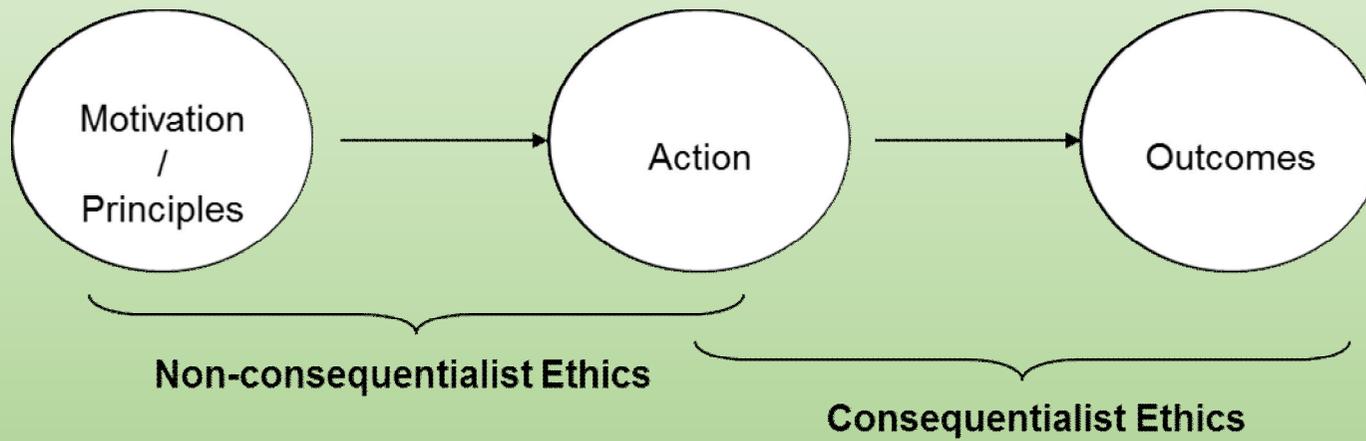
# Normative ethical theories

Ethical theories should help in determining 'right' and 'wrong' for a certain situation, and in general for any circumstance, through the use of rules and principles.

Normative ethical theories are those that prescribe a 'correct' way to act morally (opposed to describe ethics that concern how ethical decisions are taken).



# Traditional approach



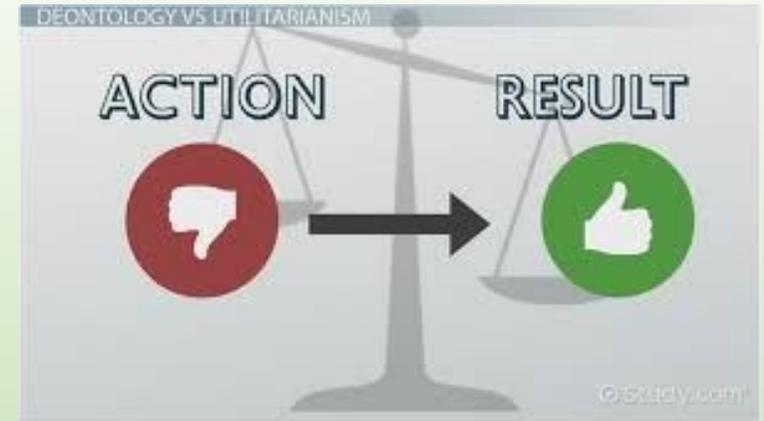
# Major normative theories

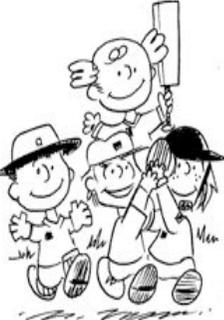
	Egoism	Utilitarianism	Ethics of duties	Rights & justice
Contributors	Adam Smith	Jeremy Bentham John Stuart Mill	Immanuel Kant	John Locke John Rawls
Focus	Individual desires or interests	Collective welfare	Duties	Rights
Rules	Maximization of desires/self interest	Act/rule utilitarianism	Categorical imperative	Respect for human beings
Concept of human beings	Man as an actor with limited knowledge and objectives	Man is controlled by avoidance of pain and gain of pleasure ("hedonist")	Man is a rational moral actor	Man is a being that is distinguished by dignity
Type	Consequentialist	Consequentialist	Non-consequentialist	Non-consequentialist

Source: Crane and Matten (2010)

# Utilitarianism

- According to **utilitarianism**, an action is morally right if it results in the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people affected by the action
  - Also called the 'greatest happiness principle'
  - Based on cost-benefit analysis



<p><b>The Greatest Happiness Principle is...</b></p>  <p>...“actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”</p>	<p><b>Happiness is...</b></p>  <p>...“intended pleasure, and the absence of pain.”</p>	<p><b>Unhappiness is...</b></p>  <p>...“pain, and the privation of pleasure.”</p> <p>— John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” (1863)</p>
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# Utilitarianism elements (1)

- What is Good?
  - For Hedonism intrinsic good is the pleasure and the intrinsic bad is pain.
  - For Pluralistic Utilitarianism good is a variety of values, but this requires to rank or weigh them and this may be difficult.
- How to measure Good?
  - Quantitative Utilitarianism, utility calculus. How to quantify?
  - Qualitative Utilitarianism, values as qualities some better than others.

## Utilitarianism elements (2)

- Which Consequences?
  - Actual consequences
  - Expected Consequentialisms
- Consequences of What? Act vs Rules
  - **Act utilitarianism**  
Looks to single actions and bases the moral judgement on the amount of good and the amount of pain this single action causes.
  - **Rule utilitarianism**  
Looks at classes of action and ask whether the underlying principles of an action produce more good than pain for society in the long run.
- Consequences for Whom?

# Deontology

- What makes a choice right is its conformity with a moral norm.
- The Right is said to have priority over the Good (regardless how much 'Good' can be produced).

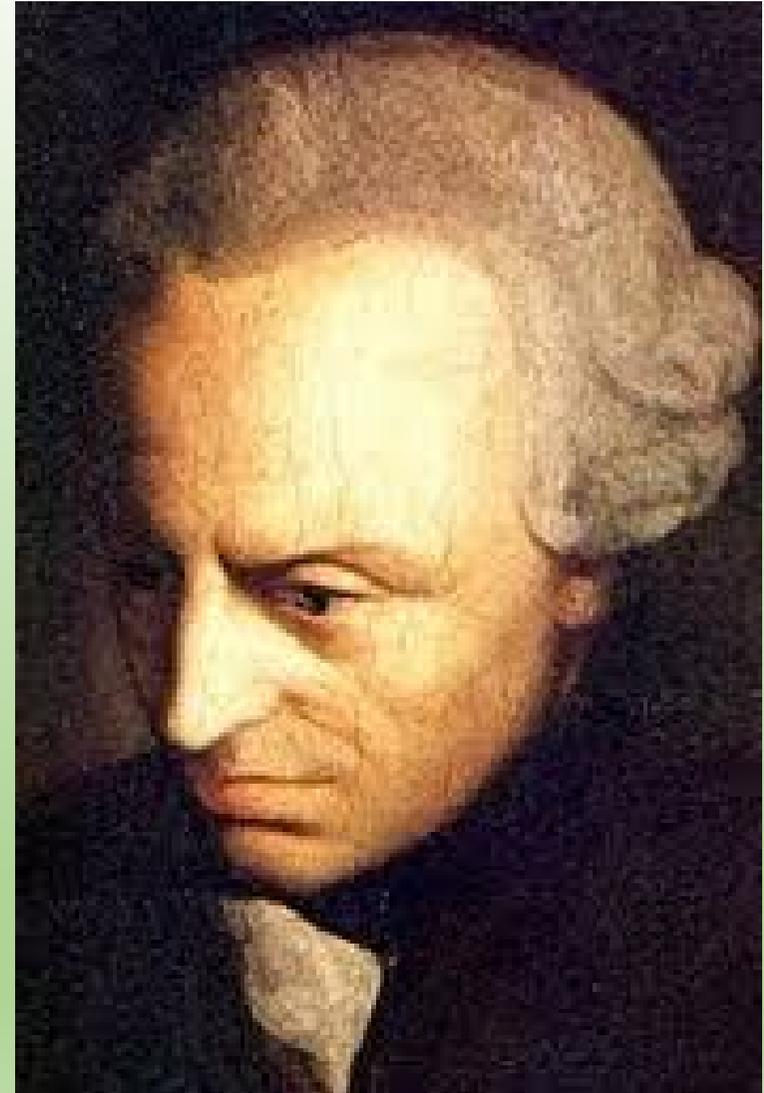


# The 'Categorical Imperative'

- Maxim 1: *Consistency* (Kant, 1948/1785: 84/52)
  - Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

## Maxim 2: *Human Dignity* (Kant, 1948/1785: 91/66–7)

- Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.
- Maxim 3: *Universality* (Kant, 1948/1785: 84/52)
  - Act only so that the will through its maxims could regard itself at the same time as universally lawgiving



# Deontology application

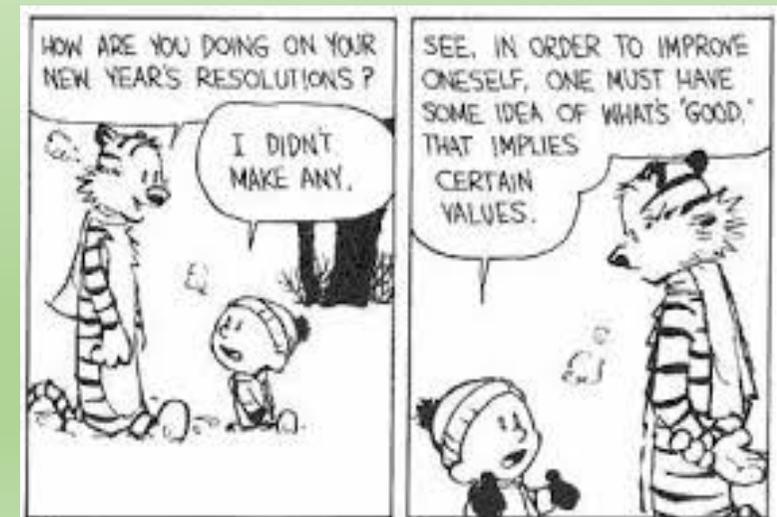
- Ask yourself:
  - What am I trying to achieve by my action?
  - What is the maxim upon which I am acting?
  - Would others agree with this maxim?
  - Would you be happy to see your decision reported in the press?
  - What would be the eventual result of universal adoption of my maxim?

# Deontology separation

- Agent-centered deontology
  - Obligations are for a particular agent to take or refrain from taking some actions, so the obligation does not necessarily give anyone else a reason to support that action.
  - Positive aspects: Professional deontology (physicians, lawyers etc.); negative aspects: permissive conducts.
- Patient-centered deontology
  - The right decision is against being used only as means for producing good consequences without one's consent.
  - Positive aspects: Focus on others; Negative aspects: conflicting absolute rights

# Virtue ethics

- Emphasis on virtues, or the development of moral character.
- In contrast to the approach that emphasizes duties or rules (deontology)
- or that emphasizes the consequences of actions (Utilitarianism).



# Virtues ethics application

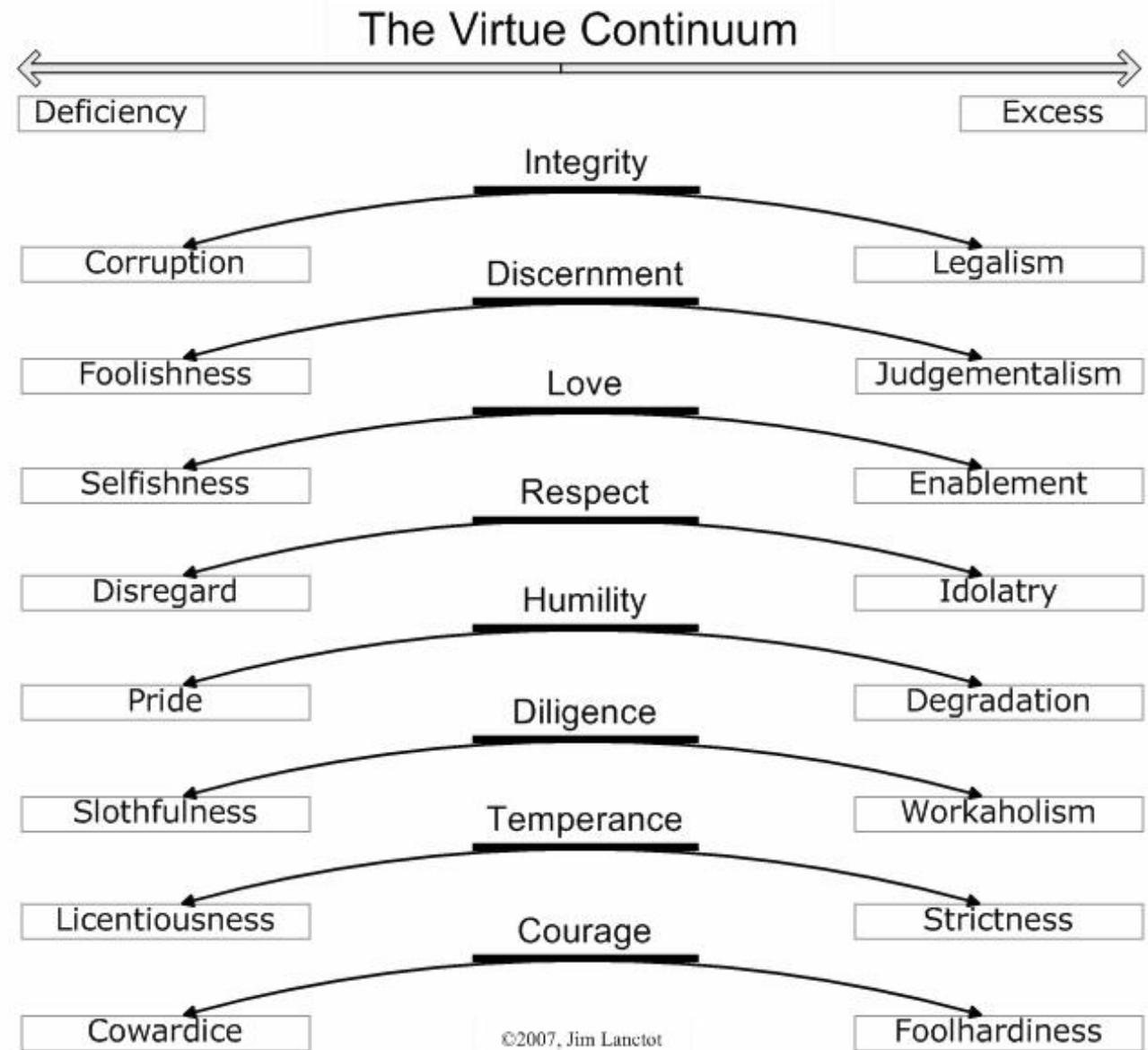
- A virtue is an excellent trait of character. It is a disposition, well entrenched in its possessor to notice, expect, value, feel, desire, choose, act, and react in certain characteristic ways.
- What a virtuous man/woman would do? (Exemplary virtue ethics)
- An essential aspect of the good life is Eudaimonia (flourishing) is the ultimate goal (Eudaimonist virtue ethics).

# Natures of virtues

- Intellectual Virtues
  - Wisdom, Understanding, Prudence
  - Taught through instruction
  - They involve rationality
- Moral Virtues (cardinal)
  - Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance
  - Acquired through practices i.e. the result of habit thus not natural or inborn characteristics.
  - They involve both feeling and action

# *Via mediocritas*

- Virtues are the 'right medium' between two vices:
- One of deficiency
- One of excess



# Phronesis or Practical wisdom

- Without discernment it is impossible to understand what is 'right' and what is 'wrong', thus actions are blind.
- Understand which are best means to attain to virtuous ends is the preliminary step to develop the character.
- Thus, Phronesis (practical wisdom/reason) is the 'golden virtue' and 'mother' of the others.

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