

What is Ethics?

Worksheet

Ethics is the study of moral principles that guide behavior - asking whether actions, rules, or character traits are good, right, or virtuous.

Questions

1. Which theory judges an action solely by its outcomes?
 - A) Deontology
 - B) Virtue ethics
 - C) Consequentialism
 - D) Divine command theory
2. Kant's categorical imperative belongs to which theory?
 - A) Consequentialism
 - B) Deontology
 - C) Utilitarianism
 - D) Relativism
3. Virtue ethics is most concerned with:
 - A) Rules
 - B) Outcomes
 - C) Character and habit
 - D) Legal codes
4. In the trolley problem, a strict utilitarian would:
 - A) Never act
 - B) Pull the lever to save more lives
 - C) Refuse based on duty
 - D) Flip a coin
5. The 'trolley problem': a runaway trolley will kill 5 people unless you pull a lever to divert it, killing 1 person instead. How would a utilitarian decide?
6. How would a Kantian deontologist respond to the same trolley problem?
7. A shopkeeper always gives correct change - not from a rule or outcome calculation, but because honesty is part of who they are. Which ethical theory best explains this?
8. Define: What is deontology?
9. Define: What is consequentialism?
10. Define: What is utilitarianism?

Answer Key

1. C) Consequentialism - Consequentialism (e.g. utilitarianism) evaluates actions by their results.
2. B) Deontology - Kant is the foundational deontologist - duty matters more than outcomes.
3. C) Character and habit - Virtue ethics asks what a person of good character would do.
4. B) Pull the lever to save more lives - Utilitarianism maximizes net good, favoring 5 saved over 1 lost.
5. A utilitarian calculates total wellbeing: 5 lives saved versus 1 lost. Maximizing good outcomes means pulling the lever produces greater net utility (5 saved > 1 lost). A utilitarian would therefore pull the lever, prioritizing outcomes over the act of directly causing harm.
6. Kant's categorical imperative asks whether the action's rule (maxim) could be universalized without contradiction. Using a person merely as a means to save others treats them as an object, not an end in themselves. Many deontologists conclude that actively causing death (even to save more) violates the duty not to use people as mere means, making it impermissible.
7. Virtue ethics focuses on character traits (virtues) like honesty, courage, and generosity rather than rules or outcomes. The shopkeeper acts from an ingrained virtuous disposition, not fear of punishment or utility calculation. This matches Aristotle's virtue ethics: right action flows from good character.
8. An ethical theory judging actions right or wrong based on rules and duties, regardless of consequences.
9. An ethical theory judging actions by their outcomes - the right act produces the best overall results.
10. A consequentialist theory holding that the right action maximizes overall happiness or wellbeing.

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