

ETHC303 Ethical Theories Comparison Table

Theory	Type/Subtype	Main Idea	Key Question	Focus	Example Statement	Main Criticism
Ethical Relativism	Subjective Relativism	Morality depends on the individual.	“What do <i>I</i> believe is right?”	Individual beliefs	“Cheating is acceptable because I personally think it’s okay.”	Makes it difficult to criticize anyone’s behavior.
Ethical Relativism	Cultural Relativism	Morality depends on society or culture.	“What does my culture believe is right?”	Cultural norms	“This practice is ethical because our society accepts it.”	Harmful practices may be justified if culturally accepted.
Divine Command Theory	—	Morality comes from God’s commands.	“What does God command?”	Religious duty	“This action is wrong because God forbids it.”	Different religions may provide different guidance.
Kantianism (Duty-Based Ethics)	—	Actions are inherently right or wrong regardless of outcomes.	“Am I fulfilling my moral duty?”	Duty, intentions, rules	“Lying is wrong even if it produces good results.”	May ignore consequences.
Utilitarianism (Consequence-Based Ethics)	—	The best action produces the greatest good for the greatest number.	“Which choice creates the most overall benefit?”	Consequences	“Invading one person’s privacy is justified if it saves thousands.”	Can sacrifice minority rights for the majority.
Social Contract Theory	—	Morality comes from rules rational people agree to follow.	“What rules would people agree upon for society?”	Fairness, cooperation, social order	“Cybercrime is wrong because it violates society’s agreed rules.”	People may disagree on what the rules should be.
Virtue Ethics (Character-Based Ethics)	—	Focuses on developing good moral character.	“What would a virtuous person do?”	Character and virtues	“An honest person would tell the truth.”	Does not always provide a clear answer to ethical dilemmas.