

TABLE 4.1 The Traditional Theories

Name	Guidance for ethical action	Focus of our efforts	Typical questions asked in the effort to fulfill obligations	Conception of the person implied by the theory	Strengths and weaknesses	Type of theory
Duty	Learn the basic duties to ourselves and others, and obey them.	The duties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ To whom do I have obligations?</li> <li>■ What are the obligations?</li> <li>■ How do the obligations weigh against each other?</li> </ul>	We are rational actors.	Gives clear guidance in many situations but is inflexible in the face of special cases.	Nonconsequentialist
Fairness	Treat people identically unless they differ in ways relevant to the situation. (Treat equals equally and unequals unequally.)	Resist prejudice and personal feelings.	Does everyone get an equal chance? (If they don't, how are the differences justified?)	We are rational actors.	Promises egalitarianism, but can be difficult to implement in complex reality.	Nonconsequentialist
Kant	Learn the basic duties to ourselves and others, and obey them.	The categorical imperative in two articulations: actions must be universalizable <i>and</i> treat others as ends and never as means.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Is the act I'm considering universalizable?</li> <li>■ Am I being careful not to treat others as means to an end?</li> </ul>	We are rational actors.	Gives clear guidance in many situations but is inflexible, especially in the face of special cases.	Nonconsequentialist
Rights theory	Maximize freedom.	Learn the individual's basic rights, live them, and respect others' right to live them.	Does doing what I want impinge on the basic freedoms of others?	We are distinguished by the possession of dignity.	Allows individuality, but does little to resolve conflicts between individuals.	Nonconsequentialist
Egoism	Increase my well-being and happiness.	Learn about my desires and welfare, and serve them	What makes me happy over the long term? How can I get that?	We are driven toward pleasure and away from pain.	Good for me in the short term, but might not help us live together as a society.	Consequentialist
Altruism	Increase the well-being and happiness of others.	Learn about others' desires and welfare, and serve them.	What makes others happy over the long term? How can I help them get that?	We are driven toward pleasure and away from pain.	Others benefit, but it may be difficult to justify devaluing yourself.	Consequentialist

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Utilitarianism	Increase the well-being and happiness of everyone collectively.	Learn about the desires and welfare of everyone, understood as an aggregate, and serve them.	What brings the greatest happiness and good to the greatest number over the long term? How can I help us get that?	We are driven toward pleasure and away from pain.	The general welfare is served, but injustices at the individual level may persist.	Consequentialist