

Assignment: Applying Ethical Theories to Socio-Political Issues (Group Exercise)

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ETHICAL ANALYSIS

Ethics is a field of philosophy that examines motives and actions from the perspective of moral principles. **Morality** refers to human behavior that is good and just. **Moral reasoning** is the process of moving from premises to conclusions in determining the right course of action. The moral principles that form the basis for evaluating behavior are generally drawn from several sources.

Ethical theories come from principles espoused by philosophers or from religious principles, such as the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments, or similar precepts from the Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim religions. The early Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle focused on good and doing right. All major religions emphasize doing good for others, being fair, and treating people with respect. In countries with a religion-based legal system, legal and moral standards are not separate.

Ethical analysis involves studying concepts and theories and applying them to particular situations. Using ethical theories requires asking questions, examining alternatives, and seeking solutions that coincide with ethical goals. Two important ethical theories influence the formation of our moral concepts today. They are the consequence-oriented utilitarian theory and the duty-based universal theory.

Utilitarian Theory

The **utilitarian theory** examines the consequences of a given action and defines an action as morally right and ethical if it produces the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. The utilitarian does not focus on the inherent correctness of a given action but instead examines its consequences. Maximizing the good from a given action or course of conduct requires measuring the costs and benefits from possible alternative activities. Thus, the utilitarian ethical analysis requires the performance of a societal cost-benefit analysis. The utilitarian theory is the dominant ethical theory used in business today. According to this theory, "good" is determined by maximizing the good consequences and minimizing the bad consequences of any action.

Universal Theory

The second major ethical theory is referred to as the **universal theory**. Immanuel Kant, commonly considered the founder of this theory, did not look at the consequences of actions to determine if they were ethical. Instead, he argued that a commitment to universal principles (the categorical imperative) should guide people. Kant believed that actions are moral only if they can be undertaken by everyone in good conscience. Thus, the universal theory suggests that your actions should be based on determining if your conduct could serve as the standard for universal conduct.

The Golden Rule exemplifies this duty-based standard: You should act as you expect others to act toward you. According to this duty-based theory, conduct should be guided not by looking at its resulting consequences, but by whether it coincides with preexisting duties.

Articles to Choose from:

["Airline Making Heavyset Flyers Buy Extra Seat Dan Fitzpatrick" Pittsburgh Post Gazette 2005.pdf](#) 

["Curry's DNA Fight with Bulls Bigger than Sports World" Jim Litke ESPN 2005.pdf](#) 

["Law Curbs McDonald's Happy Meal Toys" Lisa Baertlein Reuters 2010.pdf](#) 

["Cities Increasingly Turn to Trash Police to Enforce Recycling Laws" John Brandon Fox News 2010.pdf](#) 

["Washington State Bans Alcoholic Drinks" Curt Woodward The Spokesman-Review 2010.pdf](#) 

Choose one of the newspaper articles posted above, read through it, and then post responses to the following questions:

1. What is the issue being discussed/debated?
2. Who are the parties involved in this issue?
3. What does each party want?
4. Apply the universal theory to the actions of one or more of the parties involved.
5. Apply the utilitarian theory to the actions of one or more of the parties involved.

Example from article ["Landowners Must Yield to Ballpark" Tim Lemke The Washington Times 2005.pdf](#)



1. In the article "Landowners Must Yield to Ballpark," the issue being discussed is eminent domain—the power to take private property for public use by a state, municipality, or private person or corporation authorized to exercise functions of public character, following the payment of just compensation to the owner of that property.
2. The District and landowners.
3. The District is using the law of eminent domain to "acquire parcels of land at the site of the Washington Nationals' ballpark" (Lemke, par. 1). The 23 landowners whose property is being taken from them want to remain.
4. According to universal theory, the District is acting unethically. The theory states that you should act as you expect others to act toward you. Can those who voted to take the homeowners' land and relocate them say that were the circumstances reversed they would find this fair? Indeed, few people would consider it fair for the government to come in and take over one's private property, even if the owner was compensated.
5. However, according to utilitarian theory, the District is acting ethically because the reallocation of the land to the ballpark will bring in increased revenue for the city—much more than individual owners' property taxes. Thus, while some people (the landowners) may be inconvenienced, the new ballpark will create additional jobs for thousands.

Points to Remember:

- When discussing utilitarian theory, you should note that some people in this case may be adversely affected, but they are the *minority*. The action is still ethical because the *majority* benefit.

The utilitarian theory examines the **consequences** of a given action and defines an action as morally right and ethical if it produces the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. In other words, it is ethical to sacrifice 100 people if it means saving 1,000 people.

- Universal theory does not consider the **consequences** of actions to determine if they were ethical. Instead, a commitment to universal principles should guide people.

Actions are moral only if they can be undertaken by everyone in good conscience. In deciding whether one's actions are moral, it should be considered what the universal benefit would be if everyone behaved in such a fashion. For example, if everyone stole, the result would be chaos and violence.

- You can argue that a party is unethical or ethical according to *both* theories.
- When referring to companies, say *it*, not *them*. Although comprised of many people, a company or organization functions as a single unit.

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Points 2
Submitting Nothing

Due	For	Available from	Until
-	Everyone	-	-

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