ASSESSMENT 1

Normative Theories

Overview

Write 4–6 pages in which you address a complex ethical dilemma, applying various ethical theories to the problem.

Philosophical reasoning about human conduct aims first to discover a clear difference between right and wrong and then to apply this distinction to specific situations.

By successfully completing this assessment, you will demonstrate your proficiency in the following course competencies and assessment criteria:

- **Competency 1:** Explain the nature of ethical issues.
  - Explain ethical issues in complex scenarios.

- **Competency 2:** Critically examine the contributions of key thinkers from the history of ethics.
  - Apply Immanuel Kant’s ethical theory to a contemporary ethical issue.
  - Apply John Stuart Mill’s ethical theory to a contemporary ethical issue.

- **Competency 4:** Develop a position on a contemporary ethical issue.
  - Justify an ethical position on a contemporary issue.

- **Competency 5:** Communicate effectively in the context of personal and professional moral discourse.
  - Communicate in a manner that is scholarly, professional, and consistent with expectations for professional communities.

Competency Map

Use this online tool to track your performance and progress through your course.

Context

Philosophical reasoning about human conduct aims first to discover a clear difference between right and wrong, and then to apply this distinction to specific situations. The first of these tasks is the province of normative ethics. Normative theories try to resolve any uncertainty about what is right and what is wrong by providing a rational justification upon which to establish the ethical principles according to which we ought to live. Although there are many variations, most normative theories belong to one of three major types.

One way to address our interest in right and wrong is by appealing to the traits of character embodied by individual human beings. Virtue ethics maintains that the ultimate aim of practical wisdom is to enable each person to achieve genuine self-fulfillment and happiness. What matters above all else is that our lives express virtue or excellence in every respect. We seek to be good people who habitually act in ways that contribute to our development and well-being.

Alternative versions of virtue ethics will differ from each other in their concepts of virtue and happiness. Plato, for example, supposed that we find our highest character when the thinking, feeling, and willing parts of ourselves perform their proper functions in harmony with each other. Aristotle emphasized
instead the achievement of self-sufficiency through the careful practice of moderation in all things. More recently, Nel Noddings has proposed that our chief virtue resides in the capacity to form and maintain caring relationships with other persons (1984).

A second way to explain right and wrong is by focusing directly on the actions we have a duty to perform or a right to expect from others. Deontological ethics holds that actions are intrinsically right or wrong by reference to the moral rules by which we are all obliged. What matters in this view is that we always do our duty, every time, with no exceptions.

Versions of this approach differ in the sources from which they derive their basic set of rules. Some religious thinkers, for example, might hold that our primary duty is to obey divine commands. Others suppose that we discover the principles of the natural law by thinking rationally about our place in the world. Immanuel Kant argued that we are duty-bound to "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (1981, p. 30). John Rawls proposed that we should follow rules to which we would agree in advance of learning what social roles we ourselves will occupy.

Finally, we can deal with right and wrong by relying upon the results or consequences that flow from our actions. Consequentialist ethics is the view that actions are right if they produce favorable outcomes and wrong if they lead to bad results. The goal of ethical conduct is to make the world a better place. What matters for the consequentialist approach is that we do what will turn out for the best.

Theories of this sort differ in their identification of which outcomes are desirable, though many are hedonistic in the sense that they aim to produce pleasure, happiness, or welfare for sentient beings, generally. The most commonly held teleological approach is the utilitarianism defended by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. According to utilitarianism, actions are right when they tend to produce more pleasure and less pain in the lives of everyone who is affected by them.

References


Questions to Consider
To deepen your understanding, you are encouraged to consider the questions below and discuss them with a fellow learner, a work associate, an interested friend, or a member of the business community.

- When you make a moral decision, are you more likely to choose an action because you have a duty to perform it, or because doing it is likely to have good consequences for everyone affected? Are some actions simply right in and of themselves, or is it because they have good results? That is, do you approach ethics as a deontologist or as a consequentialist?
- As you think about this abstract issue, you will find it helpful to apply the normative theories to specific cases. What if rigidly following the rules results in harmful outcomes? What if seeking happy consequences would require violation of a rule? As you weigh an ethical dilemma, which kind of consideration matters more?

Resources

**Suggested Resources**
The following optional resources are provided to support you in completing the assessment or to provide a helpful context. For additional resources, refer to the Research Resources and Supplemental Resources in the left navigation menu of your courseroom.

Capella Multimedia
Click the links provided below to view the following multimedia pieces:

- Three Kinds of Normative Theory. | Transcript.

Library Resources
The following e-books or articles from the Capella University Library are linked directly in this course:


Course Library Guide
A Capella University library guide has been created specifically for your use in this course. You are encouraged to refer to the resources in the PHI-FP2000 – Ethics Library Guide to help direct your research.

Internet Resources
Access the following resources by clicking the links provided. Please note that URLs change frequently. Permissions for the following links have been either granted or deemed appropriate for educational use at the time of course publication.

Resources on Theories:


Resources on Theorists:


Bookstore Resources
The resources listed below are relevant to the topics and assessments in this course and are not required. Unless noted otherwise, these materials are available for purchase from the Capella
Assessment Instructions

While working in the business office of a primary care medical facility, you come across records showing that one of your daughter's grade-school teachers has been prescribed antipsychotic medication for the control of schizophrenia. Although you have been told to respect patient confidentiality in the workplace, you fear the potential harm such a person could cause in a position of authority over children. Develop your position on this ethical issue. What would you do?

Write a paper addressing this topic, supporting your position with credible research. You may begin your research with suggested Resources, but you are also expected to conduct your own independent research into the scholarly and professional resources of the field. The Capella library is recommended as a source for reliable materials.

In explaining your position, address each of the following questions:

- What features of the situation are relevant for making a moral decision?
- What would a deontologist like Immanuel Kant recommend?
- What would a consequentialist like John Stuart Mill recommend?
- How do you justify your own decision about what to do?

Additional Requirements

- **Written communication**: Written communication should be free of errors that detract from the overall message.
- **APA formatting**: Include a title page and a references page, formatted according to APA (6th edition) style and formatting.
- **References**: A typical paper will include support from a minimum of 3–5 references. You may use some of the materials recommended in the Resources, but you should also include support from your independent research of scholarly or professional materials.
- **Length**: A typical paper will be 4–6 typed, double-spaced pages in length.
- **Font and font size**: Times New Roman, 12-point.

Normative Theories Scoring Guide

[View Scoring Guide](https://www.capella.edu/blackboard9/Css/Patch_manifesto.Css) Use the scoring guide to enhance your learning. How to use the scoring guide

Write 4–6 pages in which you address a complex ethical dilemma, applying various ethical theories to the problem.

Submit Assessment

This button will take you to the next available assessment attempt tab, where you will be able to submit your assessment.

U01a1: Normative Theories
View/Complete

U01a1: Normative Theories: Revision 1
View/Complete

U01a1: Normative Theories: Revision 2
View/Complete