

## Moral Theories in Western Ethics

As a reminder of the conclusion we reached in the last lecture, the content of evaluative predicates in moral arguments is determined by reference to a moral theory. Knowing which moral theory and how any particular author is using those terms is vital for understanding their claims. The following chart is intended to assist you in making those determinations.

Name of Theory	Virtue Ethics	Divine Command	Deontology	Utilitarianism	Social Contract
Conception of Human Happiness	Human Flourishing	Following the Commandments	Obeying Duty	Maximizing Pleasure	Abiding by the Social Contract
What is evaluated	intention, action, end	intention, end	intention	consequences	consequences
Number of principles	Many: One for each virtue	One and many: One ultimate source from which the authority of all commands rest	One: Categorical Imperative	One: Greatest Happiness Principle	Many: Each individual Law protects each right
Content of Moral Predicates	Excellence: virtue Defect: vice	Merit Sin	Satisfying Duty Violating Duty	Pleasure Pain	Rights Rights violations understood as harms

If the content of the evaluative predicates (  $x$  is good;  $x$  is evil, etc.) is determined by reference to a particular moral theory, then being able to know what that content is will enable you to better determine what the claims are supposed to mean. One area where moral disputes lies is in the meaning of the moral predicates. If one author means by good maximizing pleasure, and another author means by good satisfying duty, then there may be an apparent conflict in the meaning of the arguments used to support or defend individual claims. In our readings, each author will use one or more of these theories without immediately identifying which one he or she intends. So, being aware of these theories will put you in a better position to be able to understand what claims are being made. This is not a matter of relativism or individual wishy-washyness on the part of the authors. If pressed, each one would discuss which of these theories that person was using or thought appropriate to the matter. Hence, being aware of the differences in these theories greatly helps one understand the claims being made in the essays.