

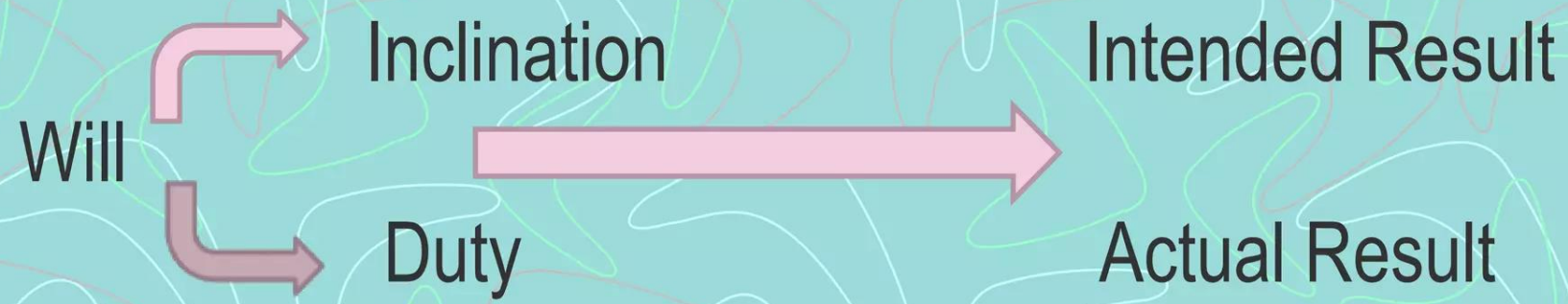
Theories of Ethics

- Four major theories of ethics in the Western world
 - Utilitarianism: net benefits
 - Rights: entitlement
 - Justice: fairness
 - Egoism: self-interest



How does this work?

What makes an act right or wrong?



Ethical Theory 1: Utilitarianism



- Famous Proponents: Jeremy Bentham, J.S. Mill
- What makes something good or bad, right or wrong, is that it produces the greatest amount of pleasure (or lack of pain) for the greatest number of people
- Basic Principle: Greatest Happiness Principle
 - ✓ Maximizing positive outcomes for the largest number of people, negative outcomes for lowest number of people
 - ✓ One should chose the action which will lead to the greatest happiness (i.e. pleasure, lack of pain) overall
 - ✓ One's own pleasure and pain only count **as much as** any other person's affected

Utilitarianism (Contd)

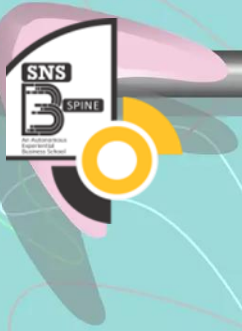


- Assessment of net benefits includes any important indirect effects
- Example: assessing the effects of pollutant discharge from a factory on the immediate surrounding environment and those down stream or down wind from the factory
- Two forms: act and rule

Act utilitarianism



- It asks a person to assess the effects of all **actions**
- Rejects the view that actions can be classified as right or wrong in themselves
- Example: lying is ethical if it produces more good than bad



Rule utilitarianism



- It asks a person to assess actions according to a set of **rules** designed to yield the greatest net benefit to all affected
- Compares act to rules
- Does not accept an action as right if it maximizes net benefits only once
- Example: lying is ***always*** wrong or “thou shalt not lie”



Limitations of Utilitarianism



- Hard to use in difficult to quantify situations
- Does not include rights and justice

Example



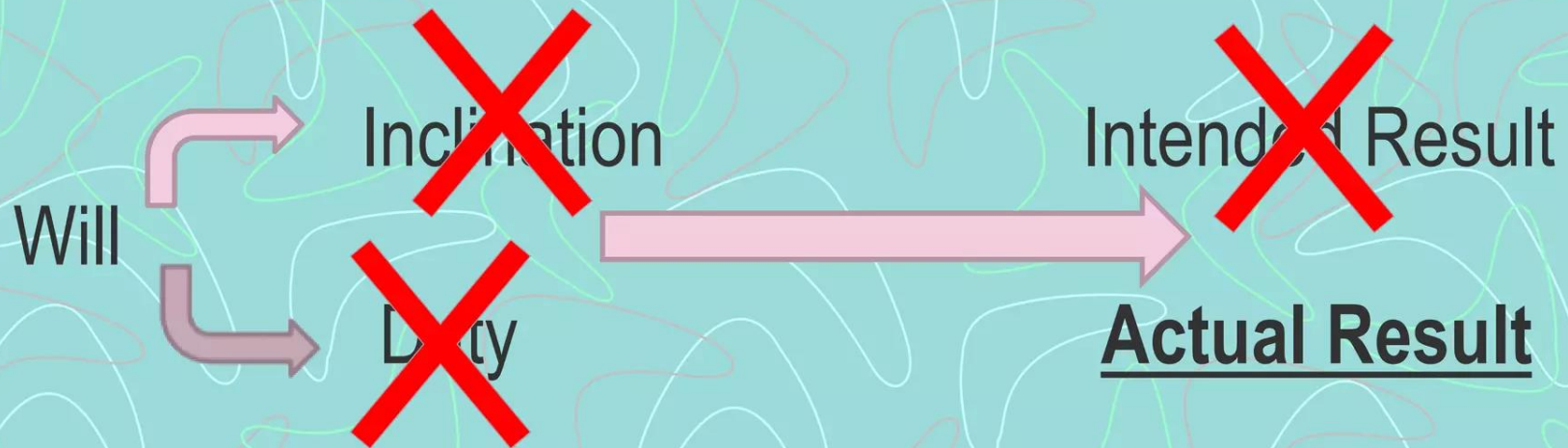
- A few doctors decide that a number of experiments on a few people, even if most of them died, would be worth it if they could find a cure for a disease that would relieve the suffering of millions of people. Utilitarianism would give the approval for such because it produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people.



Utilitarianism



What makes an act right or wrong?

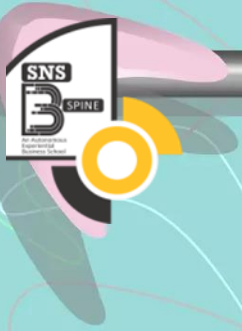




#2

Ethical Theory 2: Justice

- Looks at the balance of benefits and burdens distributed among members of a group
- Can result from the application of rules, policies, or laws that apply to a society or a group
- Just results of actions override utilitarian results
- Rejects view that an injustice is acceptable if others benefit the action



Ethical Theory 3: Rights



- **Right:** a person's just claim or entitlement
- Focuses on the person's actions or the actions of others toward the person
 - ✓ **Legal rights:** defined by a system of laws
 - ✓ **Moral rights:** based on ethical standards
- Purpose: let a person freely pursue certain actions without interference from others

Rights (contd)



- Features
 - Respect the rights of others
 - Lets people act as equals
 - Moral justification of a person's action
- Examples
 - Legal right: right to a fair trial in the United States
 - Moral right: right to due process within an organization



Rights (contd)



- Rejects view of assessing the results of actions
- Expresses moral rights from individual's view, not society's. Does not look to the number of people who benefit from limiting another person's rights
- Example: right to free speech in the United States stands even if a person expresses a dissenting view

Types Of Rights



- **Negative rights:** do not interfere with another person's rights
- **Positive rights:** A person has a duty to help others pursue their rights

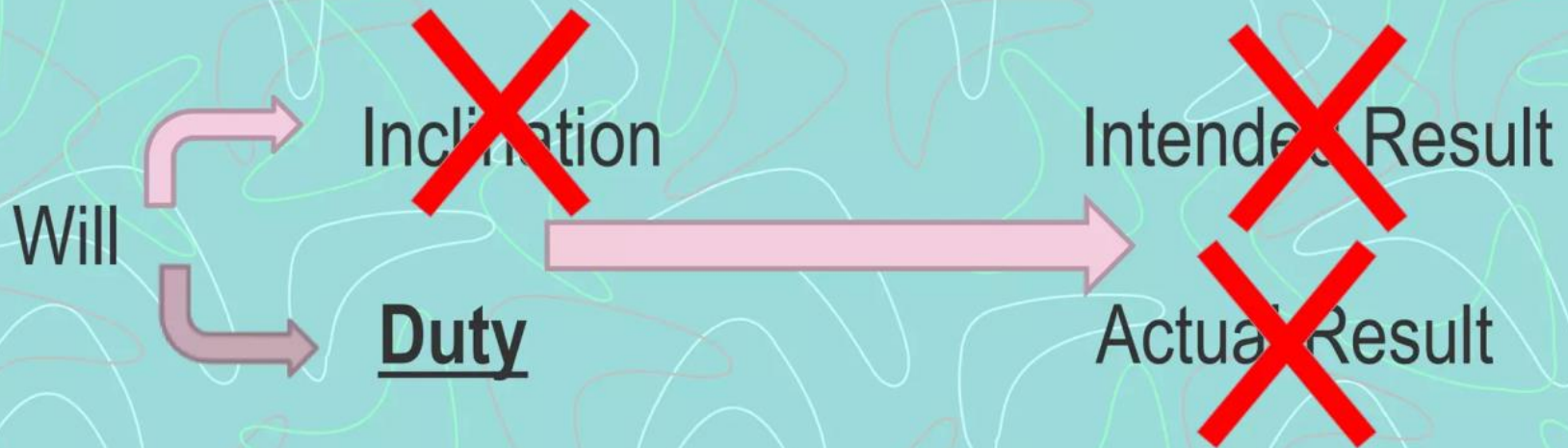
Negative: do not stop a person from whistleblowing

Positive: coworker helps another person blow the whistle on unethical actions

Right-based Theories

#3

What makes an act right or wrong?



Ethical Theory 4: Egoism

 #4

- Famous Proponents: Ayn Rand, Adam Smith
- What makes something good or bad, right or wrong, is that it satisfies one's desires, or meets one's needs
- Basic Principle: Self-interest of person doing, considering, or affected by the action
- One should chose the action which most realizes or conduces to one's own self-interest
- Important Variation: should the person look simply to self-interest, or to **enlightened** or **rational** self-interest?
- Conception of **Rational Self-Interest** is basic component of capitalist economy and business models



Types of Egoism

#4

Individual Ethical Egoism

- Judges actions only by their effects on one's interests
- Usually rejected by moral philosophers as a defensible basis of ethics

Universal Ethical Egoism

- Can include the interests of others when assessing one's actions
- Still self-centered: pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain
- “Enlightened self-interest.” Considers the interests of others because the person wants others to do the same toward him or her

Objections regarding Egoism Theory

 #4

- Does not resolve conflicts in people's interests
- One party would always have the pursuit of his or her interests blocked