

1. Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a consequentialist philosophy that suggests that the best action is the one that maximizes utility, often defined as that which produces the greatest well-being of the greatest number of people.

Situational Sample: Imagine a city facing a natural disaster. The government must decide whether to divert resources to evacuate one affluent neighborhood or provide aid to a larger, poorer neighborhood affected by the disaster. A utilitarian approach would advocate for prioritizing aid to the poorer neighborhood, as saving more lives benefits the greater number of people.

2. Deontology

Deontology is an ethical theory that emphasizes the importance of following moral rules or duties regardless of the consequences.

Situational Sample: Consider a scenario where a doctor has a terminally ill patient who requests assistance in dying. A deontologist would argue that the doctor has a duty to preserve life and follow the ethical oath to do no harm, even if the patient believes it would bring them relief.

3. Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics focuses on the character of the moral agent rather than the rules or consequences. It posits that ethical behavior stems from a person's character and virtues.

Situational Sample: In a workplace setting, if an employee notices a colleague being unfairly treated but fears retaliation for speaking out, a virtue ethicist would encourage the employee to act courageously and demonstrate the virtue of justice by standing up for the colleague, displaying integrity and moral character.

4. Existentialism

Existentialism emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and the search for meaning in life, often in the face of an absurd or indifferent universe.

Situational Sample: A student graduating from college faces uncertainty about their future career. An existentialist perspective would encourage the student to embrace this freedom to choose and craft their own path, rather than simply follow societal expectations, thereby finding personal meaning and authenticity in their choices.

5. Social Contract Theory

This theory posits that individuals consent, either explicitly or tacitly, to surrender some of their freedoms and submit to the authority of a governing body in exchange for protection of their remaining rights.

Situational Sample: In a community, residents agree to regulate noise levels during the night to ensure everyone's peace and comfort, effectively entering a social contract where they prioritize communal well-being over individual freedom to create noise, thus establishing a harmonious living environment.